Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Conflict in the Middle East, 1945–95

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The birth of the state of Israel, 1945–63

- Britain ruled Palestine under a **mandate** after the First World War. Jewish immigration grew in the 1930s, and Arabs rebelled (1936–39). After the Holocaust, many Jewish survivors wanted to settle in Palestine, but Britain limited immigration: in 1947 it turned back the refugee ship Exodus.
- Jewish groups used violence to push Britain out. In July 1946, the **Irgun** (led by Menachem Begin) bombed the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, Britain's headquarters, killing 91 people.
- In 1947, Britain handed the problem to the United Nations. The **UN Partition Plan** (November 1947) split Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, with Jerusalem under international control. Jewish leaders accepted it; Arab leaders rejected it, and fighting began.
- On 14 May 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared the state of Israel as the British left. Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq attacked. Israel won the 1948–49 war and ended up with more land than the plan gave it.
- About 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven from their homes and became refugees. Palestinians call it the **Nakba** ('catastrophe'). Jordan took the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Egypt took the Gaza Strip.

Nasser and the Suez Crisis, 1956

- Gamal Abdel Nasser led Egypt from 1954. He promoted **Arab nationalism**: the idea that Arab countries should unite and be free of Western control. Egypt and Syria joined as the United Arab Republic (1958–61).

- In July 1956, after the USA and Britain withdrew funding for the Aswan Dam, Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. Britain and France, who owned the canal company, secretly planned with Israel to attack Egypt.
- Israel invaded Sinai in October 1956, and Britain and France landed troops, claiming to separate the two sides. The USA and the USSR both opposed the attack, and the US pressure forced Britain and France to withdraw.
- Results: Nasser became a hero of the Arab world; Britain was humiliated and its Prime Minister, Eden, resigned; a UN force was placed in Sinai; Israel gained shipping access through the Straits of Tiran; the USSR gained influence in Egypt.

The escalation of the conflict, 1963–67: from the Cairo summit to the Six-Day War

- In January 1964, Nasser called a meeting of Arab leaders, the **Arab League** summit in Cairo, partly in response to Israel taking water from the River Jordan. They agreed to create a body to represent the Palestinians.
- The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was set up in East Jerusalem in May 1964, led by Ahmad Shukeiri. It was controlled by the Arab states at first.
- **Fatah**, founded in the late 1950s by Yasser Arafat and others, wanted Palestinians to fight for themselves. From 1965 it carried out guerrilla raids into Israel, many from Syria and Jordan, and Israel hit back, as in its raid on the West Bank village of Samu (1966).
- In May 1967, the USSR falsely told Egypt that Israel was massing troops on the Syrian border. Nasser moved troops into Sinai, made the UN force leave and closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli ships. Jordan signed a defence pact with Egypt.
- The **Six-Day War** (5–10 June 1967): Israel struck first, destroying most of Egypt's air force on the ground. It captured Sinai and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.
- Consequences: Israel controlled far more land and over a million Palestinians; more Palestinians became refugees; Arab states were humiliated; Palestinians lost faith in the Arab states and turned to their own groups, such as **Fatah**.
- UN **Resolution 242** (November 1967) called on Israel to withdraw from land taken in the war, and on Arab states to recognise Israel's right to exist ('land for peace'). At Khartoum (1967), Arab leaders agreed: no peace with Israel, no recognition and no negotiations.

The escalation of the conflict, 1968–73: Karameh to Black September, Munich and Yom Kippur

- The **Battle of Karameh** (March 1968): Israel attacked **Fatah**'s base in Jordan. **Fatah** fighters and the Jordanian army fought back, and Israel suffered heavy losses. Palestinians saw it as a victory, and thousands joined Fatah.
- Yasser Arafat became leader (chairman) of the PLO in 1969, and the PLO became more independent of the Arab states.

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- Some groups used terrorism to get world attention. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (**PFLP**) hijacked an Israeli plane in 1968, and in September 1970 hijacked several planes, flying three to Dawson's Field in Jordan and blowing them up after the passengers were taken off.
- **Black September** (September 1970): the PLO had become a 'state within a state' in Jordan, and the hijackings were the last straw. King Hussein sent the Jordanian army against the PLO. Thousands were killed, and by 1971 the PLO had been driven out to Lebanon.
- The **Munich Olympics** (September 1972): a group named after these events, **Black September**, took Israeli athletes hostage. Eleven Israeli athletes and coaches were killed, most during a failed German rescue. Israel hit back with air raids on PLO bases and by hunting down those involved.
- The **Yom Kippur War** (October 1973): Egypt, now led by Sadat, and Syria made a surprise attack on Israel's holiest day. They did well at first, but Israel recovered with American weapons. Arab oil producers used oil as a weapon: they cut supplies and oil prices quadrupled, putting pressure on the West to find a settlement.

