

TITLE: A Mideast Conference: The Arab-Israeli Conflict

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Grades: 9-12

Subjects: World Cultures; Global Issues; International Affairs

Overview of Lesson Plan/rationale:

This lesson is part of a unit on the Middle East which addresses the geography, history, economics, politics, and social organizations of the region. This lesson is a culminating activity at the end of the unit.

Popular misconceptions derived from broadcast and print media sources on both sides portray a position of absolutes. An unbiased study of the region is necessary to evaluate and understand the opposing viewpoints, positions and actions of the principal parties involved in the conflict.

No valid position or suggested solution can be formulated by students without understanding the geography, economics, and social organizations of the region.

OBJECTIVES: The students will:

- study the background information regarding the Arab-Israeli Conflict through the text, supplementary articles, maps and in-class discussions.
- identify the positions held by the affected parties in the region.
- by assuming the role of local stakeholders, apply this knowledge in a two-day simulation of a Middle East Peace Conference.

Suggested Time Allowance: This is a 3-day culminating event in a 5-week study of the Middle East.

MATERIALS/RESOURCES:

Ahmad, Iftikhar, et al. World Cultures: A Global Mosaic. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 2000.

"Arab-Israeli Conflict," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2009.
<http://encarta.msn.com> © 1997-2009 Microsoft Corporation.

"Concise Timeline of Recent Israeli-Palestinian History."
www.mideastweb.org/timeline.

"Israel and the Palestinian Authority." (map). Government By the People. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2008.

"The Near East after the 1967 June War." (map). Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs.

ACTIVITIES/PROCEDURES:

1. WARM-UP:

Vocabulary: Israeli, Palestinian, Zionism, PLO, occupied territories, diaspora, anti-Semitism, Intifada, Right of Return

Hand out copies of the article, "Arab-Israeli Conflict" to each student. Most of this information would have been covered previously in class lectures. Skim article, and review vocabulary and specific information that will be helpful to students in the simulation.

FOR HOMEWORK OR FUTURE CLASSES:

Study notes from text and class notes and read article, "Arab-Israeli Conflict," in preparation for the simulation.

2. ACTIVITY

Day 1: As students enter the classroom, they will randomly get a card that identifies them as one of the following groups: Israel; Palestinian Authority; Egypt; Jordan; or Syria. The desks in the classroom will be set up in groups with an identification for each group.

Students will sit according to the group. In this group, using background information they have received through class, they will identify what the group's positions are with regard to the conflict; decide what issues are priorities for each group and what issues the group would be likely to compromise on. Have students write down the points they will make in the conference for the following day.

FOR HOMEWORK OR FUTURE CLASSES: Students will do additional research on their group's position for the conference the next day.

Day 2: The desks in the classroom will be set up in groups of at least five. Each of the students will have a name tag identifying the country that they are representing in the peace conference. Each group will have a laptop for drafting a peace resolution.

The groups must address these issues:

- Identify specific Israeli and Palestinian land claims and suggest possible points for agreement. Can include disposition of land acquired during the 1967 War.
- Identify specific Christian, Jewish and Muslim holy sites and suggest an agreement of guaranteed access by all faiths including responsibility for security issues.

- Identify contributions of other states in the region to the process.
- Identify the role of the UN and other entities in the process.
- Justify your suggested conflict resolution with the Israeli demand for “Peace with security” and the Palestinian demand for “Peace with justice.”

Day 3: Reassemble in day 2 groups to complete any unfinished negotiations, draft a peace document and sign the agreement. Each group will report their peace treaty to the class.

Class discussion: The teacher will ask students to identify major problems in the negotiations and evaluate the potential for success or failure of each agreement with reasons for their evaluations.

