

## Lesson I: Context and Background to Understanding Arab-Israeli Relations

### Materials

Each student needs:

- 1) *The Origins of Zionism and Arab Nationalism*
- 2) *The Origins of Zionism and Arab Nationalism: Reading Questions*

The teacher needs:

- 3) A blank overhead transparency labeled “What We Want to Know”
- 4) Overhead transparencies of *The Arab League and Israel*
- 5) Overhead transparencies of *Geographic Features of Israel and Its Neighbors*

### Note

Please download the latest version of this lesson before using it. ICS frequently updates, revises, and strengthens its materials. Sign up at [www.icsresources.org/register](http://www.icsresources.org/register) to be notified of major updates, new materials, and events in your area. Please send questions, suggestions, and requests about ICS educational materials to [bchaika@icsresources.org](mailto:bchaika@icsresources.org).

### Goals

- 1) Students will be able to describe the locations of Israel and Arab countries.
- 2) Students will be able to explain Jewish and Arab connections to the Levant and the origins and goals of Zionism and Arab nationalism.

### Instructional Design

Anticipatory Set: I Know / I Want to Know

- 1) Instruct students to fold a piece of paper in half longitudinally, write the heading “I know” on the left side, and the heading “I want to know” on the right side.
- 2) Ask students to write at least three facts about the history of Arab-Israeli relationships on the left side of the paper under “I know” and at least three questions about history of Arab-Israeli relationships on the right side under “I want to know.”
- 3) (optional) Have volunteers share a fact from their “I know” column. If students share opinions, use the opportunity to review the difference between facts and opinions and help them identify the reasons the statement represents an opinion rather than a fact.
- 4) Have volunteers share a question from their “I want to know” column. Write questions on a blank overhead transparency labeled “What We Want to Know.” Save transparency for later use.



- 5) Collect folded sheets and use responses in the “I know” column as a formative assessment.
- 6) Close with the following points:
  - a. The class will be learning about the origins and history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the steps towards peace.
  - b. The peace process has had some major successes, but many unresolved issues – including Israeli control of some land claimed by non-Israeli Arabs and the refusal of many Arab countries and organizations to recognize Israel’s right to exist – remain.
  - c. Many people outside the conflict feel involved because of cultural or religious ties to the area. The conflict has been the focus of worldwide media and diplomatic attention for decades.
  - d. Although the conflict is often portrayed in simple black-and-white terms, it is extremely complex and cannot be properly understood without knowing the history of the area.

#### Topic 1: Geography

- 1) Ask students why it is important to discuss geography before studying the relationships of peoples and states in a region. Responses should reference both political and physical geography. Responses might mention that interactions are influenced by factors such as shared borders, natural boundaries, and natural resources.
- 2) Display *The Arab League and Israel* map. Explain that the Arab League is an association of independent Arab countries that was formed in 1945 to promote cooperation among member states. Ask the class the following questions:
  - a. Where are Arab League countries located? Responses should identify North Africa and Southwest Asia.
  - b. Where is Israel located? Responses might identify Southwest Asia or the Eastern Mediterranean.
  - c. In what ways is Israel different than its neighbors? Responses should mention that it is not part of the Arab League and that it is smaller than most other states in the area.
  - d. Which countries on the map have participated in wars with Israel? Responses should identify: Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. *Note for teachers:* Saudi Arabia and Yemen have not officially been at war with Israel, but they sent expeditionary forces to fight in the 1948 War.