Attempts to find a peaceful solution, 1974–95

- **Shuttle diplomacy**: the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, flew between leaders to arrange the separation of forces after 1973. In 1974, Arafat spoke at the United Nations, and the **Arab League** called the PLO the sole representative of the Palestinians.
- Sadat visited Jerusalem in 1977. The **Camp David Accords** (1978), arranged by US President Carter between Sadat and Israel's Prime Minister Begin, led to the Egypt–Israel peace treaty (1979). Egypt got Sinai back and recognised Israel, but other Arab states expelled Egypt from the **Arab League**, and Sadat was assassinated in 1981.
- In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon to drive out the PLO, which moved its headquarters to Tunis. Christian militia killed hundreds of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, in an area controlled by Israel's army.
- The First **Intifada** ('uprising') began in December 1987 in Gaza and the West Bank: strikes, protests and stone-throwing against Israeli rule. Hamas was founded. Television pictures won sympathy for the Palestinians around the world.
- In 1988, Arafat accepted **Resolution 242**, recognised Israel's right to exist and rejected terrorism. After the Gulf War, the Madrid Conference (1991) brought Israel and the Palestinians to talks.
- The **Oslo Accords**: after secret talks in Norway, Israel and the PLO recognised each other and signed an agreement at the White House (September 1993), with Rabin and Arafat shaking hands. Palestinians gained self-rule, starting in Gaza and Jericho, under a Palestinian Authority. Israel and Jordan made peace in 1994.
- In November 1995, Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli extremist who opposed the peace process.

Your notes

Key terms

Mandate	Rule of a territory by a country on behalf of the League of Nations, as Britain ruled Palestine.
Zionism	The movement for a Jewish homeland in Palestine.
Irgun	A Jewish group that used violence against the British, led by Menachem Begin.
UN Partition Plan	The 1947 UN plan to split Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state.
Nakba	'Catastrophe': the Palestinian name for their flight and loss of homes in 1948.
Arab nationalism	The idea that Arab countries should unite and be free of Western control.
Suez Crisis	The 1956 attack on Egypt by Britain, France and Israel after Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal.
Arab League	An organisation of Arab states, which met in Cairo in 1964 and agreed to create the PLO.
PLO	The Palestine Liberation Organisation, set up in 1964 to represent the Palestinians.
Fatah	A Palestinian group founded by Yasser Arafat, which carried out guerrilla raids on Israel.
Six-Day War	The June 1967 war in which Israel captured Sinai, Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.
Resolution 242	The 1967 UN resolution: Israel to give back land taken in the war, and Arab states to recognise Israel.
Battle of Karameh	The 1968 battle in Jordan that Palestinians saw as a victory, after which many joined Fatah.
PFLP	The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which hijacked planes to get attention.
Black September	The 1970 war in which Jordan drove the PLO out; also the name of the group behind the Munich attack.
Munich Olympics	The 1972 Games, where Black September took Israeli athletes hostage and eleven were killed.
Yom Kippur War	The 1973 surprise attack on Israel by Egypt and Syria.
Shuttle diplomacy	Kissinger flying between leaders to arrange agreements after 1973.
Camp David Accords	The 1978 agreements between Egypt and Israel, arranged by President Carter.
Intifada	The Palestinian uprising against Israeli rule that began in 1987.

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Oslo Accords	The 1993 agreement in which Israel and the PLO recognised each other and Palestinians gained self-rule.

Your notes

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which country ruled Palestine under a mandate until 1948?
2. What did the Irgun bomb in July 1946?
3. What did the UN Partition Plan of 1947 propose?
4. Who declared the state of Israel on 14 May 1948?
5. What do Palestinians call the events of 1948, when about 700,000 lost their homes?
6. Which territory did Jordan take control of after the 1948–49 war?
7. Why did Nasser nationalise the Suez Canal in 1956?
8. Who forced Britain and France to withdraw from Egypt in 1956?

Answers

1. Britain
2. The King David Hotel in Jerusalem
3. Splitting Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state
4. David Ben-Gurion
5. The Nakba
6. The West Bank and East Jerusalem
7. To pay for the Aswan Dam after the USA and Britain withdrew funding
8. The USA, through pressure, with the USSR also opposing the attack

What to do next

Practise 38 questions on this topic

Try 5 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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