Academic Content Standards:

- 1.1.11.B** Analyze the structure of informational materials explaining how authors use these to achieve their purposes.
- 1.2.11.A** Read and understand essential content of informational texts and documents in all academic areas.
- 7.3.12.C** Analyze the significance of human activity in shaping places and regions by their settlement characteristics.
- 7.3.12.E** Analyze the significance of human activity in shaping places and regions by their political characteristics.
- 8.4.12.B** Evaluate historical documents, material artifacts and historic sites important to world history since 1450.
- 8.4.12.C** Evaluate how continuity and change throughout history has impacted belief systems and religions, commerce and industry, innovations, settlement patterns, social organization, transportation and roles of women since 1450.
- 8.4.12.D** Evaluate how conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations impacted world history from 1450 to present in Africa, Americas, Asia and Europe.

GRADES: This lesson was prepared for an 11th Grade World Cultures class.



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Arab-Israeli Conflict

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Arab-Israeli Conflict

I. INTRODUCTION

Arab-Israeli Conflict, conflict between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East over the land of historic Israel and Palestine. The conflict has led to several wars, beginning in 1948, between the state of Israel and Arab nations and Palestinian refugees. Since 1979 several peace accords have been signed, addressing parts of the conflict.

II. ORIGINS OF ZIONISM AND THE ARAB-JEWISH CONFLICT

Throughout recorded history the land of historic Israel and Palestine, located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, was conquered many times by invaders. The area is the homeland of the Jewish people, who immigrated to the area beginning in the 13th century BC as Hebrew tribes. The tribes confederated as the Israelites who ruled much of the area from the 11th century to the 6th century BC. The Jews formed an identity as the people of the covenant but subsequently came under the rule of others until they succeeded in establishing an independent Jewish state called Judea in 168 BC. The Romans expelled the Jews from Judea in AD 135. In subsequent centuries many Jews maintained the idea of regaining control of the area, which they considered home. In the 1890s Theodor Herzl, a Jewish journalist living in Austria, advocated reestablishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Early proponents of such a state said Zionism (the reuniting of Jewish people in Palestine) would match "a people without a land with a land without a people." *See also* Palestine, Ancient.

Palestine was already inhabited, however. The countryside was home to Arabs, most of them Muslims, while the larger towns contained both Arabs and Jews. Some of the Jews were long established there, while others were religious pilgrims from Europe who had come to live near the holy sites in Jerusalem and other cities. (Because the vast majority of Palestinians were Muslim Arabs, the term Palestinians now usually refers only to them, not to the Jews of Israel. Most Palestinians are Muslims.) The land was ruled by the Ottoman Empire, but the Ottomans saw little of value in Palestine and neglected the area. Consequently, poverty, disease, and malnutrition were widespread. Nonetheless, the area served as a land corridor between Europe, Asia, and Africa and thus had strategic importance. It was also near the Suez Canal, which, when opened in Egypt in 1869, connected the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea. Palestine was therefore important to the British, who occupied Egypt in 1882 and depended on control of the canal for its fortunes.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the Zionist movement gained strength in Europe, and large numbers of Jews immigrated to Palestine. The movement focused on self-reliance through agriculture, and many immigrants settled in the countryside. To do so, Jews had to buy land from local Arab holders of small tracts and from absentee Arab landlords of large areas. As a result, Jews and Arabs came into increasing contact; at times, Jewish purchases led to the displacement of Arab peasants from the land. Although the Ottoman government sought to slow the Zionist movement, Jews established a significant and expanded presence. Their success furthered the world debate about whether and how to establish a Jewish homeland, and it also created apprehension among Arabs.

III. THE BRITISH MANDATE

With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I (1914-1918), control of Palestine shifted from Muslim to Western powers. In return for their help in the war Britain had promised autonomy to both Zionists and Arabs. In a series of letters known as the Husein-McMahon Correspondence (between Husein ibn Ali of Mecca, who ruled Arabs in the Al Hijaz on the Arabian Peninsula, and Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner in Egypt), the Arabs were promised the right to a new Arab nation in the lands of the former Ottoman Empire. The promise to the Jews came in the form of the Balfour Declaration (named for the British foreign secretary, Lord Arthur Balfour, who communicated the declaration). Issued by the British in 1917, it read:

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.