- e. Which Arab countries have not participated in wars with Israel? Responses should identify: Mauritania, Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Oman, U.A.E. (The United Arab Emirates), Qatar, and Kuwait.
  - f. Does a country need to send troops to fight to be considered part of a conflict? Responses might mention that conflicts are not only about physical battles. Inform students that almost no Arab state recognizes Israel nor has trade relationships with Israel. So, the Arab-Israeli conflict includes most of the Arab world. *Note for teachers:* Egypt, Jordan, and Mauritania have full diplomatic relations with Israel and Qatar has trade relations with Israel.
- 3) Show *Geographic Features of Israel and Its Neighbors* map and ask:
- a. How would the geographic features on this map create challenges for the people who live there? Responses should mention that most of the land is desert or mountainous, so there is probably not much water or good farmland.
  - b. Why might this contribute to conflicts? Responses should mention that people might disagree over who controls limited resources.
  - c. Why is the area on this map important for trade? Responses should mention that the area is a land bridge between Asia and Africa. The fact that it also helps link Southeast Asia and Europe should also be addressed; the Suez Canal links the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea and goods are also shipped overland through Israel to these bodies of water. Mention that in modern times, this has been much more important than the fact that the region is a land bridge. One of the clearest examples of this is the Trans-Israel pipeline.
- 4) Inform students that the Trans-Israel pipeline was constructed in 1968 to transport Oil from Iran to Europe with a maximum capacity of 1.2 million barrels of oil per day. Iran cut ties with Israel following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Afterwards, Israel retooled the pipeline to carry oil in the opposite direction. It can now be used by oil producers in Russia, the caucuses, and central Asian republics to ship oil to the Far East. The pipeline has terminals on the Mediterranean Sea (in Ashkelon, Israel) and the Red Sea (in Eilat, Israel). Oil producers can ship oil from the Black Sea, to the Mediterranean, across the pipeline, to ships on the Red Sea which will carry the oil to Asian markets. Oil can also be shipped from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean to the Trans-Israel pipeline through another pipeline (The Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline). The trans-Israel pipeline can transport up to 400,000 barrels of oil per day between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.
- 5) Use a world map to show why the shipping of goods between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea is much more efficient than shipping them around Africa. Ask students how the Arab-Israeli conflict and international trade routes might affect each other. Responses might mention that military conflict can disrupt trade routes, that this disruption can help spur other nations to promote calm, and that blocking trade routes could spur armed conflict. *Note for Teachers: Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal was the driving force behind England and France's instigation of the Suez War of 1956,*

*and Egypt's blockade of Israeli access to the Red Sea, an act of war, was a cause of the 1967 War.*

### Topic 2: Zionism & Arab Nationalism

- 1) Ask students to discuss why it is important to understand the history of a conflict rather than simply looking at current events. Responses might mention that one cannot understand a current situation without understanding the events that led to it, that understanding the history helps one understand the sentiments of the people involved, that understanding the history helps one understand the complexity of an issue, or that a conflict cannot be solved without understanding its causes.
- 2) Distribute *The Origins of Zionism and Arab Nationalism* and *The Origins of Zionism and Arab Nationalism: Reading Questions*.
- 3) Instruct students to use the reading to answer the questions. This activity may be done individually, in mixed ability pairs, or as a whole-class activity with students taking turns reading.
- 4) Have students share-out answers.

### Closure: Why Does It Matter?

- 1) Ask students to think about the geography and history of the region and to identify factors that might lead to conflict. Responses should identify limited natural resources such as water and farmland and the differing goals of Zionists and Arab nationalists.
- 2) (optional) Display the "What We Want to Know" transparency from the anticipatory set. Have students identify questions that they can now answer or begin to answer. Have students provide answers to those questions.