The British were not troubled by potential contradictions between the Husein-McMahon Correspondence and the Balfour Declaration. They explained that they had not promised *all* the land of the Ottomans to either the Arabs or the Jews; they had

merely promised parts of it to each group. The British did not elaborate on what would happen if both groups wanted the same land. Following the war, Britain sought and received a mandate from the League of Nations to rule Palestine and develop it according to the premise of the Balfour Declaration.

In 1922 the British separated Palestine into two territories: land east of the Jordan River became the Emirate of Transjordan (now Jordan); land to the west, from Lebanon and Syria in the north to Egypt in the south, remained Palestine. It was in this limited territory that Zionists clashed with Palestinian Arab nationalists. Both Jews and Arabs conducted terrorist attacks and intermittent, low-level warfare. Both groups resisted the British, particularly when a British policy was believed to benefit one side over the other. The struggle was reflected in political efforts to control land, institutions, and the economy.

Initially, Britain took several steps to aid the Arab side. For example, before World War II (1939-1945) the British did not allow large numbers of Jews to come to Palestine from Europe, where they were often persecuted. Nonetheless, Zionists gradually gained the upper hand through steady land purchases, slow but continual immigration, and community organization. After World War II the world became aware of the murder of millions of Jews in the Holocaust, and opinion began to favor creating an independent Jewish state.

Arabs in Palestine and elsewhere continued to resist the idea, but on November 29, 1947, the United Nations (UN) passed Resolution 181, which called for a partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. The Jews accepted the resolution, but the Arabs opposed it. From the Arab perspective the UN had just divided a territory that was overwhelmingly populated by Arabs and had given more than half of it, 55 percent, to a minority group. In contrast, the Zionists were already well prepared for statehood. They possessed the rudiments of a government in the form of the Jewish Agency and the National Council and the structure of an army in the form of a well-organized and disciplined militia known as the Haganah. Soon after the UN resolution passed, Arab guerrilla attacks began on Jewish targets. The leaders of the Haganah argued for an aggressive response, and in December 1947 Palestinian Arab villages came under attack.

Zionist leaders had long recognized that the new Jewish state would have a significant Arab population, and they worried about the so-called demographic problem—that is, the possibility that Arabs would come to outnumber Jews in the new state. Early Zionist leaders, such as David Ben-Gurion, argued that “compulsory transfer” might be necessary and that he saw nothing morally wrong with it. The Zionist leaders also anticipated an armed response by Arabs to the new Israeli state. In March 1948 Zionist political and military leaders agreed on Plan Dalet, which called for clearing the new state of hostile and potentially hostile Arabs by destroying Arab villages and evicting Arabs from cities. From March 1948 to May 1948 Haganah forces occupied about 200 Arab villages and expelled their inhabitants.

On May 14, 1948, the British mandate was terminated, and at midnight the Jewish state of Israel declared its independence. Israel’s declaration of independence pledged that the new state would be based on principles of justice, liberty, and peace as defined by the Jewish prophets of the Hebrew Bible (what Christians call the Old Testament). It also promised full civil and political rights for all its citizens, regardless of race or religion, and it specifically pledged equal rights to Arab citizens. The new state came under immediate attack from Palestinian Arab militias and Arabs of the surrounding countries, including Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon.

IV. THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF 1948-1949

In the Arab-Israeli War of 1948-1949 Arab forces (including the armies of Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq as well as Palestinian guerrillas) had expected an easy victory over the small and isolated Jewish state, but despite heavy casualties Israel won. Israel had numerical superiority throughout the war and by its final stages outnumbered Arab troops by 2 to 1. Arms supplies from the Communist-bloc nation of Czechoslovakia also gave the Israeli army an advantage in weaponry. Israel also benefited from lack of cohesive unity and strategy among the Arab countries and the willingness of Transjordan’s King Abdullah ibn Hussein to seek an accommodation. After the war Israel increased the land under its control far beyond what it had been given by the partition plan, from 55 percent to 79 percent of what had been Palestine. The region just west of the Jordan River known as the West Bank came under the control of Transjordan (which was renamed Jordan in 1949). Egypt gained control of the Gaza Strip, a small region bordering the southern end of Israel’s Mediterranean coast.

The plan to forcibly expel large numbers of Palestinian Arabs had also been successful. By the end of 1948 more than 500 Palestinian Arab villages had been destroyed and Arab neighborhoods in nearly a dozen cities had been ethnically cleansed. Thousands of Palestinians were massacred in ethnic cleansing operations, often as retribution for Israeli casualties during the war or as retribution for Arab attacks on Jews during the Arab Revolt of 1936. The war created a population of about 700,000 Palestinian Arab refugees who fled Israel and ended up in camps maintained by the United Nations (UN) in neighboring Arab states. Many of these camps were in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Lebanon. With the exception of Jordan, Arab countries generally refused to allow Palestinians to settle outside the camps or to be granted citizenship. As a result, the conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs continued to fester.

Following the war, a number of Arab countries indicated a willingness to make peace with Israel, but on the issue of the Palestinian refugees, the Arab nations agreed to be bound by an Arab League position that Israel was responsible for resolving the refugee problem. UN resolutions gave the refugees the right to return to their homes or to receive compensation from the Israeli government for their property. Israel, however, rejected these resolutions and maintained that the Arab governments were responsible for the refugees because those governments had initiated the war.

In the mid-1950s the Egyptian government, under the leadership of the Pan-Arab nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser, began to support Palestinian guerrilla raids into Israel from the Gaza Strip in retaliation for an Israeli attack on an Egyptian military unit in Gaza. Egypt also refused to allow Israeli ships to use the Suez Canal and in 1951 blockaded the Strait of Tiran (Israel's access to the Red Sea), which Israel regarded as an act of war. In June 1956 Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, which had been jointly owned by Britain and France. In late October, Israel in a secret collusion with Britain and France invaded the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula, defeating Egyptian forces there. As planned beforehand Britain and France attacked Egypt a few days later. The fighting was brief and Israel eventually withdrew from the Sinai and Gaza after the United States openly opposed the invasion, but the conflict further exacerbated regional tensions.

V. THE SIX-DAY WAR AND THE 1973 WAR

In 1967 Egypt, Syria, and Jordan massed their armies on Israel's borders, and several Arab states called for war. Egypt demanded the withdrawal of UN observers from the Sinai Peninsula. Assuming the Arabs would attack, Israel struck first, in June 1967, and caught the Arabs by surprise. In the Six-Day War that followed, Israel demolished the armies and air forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. It also gained control of the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights region of southwestern Syria, and all of Jerusalem. A second wave of Palestinian refugees fled the fighting, worsening the problem created by the first exodus in 1948. With the armies of its enemies crushed, Israel felt it could wait for the Arab states to offer peace on terms it found comfortable. Many UN members were less confident that peace would follow and generally did not approve of Israel's territorial gains. In late November the UN Security Council passed Resolution 242, which called for an exchange of territory for peace and for a resettling of the Palestinian refugees.

The Arab states continued to call for the destruction of Israel, while Israel for its part, refused to consider withdrawing from the territories it had occupied except in the context of a comprehensive peace plan. The Arabs increasingly threw their support behind the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a political body that had been formed in 1964 to create a Palestinian state. Using terrorism, the PLO attacked Israel from their bases in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria; attacks by Palestinian Arabs came from within the Gaza Strip and West Bank as well. Israel's position hardened, and little progress toward achieving peace was made in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat reconstructed the Egyptian army in the early 1970s. Syria also prepared for war and received weapons from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Israel, in turn, fortified its forward positions and was supplied with weapons by the United States. The Arabs attacked in October 1973 on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, and caught Israel by surprise. Egypt and Syria pushed across the armistice lines established after the Six-Day War, which had kept Egyptian troops west of the Suez Canal and Syrian troops northeast of the Golan Heights. The Arab advances greatly restored Arab confidence. Israel, however, quickly recovered from the surprise and again pushed into Arab territory, surrounding or destroying the bulk of the Egyptian and Syrian forces. Nevertheless, Israel suffered greatly in the three-week war, especially from the injuries, deaths, and massive physical destruction of the war's first two days. Moreover, Israel's confidence was shaken, and the euphoria that followed the country's victory in the Six-Day War was lost. In Israel and among most Western countries, the conflict came to be known as the Yom Kippur War; Arabs call it the October War or Ramadan War. See Arab-Israeli War of 1973.