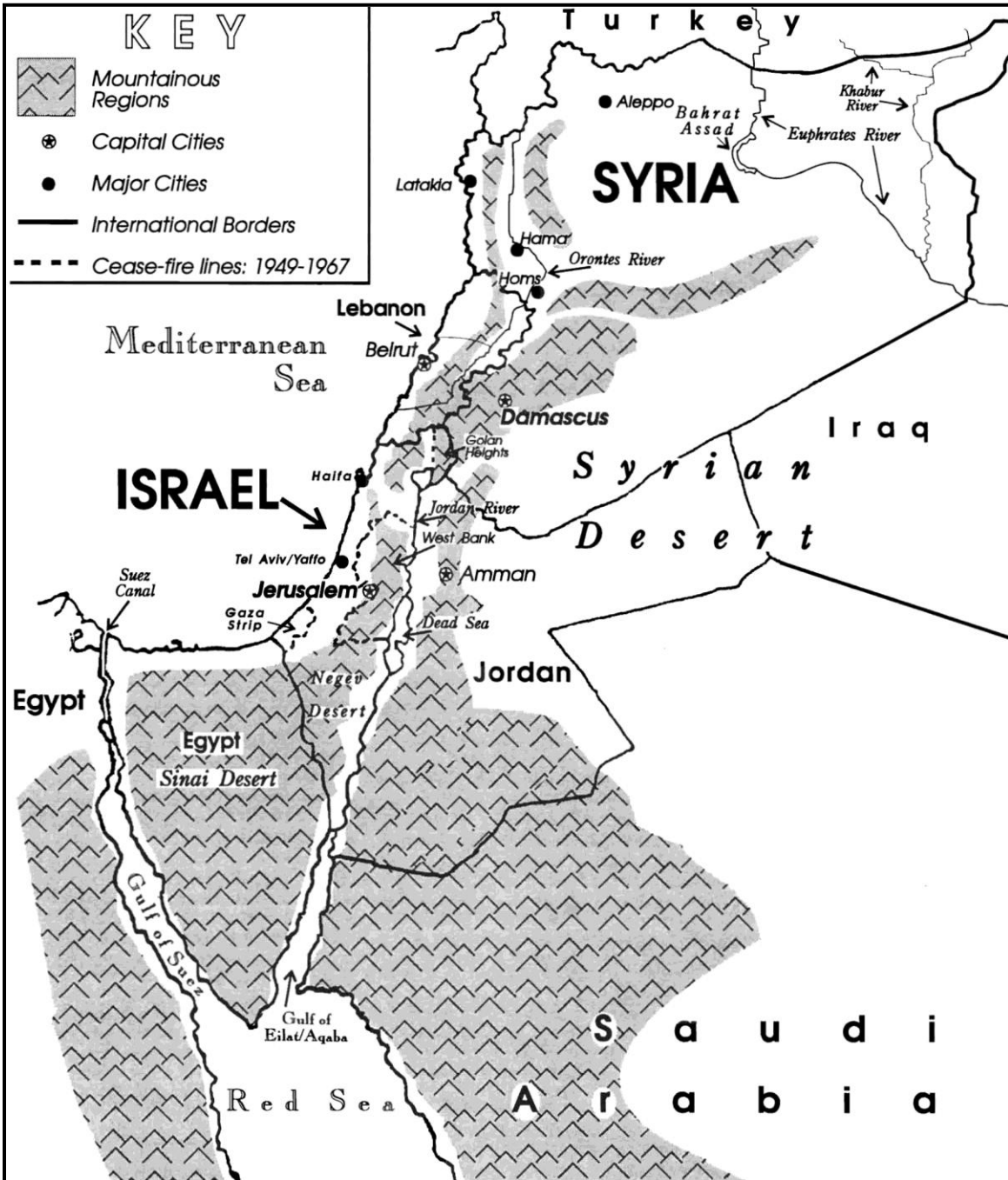


# The Arab League and Israel



Arab League states that have not participated in wars with Israel	Israel
Arab League states that have participated in wars with Israel	Gaza Strip and West Bank

# Geographic Features of Israel and Its Neighbors



## The Origins of Zionism and Arab Nationalism

### **Nations**

A **nation** is a large group of people who are associated with a particular territory and believe that they share common attributes that make them a distinct group. These attributes often include a shared language, history, and culture. *Nation* is not synonymous with *country*, which is a political division of an area, nor is it synonymous with *state*, which refers to a self-governing political entity. The terms *state* and *country* can be used interchangeably, but some countries, such as the United States of America, also refer to smaller internal political units as states.

**Nationalism** is the idea that nations have the right to self-determination, the ability to form independent states, called **nation-states**. This understanding of nationalism should not be confused with popular usages that equate the term to “super-nationalism” or extremist ideologies. Nationalism in this context is a neutral term and countries across the globe, ranging from Italy to Uzbekistan, base their legitimacy on being expressions of national identity.

Nationalism began in Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Before this time, most people were loyal only to their own town or locality and many governments were empires that included people of various nationalities. From Europe, the idea of nationalism spread around the world. Nationalism and pride in the nation-state have spurred great achievements, such as works of literature, architecture, and music. However, nationalism has also caused great conflict. For example, nationalism brought some Arabs and some Jews into conflict in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This conflict continues today. In order to understand this conflict, it is necessary to have a basic understanding of both Jewish and Arab history.

### **Jews Lose Their Homeland**

In 63 B.C.E., Rome began to dominate Judea, the homeland of the Jews, and eventually incorporated the kingdom into its empire as a province. The ancestors of the Jews had formed their first kingdom in the area over a thousand years earlier and had tribal alliances for hundreds of years before that. Roman rule and taxes were harsh on the Jews and, at times, Romans interfered with Jewish religious practice. In 66 C.E., the Jews began a revolt to regain their independence. By the year 70, the Romans had crushed the revolt and destroyed the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem - the center of Jewish religious life.

In 131, the Romans began to build a temple to one of their gods on the ruins of the Jewish Temple. Jews revolted again. Following this revolt, the majority of Jews in the province were killed, exiled, or sold into slavery. Although some Jews continued to live in the province, most now lived in the area outside of their ancient homeland. In order to wipe out the Jewish connection to the province, the Roman emperor ordered that its name be changed from Judea to Syria Palaestina which was eventually shortened to Palestine.

However, Jews did not lose their connection to their ancient homeland and Jerusalem, its capital and the site where their Temple had stood. Although some Jews never left this area, which they referred to as the Land of Israel, and others immigrated to it, most Jews felt that they would only be able to return when God sent the messiah to lead them there. Jews expressed their connection to this land and their hope to be able to return in the future through prayer, the psalms they recited from the Bible, folktales, artwork, and song.