Following the war, U.S. secretary of state Henry Kissinger negotiated a series of disengagement agreements with the warring parties. Kissinger's work (labeled *shuttle diplomacy* because he flew back and forth between the capitals of the warring countries, which refused to meet with one another) did little to change the prewar status quo, and the countries were technically still at war. Even so, the agreements did reverse the military buildup and achieved a relatively peaceful, if tense, stalemate.

VI. CAMP DAVID ACCORDS

In the late 1970s Egypt's military expenses caused it increasing economic hardship and social unrest, prompting Sadat to initiate negotiations with Israel in 1977. Sadat hoped to end the military buildup and regain the Sinai Peninsula. Israelis greeted Sadat's visit to Jerusalem enthusiastically. United States president Jimmy Carter facilitated the negotiations between Sadat and Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin. The agreements came to be known as the Camp David Accords after the Maryland retreat where Carter hosted some of the negotiations. Under the peace treaty signed in March 1979, Egypt regained the Sinai Peninsula, which was partially demilitarized; foreign observers were placed in the peninsula to maintain the treaty's provisions; and Israel and Egypt entered into normal diplomatic relations. For its part, Israel achieved peace with what had been its largest enemy at the cost of evacuating Israeli settlers from the Sinai and losing some investment in the area's infrastructure, such as roads and housing. The Camp David Accords, however, did nothing for Syria and only advanced the Palestinian cause in the vaguest of terms. For these reasons, the Arab League expelled Egypt and the rest of the Arab world widely condemned the accords. In 1981 Sadat was assassinated by a group of Islamic fundamentalists within the Egyptian army. Egypt continued to maintain relations with Israel after Sadat's death.

Following Camp David, Syria maintained its warlike posture and demanded the unconditional surrender of the Golan Heights, and the PLO continued its terrorist assaults on Israel. In 1982 Israel tried to wipe out the PLO by attacking its bases in Lebanon, which had been plunged into its own civil war in 1975. The assault on the PLO, which Israel called Operation Peace for Galilee, quickly escalated into ground battles in Lebanon and full-scale engagements between the Israeli and Syrian air forces. After a siege on Beirut the PLO leadership evacuated from Lebanon and relocated to Tunisia. Arabs were frustrated that Israel had occupied an Arab capital with little intervention from the rest of the world. Palestinians also expressed anguish

at the lack of international outcry against the massacre of hundreds of Palestinians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila outside Beirut. Israeli defense minister Ariel Sharon had allowed a Lebanese Christian right-wing militia to enter the camps, and Israeli forces did nothing to halt the massacre. The Palestinians of the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip felt more isolated and abandoned than ever. Israel withdrew from most of Lebanon by 1985, though it continued to maintain a self-declared security zone inside Lebanon along the Israeli border until 2000.

VII. THE INTIFADA AND THE PEACE PROCESS

In the late 1980s Palestinians began the *intifada* (uprising), a widespread campaign against the continuing Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The campaign combined elements of mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, riots, and terrorism. The *intifada* put the Israeli army on the defensive and forced them to devote significant resources to patrolling the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a police force. Along with Israeli civilian casualties, many soldiers, including civilian reservists, were injured or killed, and the army in turn often used brutal tactics against Palestinians.

As a result of the *intifada*, pressure grew within Israel to broaden the peace process. The opportunity to do so was provided in 1991 by the Persian Gulf War. In this war, a multinational coalition of Western and Arab armies expelled Iraq from Kuwait, which Iraq had invaded in 1990. One of the coalition's chief partners was the United States, a strong ally of Israel. Following the Western-Arab victory, the United States, along with its one-time enemy the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), pressed Arabs and Israelis to pursue peace in the Madrid Conference of 1991. For the first time, all sides sat together to discuss bilateral and region-wide peace talks. Although little progress was made, the conference paved the way for future agreements.

In 1993, while the official negotiating teams of the Palestinians and Israel were engaged in deadlocked negotiations in the United States, the two sides achieved a major breakthrough with the Oslo Accords, which were secretly negotiated in Oslo, Norway. The Oslo Accords and the resulting Declaration of Principles set the stage for a gradual transfer of power to the Palestinians. Further agreements in 1994 and 1995 gave the Palestinians autonomy over most aspects of life in the Gaza Strip and in urban areas of the West Bank through a new administrative body, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). In the first elections for the PNA in 1996, PLO chairman Yasir Arafat was chosen as its president. Finally, the agreements stated that soon after these elections Israel would conduct further withdrawals from rural areas of the West Bank, after which talks addressing the final status of the Palestinian areas would begin.

Meanwhile, with the initial progress on the Palestinian issue, many Arab states felt freer to engage Israel openly and formally, though still with caution. On the heels of the 1993 agreements, Israel and Jordan took steps to negotiate a cooperative relationship. Despite opposition from other Arabs that Jordan's King Hussein, like Egypt's Sadat before him, was abandoning Palestinian interests in pursuit of a treaty with Israel, Hussein was undeterred. Jordan and Israel signed a peace agreement in 1994. By the mid-1990s Israel had also achieved diplomatic relations with Arab countries in North Africa and the Persian Gulf.

Despite these accomplishments toward peace, some terrorism and bloodshed continued. Palestinians conducted terrorist attacks on Israeli citizens, and on a number of occasions Israeli extremists responded in kind. Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in 1995 by an Israeli student opposed to the peace process. Under Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the peace process stalled in 1997. While Netanyahu completed some elements of the peace agreements, such as removing Israeli troops from the West Bank town of Hebron, some of his policies, including building Israeli settlements in Arab East Jerusalem, angered Palestinians and earned rebukes from many nations.

In October 1998 Netanyahu and Arafat signed an accord by which Israel would withdraw from additional West Bank territory in return for Palestinian security measures against terrorist attacks on Israel. The Palestinians also agreed to remove articles that called for Israel's destruction in their national charter. In November Israel completed the first of three scheduled withdrawals, but froze the implementation of the accord the following month. Israel claimed that the Palestinians had not carried out their part of the accord and placed new conditions on further withdrawals. These developments again stalled the peace process and delayed negotiations on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In 1999 elections Netanyahu was defeated by Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, who vowed to move the peace process forward.

Negotiations between Barak and Arafat were encouraging at first, but foundered over expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the issue of how Israelis and Palestinians could share the city of Jerusalem. Despite the active participation of U.S. president Bill Clinton, the two sides were unable to come to agreement after marathon negotiating sessions held at Camp David, Maryland, in the summer of 2000. The failure generated bitter frustration among both Israelis and Palestinians.

The volatile situation erupted in September with the outbreak of a second *intifada*. It was known as the Al Aqsa *intifada* because it was triggered by a decision by Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to permit an archaeological excavation near a Muslim holy site, the Al Aqsa Mosque, in Jerusalem. Palestinian militants resumed widespread resistance to Israel in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, along with a string of devastating terrorist attacks in Israel proper. At the same time, the Israeli army increased its restrictions on the Palestinian population and stepped up its military tactics. During the second *intifada*, loss of life was heavy on both sides and peace negotiations broke down. In the absence of meaningful diplomacy, the situation was marked by increased use of force by the Israeli side and frequent suicide and ambush attacks by the Palestinian side.

In a February 2001 election Likud party leader Ariel Sharon defeated Barak and became prime minister of Israel. In late 2001 Sharon asserted that Arafat was either unwilling or unable to represent the Palestinian people adequately and was therefore irrelevant to the peace process. Sharon disengaged from the peace process and announced that Israel would withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip. With mounting pressure from both Palestinian and Israeli extremist groups, the subsequent period was marked by pessimism and bitterness on both sides of the conflict.