### **Palestine Becomes Part of the Arab World**

For the next five hundred years, Palestine remained a region in the eastern half of the Roman Empire (also called the Byzantine Empire). During this time, the empire became Christian and its leaders came to value the area as the birthplace of Jesus, and Jerusalem as the place where they believed that he was resurrected. Then, in 638, the area was conquered by a Muslim army from the Arabian Peninsula.

Islam arose in the Arabian Peninsula when Muhammad began preaching to the Arab tribes who lived there in 613. By the time of his death in 632, all the tribes in the area had converted to Islam. In 634, the new leader of these tribes, Umar, led a large army out of the Arabian Peninsula. Within six years, they had conquered Egypt and much of Southwestern Asia, including Palestine, which became part of the province of Greater Syria. These conquerors regarded Jerusalem as particularly important because they believed that Muhammad had ascended to heaven from there. They built a shrine on the spot where they believed he ascended, which was also the location where the Jewish Temple had once stood.

Islam soon became the dominant religion in the region. Jews and Christians were usually protected from attacks, theft, and forced conversions; but, they did not have all of the rights of Muslims and had to pay a special tax. The treatment of religious minorities under Muslim rule varied across time and place. However, they were generally treated better under Muslim rule than Jews were treated in Christian Europe.

### **Antisemitism in Europe**

In Europe, Jews faced many restrictions. They were often prohibited from owning land and were only allowed to work in certain professions. In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Church issued a decree that Jews had to wear special clothes so they could be easily identified. In some places, they had to live in special areas of the city called ghettos which were often overcrowded, impoverished, and had walls with gates that were locked at night and during Christian holidays. When the gates were locked, Jews were not allowed outside of the ghetto.

In addition to restrictions, antisemitic beliefs also caused great violence against the Jews. For example, during the crusades many Jewish communities were destroyed and many Jews were killed. Originally, the crusades were a series of military expeditions to the Eastern Mediterranean because Europeans believed that God wanted them to conquer the "Holy Land," where Jesus had lived, from its Muslim rulers. Some crusaders believed that God wanted them to kill all non-Christians and so they attacked European Jews. Scholars estimate that between one-quarter and one-third of the Jews in northern France and Germany were killed during the First Crusade alone. The Jewish population in the region of Palestine was devastated as well. The Crusades were also directed against the Arab population of the region and Muslims suffered great persecution from the European invaders, an experience that made them distrust European ideas and intentions.

Jews in Europe were also often blamed – or scapegoated – for tragedies and natural disasters such as the disappearance of a child or the outbreak of disease. These accusations often led to attacks. Jews were also often forced to convert or leave their homes. Between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Jews were expelled at least thirty-four times from major Christian cities and states. The most famous example of these expulsions was in 1492 when Jews in Spain were given the

choice of converting, leaving the country, or being killed. Many Jews fled to the Ottoman Empire.

### **The Ottoman Empire and the Birth of Arab Nationalism**

The Ottoman Empire began in what is today Western Turkey around the year 1300. At the height of its power (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries), it controlled large parts of Southeastern Europe, Southwestern Asia, and North Africa. The Ottomans were ethnically Turkish and religiously Muslim, but their empire was extremely diverse and included many ethnicities and large Jewish and Christian populations. As under earlier Muslim rule, Christians and Jews did not have full equal rights, but were usually protected.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, most Arabs lived in the Ottoman Empire. The majority of Arabs shared the Muslim religion with the Turks. However, the Turks were not Arabs and nationalist ideas began to spread to Arabs in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Arab interest in nationalism began as a literary and cultural movement to re-establish the prominence of Arab culture and to promote a positive ethnic identity. As time passed, Arabs increasingly expressed the desire for greater self-rule. In 1912, Syrian Arabs living in Egypt founded the Ottoman Decentralization Party. The party sought more local autonomy for Arabs. In 1913, a group of young Arabs who were students in European universities met at the First Arab Congress and demanded more rights and autonomy for Arabs in the empire. There was also a secret society of Arab officers in the Ottoman army, who supported turning the empire into a Turkish-Arab dual monarchy, on the model of Austria-Hungary in Europe.

However, before World War I, few Arabs argued for a completely independent Arab state. Ottoman authorities sought to maintain control of the empire and could respond strongly to threats to their power. In addition, most Muslim Arabs supported the idea that all Muslims should be united under one Islamic state. Non-Muslim Arabs also opposed complete independence because they felt it would lead to European domination. Arab nationalists of different religious backgrounds were united by their goal of greater Arab autonomy. They were also largely united by their opposition to Zionism.