In December 2001, in response to a surge in Palestinian suicide bombings in Israel, Israeli forces surrounded and severely damaged Arafat's compound in the West Bank town of Râm Allâh, also known as Ramallah. Israeli forces kept Arafat confined to the compound until he traveled to France for medical care shortly before his death there in November 2004. Arafat was succeeded as leader of the Palestinian National Authority by Mahmoud Abbas.

In September 2005 Israel evacuated Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip after the Israeli parliament had approved Sharon's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the territory. Although Palestinians welcomed the departure, the PNA still sought a negotiated settlement with Israel over the future of the West Bank and Jerusalem. Despite the withdrawal, Israel retained control of Gaza's air space and coastal waters and the border crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

In November, Sharon called an election for the following March. He resigned from Likud and formed a new party called Kadima. In January 2006 Sharon suffered a stroke from which he failed to recover. He was succeeded in Kadima and as prime minister by Ehud Olmert. The peace process was thrown into turmoil by the Hamas victory in the Palestinian Legislative Assembly elections. Although Israel had originally encouraged the growth of the Islamist group as a counter to the Palestine Liberation Organization, Hamas became more than just a religious and social service organization. It grew increasingly political and emerged as a force during the intifadas. Hamas's charter fails to recognize Israel's right to exist. As a result of the Hamas victory, international aid, upon which the PNA depended for its economic welfare, was restricted.

Kadima's victory in the Israeli election failed to ease the crisis. Low-level skirmishes between Gaza-based militias and the Israeli forces erupted into a full-scale Israeli offensive in June when Hamas killed two Israeli soldiers and abducted a third in an incursion from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory. From June to August 2006 more than 200 Palestinians were killed in the offensive that also saw the destruction of much of Gaza's infrastructure, with the Olmert government refusing to bargain for the release of the soldier.

VIII. THE SECOND LEBANON WAR

Then in July, on the northern border of Israel, the Iranian- and Syrian-backed terrorist group Hezbollah abducted two Israeli soldiers, killed several others, and shelled a number of communities. Israel responded by launching an attack on southern Lebanon, including air raids on Hezbollah strongholds as far north as southern Beirut, leading to the deaths of about 1,200 Lebanese civilians. The escalation of the crisis saw thousands of rockets launched daily into northern Israel by Hezbollah, causing the deaths of about 160 Israeli civilians, the disruption of Israel's economy, and the temporary flight or confinement in bomb shelters of roughly a million Israelis. The fighting caused tremendous damage to the infrastructure of southern Lebanon and some parts of Beirut, and left 1 million Lebanese homeless or displaced. By the time a ceasefire was agreed at the United Nations (UN) in August, more than 100 Israeli troops and some 500 Hezbollah insurgents had been killed in fierce fighting. The UN ceasefire resolution called for the withdrawal of both antagonists and for southern Lebanon to be occupied by the Lebanese army augmented by a UN force.

Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert came under criticism within Israel because the land invasion of Lebanon was delayed. When it occurred, it quickly became bogged down due to unexpectedly strong resistance from Hezbollah, which was equipped with antitank missiles. Many within the Israeli political and defense establishment feared that Israel's ability to deter attacks on its soil was damaged and the country's reputation for overwhelming military superiority in the region harmed. Israel became increasingly concerned that Iran was supplying Hezbollah and Hamas with sophisticated weaponry and that the Islamic regime there was developing nuclear weapons. Although Iran was a Persian nation, its mainly Shia Muslim population sympathized greatly with the Palestinians. The relations between the two countries, even when Iran was headed by the pro-Western government of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, often involved rivalries over which country would become the dominant military and economic power in the Middle East.

IX. ISRAEL'S INVASION OF GAZA

Concerned with the growing militancy of Hamas and Hezbollah, Israel became even more alarmed when Hamas won elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2006. The moderate Palestinian group, Fatah, which recognized Israel's right to exist and sought a two-state solution to the conflict, had been expected to win the elections to the legislative body of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). But many Palestinians saw Fatah as corrupt, and they admired Hamas for its social service programs. Israel considered Hamas a terrorist organization and decided not to cooperate with the new government even though it was still headed by PNA president Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of Fatah. With the backing of the administration of U.S. president George W. Bush, Israel, the United States, and the European Union (EU) withheld economic aid and tax revenues from the Legislative Council. Both Israel and the United States were accused of seeking to undermine a national unity government formed between Hamas and Fatah, which was mediated by Saudi Arabia, by supplying Fatah with arms and urging it to attack Hamas.

Some critics claimed that both Israel and the United States were fomenting a Palestinian civil war. They argued that the two

governments should have encouraged moderate elements within Hamas, especially since the chief task facing Hamas was to govern effectively after winning the Legislative Council elections. Instead, both the Israeli and U.S. governments appeared determined to oust Hamas from power unless it recognized Israel's right to exist and agreed to a two-state solution. In 2007 Hamas staged a coup in Gaza, where it was most popular, and ousted Fatah from its control of the security apparatus. Israel almost immediately imposed a blockade on the border crossings, allowing in only humanitarian supplies of food and medicine. Hamas responded with rocket attacks into southern Israel, especially around the town of Sederot.

Israel and Hamas eventually agreed to a six-month ceasefire or *hudna* (truce) in June 2008 after negotiating indirectly through mediators provided by the Egyptian government. Although the talks failed to result in a written agreement, Israel reportedly understood that Hamas agreed to end all rocket attacks from Gaza, even those fired by other militant groups, such as Islamic Jihad. Hamas understood that Israel would end its blockade of the border crossings and allow the free flow of goods, including materials needed for construction and to revive Gaza's economy. Even as the truce was being negotiated, Israel's defense minister, Ehud Barak, was also drawing up contingency plans for an invasion of Gaza, based on lessons learned by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) during its abortive invasion of Lebanon.

The ceasefire largely held during the first few months, although there were occasional rocket attacks. In November, Israel launched air strikes into Gaza to destroy a border tunnel, killing six Hamas militants. When the ceasefire officially expired in December, Hamas said it would not seek a renewal of the truce and accused Israel of failing to uphold its part by ending the border blockades. Rocket attacks into southern Israel became more frequent, although they were mostly inaccurate Qassam rockets that caused little damage and few casualties. Israel responded forcefully, however, in late December with massive air strikes that struck a number of government buildings, mosques, schools, and other facilities and caused significant civilian casualties. The air strikes were followed by a land invasion. The 22-day military offensive resulted in about 1,300 Palestinian deaths, mostly civilians, and 13 Israeli deaths, including 5 civilians. Israel was accused of targeting United Nations-run schools and ignoring humanitarian protocols and of using white phosphorus, an incendiary used for smokescreens but which can be lethal in densely populated areas. The offensive ended in January 2009, and both sides declared their own informal ceasefires.

X. THE END OF THE PEACE PROCESS?

The withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza coincided with the inauguration of U.S. president Barack Obama, who had been elected on a platform sharply critical of Bush administration policies in a number of areas, including the Middle East. The withdrawal also preceded, by two weeks, Israeli parliamentary elections, which saw the formation of a government likely to be headed by Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Prior to the election, Obama had sent a special envoy, George Mitchell, to the Middle East in an attempt to revive the peace process. Mitchell had successfully helped broker the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement. But it was unclear what the prospects were for a renewal of the peace process. Netanyahu has never openly endorsed a two-state solution and refuses to say that he would halt the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Meanwhile, Hamas showed some signs of moderation, including statements by its political leaders that it would respect a long-term truce with Israel and a two-state solution if it were endorsed by Palestinians in a referendum. Nevertheless, it was unclear if Hamas and Fatah could reconcile and form a national unity government, a precondition for successful peace negotiations.

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