### **Antisemitism in Modern Europe and the Birth of Zionism**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, “pogroms” against Jews became common. These were organized government-tolerated or government-sponsored attacks on Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe. However, in Western Europe, ghettos were abolished and Jews were granted legal equality with Christians. This led many Jews in Western Europe to believe that they would be accepted as equals. However, when they came to realize that antisemitism continued to flourish, they began to look for a new solution.

A watershed moment was in 1894 when a Jewish journalist named Theodor Herzl reported on the trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army. France, one of the most advanced and enlightened countries in the world, guaranteed the equality of all of its citizens, regardless of their religion. Yet, the prevailing antisemitic atmosphere led to Dreyfus’ conviction on the charge of treason despite his being innocent (he was exonerated in 1906). Herzl also witnessed French mobs shouting “Death to the Jews!” Herzl concluded that the only solution to antisemitism was to establish a Jewish state. He organized modern political Zionism, or Jewish nationalism, which is the belief in the right to self-determination for the Jewish people in their ancient homeland, the Land of Israel.

As was previously discussed, Jews had long dreamed of returning to their ancient homeland, but most felt that this could not happen until the arrival of the messiah. Herzl popularized the idea that Jews could reestablish their homeland as an expression of nationalism rather than strictly on the basis of religious belief. Jews around the world began donating money to purchase land from Arab and Ottoman landowners. Suffering from horrific pogroms, Eastern European Jews began immigrating to these properties and developing the infrastructure of a modern nation with schools, hospitals, and theaters, as well as agricultural communities.

### **World War I—Conflicting Promises**

During World War I, Arab nationalists began to argue for an independent Arab state because Ottoman power was weakening, Arab youths were being conscripted into the Ottoman army, the provinces were suffering from famine and labor shortages, and Arab leaders were arrested and even executed on the suspicion of treason. Arab nationalists believed that life would be better if Arabs were united under an independent Arab government. Britain attempted to gain Arab support by promising Arab independence. At the same time, Britain tried to enlist Jewish support by promising to create a Jewish national home in Palestine.

At the conclusion of the war, both Jews and Arabs felt betrayed because instead of either gaining independence, Ottoman Syria was divided between the British and the French. The region known as Palestine came under the control of the British as a mandate granted by the League of Nations. Part of the mandate included the obligation to create a Jewish national home in Palestine.

Until the establishment of the mandate, Palestine's boundaries had not been defined because it was not a distinct political unit. With the imposition of the Palestine Mandate, the borders of Palestine were defined for the first time. It included land on both sides of the Jordan River encompassing the present-day countries of Israel and Jordan. However, Palestine did not remain intact for long, because, in 1921, Britain created an administrative entity called Transjordan as a political division of the Palestine Mandate. In 1922, with the support of the League of Nations, Britain established that all provisions dealing with Jewish settlement in the Palestine Mandate would not apply to Transjordan. The Zionists felt betrayed because a huge part of Palestine, almost 80% of the original mandate was now prohibited to them. The eastern part of the Palestine Mandate became the Arab state of Transjordan (across the Jordan)—today known as Jordan. The western half, still called Palestine, remained under British control.

## The Origins of Zionism and Arab Nationalism: Reading Questions

1) What is the difference between a nation and a state? In your opinion, why does nationalism exist?

2) Why did most Jews end up living outside of their homeland?

3) What is the religious significance of Jerusalem for Jews, Christians, and Muslims?

4) How were medieval European ghettos similar to modern American ghettos? How were they different?

5) How did the crusades affect Arabs?

6) Before World War I, why did most Arab nationalists argue for the idea of greater self-rule rather than complete independence from the Ottoman Empire?

7) In late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, Jews had legal equality but not actual equality. How is it possible that a group can have legal equality but not actual equality? What examples of this have there been in America?

8) Why did Jews embrace modern Zionism?

Place the following 10 events in chronological order below:

1. *Nationalism begins in Europe.*
2. *Judea is renamed Palestine by the Romans when the Jews try to regain their independence.*
3. *Europeans try to conquer the "Holy Land" during the crusades.*
4. *Ottoman lands are divided between the British and the French.*
5. *Islam begins in the Arabian Peninsula.*
6. *Jews in Spain are given the choice of converting, leaving the country, or being killed.*
7. *Tribes from the Arabian Peninsula conquer Palestine.*
8. *The Ottoman Empire is at the height of its power.*
9. *Britain makes conflicting promises to Jews and Arabs.*
10. *Arab nationalists argue for greater autonomy in the Ottoman Empire.*