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## **The Arab-Israeli Conflict**

**I. Cold War and Israel:** The Cold War too was to have an impact on the Middle East conflicts. After 1956, both the US and USSR became more deeply involved in the conflict. The US with large influential Jewish population gave Israel economic and military support. The Soviet Union backed Arab states such as Syria, Iraq, and Egypt with loans and military equipment. Each superpower hoped to gain a strategic advantage in the region. The result was a miniature arms race and two major conflicts.

Equipped with Soviet tanks and aircraft, Nasser and his Arab allies felt ready by early 1967 to confront Israel. There was a lot of talk and threats exchanged between the Arab states and Israel. In June 1967, Israel attacked Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. In 6 days (hence the name of the war) the war was over and Israel won it. The price for peace was the annexation by Israel the following territories: Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, Golan Heights from Syria, and the West bank from Jordan. Those territories were occupied by Israel to give that country borders that were easier to defend and as a buffer zone in case any future wars were to happen. Israel also occupied Jerusalem, which formerly was divided between Israel and Jordan. That city is considered holy to Jewish people and this is where their most important religious and historical sites are located. The Israelis were serious about keeping the newly acquired territories. According to Moshe Dayan, "We have returned to our holiest of places ... and will never depart again". The newly acquired territories was a huge success for Israelis, but they had one problem – the population residing there was predominately (mostly) Palestinian and did not want to be a part of a Jewish state. The Israelis themselves were also not too eager to accept them as full citizens for fear that with such large influx of non-Jewish population, Israel would lose its identity as a Jewish state. So the Palestinian occupants of the new territories which are called The West bank and The Gaza Strip, were under Jewish rule but without Jewish citizenship. This in time proved to be an explosive mixture.

**Question #1:** Who was supporting Israel? Why? Who was supporting the Arab states? Why? Why do you think Israel decided to attack its neighbors? What was the outcome of the Six Days War? Why is Jerusalem so important to Israelis? What problems did annexation/occupation of West Bank and Gaza Strip create for Israel?

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**II. The Yom Kippur War:** A fourth Arab Israeli conflict erupted in Oct. of 1973. After Nasser's death, his successor Anwar Sadat the new leader of Egypt, plotted a joint Arab attack on Israel during one of the most important Jewish holidays – Yom Kippur. This time the Israelis were caught by surprise as Arab forces inflicted heavy casualties and recaptured some of the territories lost by Arab states in 1967. However, with massive US help, the Israelis succeeded in launching a counterattack and recovered most of the lost territory. An uneasy truce was agreed to by both sides after several weeks of fighting. The next armed conflict erupted in 1980 when Israel decided to invade Lebanon to kick out Palestinians who formed an organization called PLO (Palestinian Liberation organization) in Lebanon. The war ended with a partial success for Israel. It was a semi-victory because the PLO forces were defeated but not destroyed. Moreover, Israel had to maintain a large army in occupied Lebanon which was expensive and made Israel unpopular in many countries where it was seen as an aggressor.

**Question #2:** Why do you think the Arab states attack Israel during Yom Kippur? What was the U.S. role in this war? Why did Israel decide to attack Lebanon? What was the outcome of the attack on Lebanon? Why did Israel decide to pull out its forces out of Lebanon?

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**III. The Oil Crisis of 1973:** During the Yom Kippur War with Israel, the Arab oil-producing states decided to show what impact they could have upon the world economy. OPEC announced that it was severely reducing oil production. It also cut off all oil shipments to countries that supported Israel. The result was an energy crisis that brought shortages of gasoline,

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hating oil, and electricity to much of the Western world. OPEC's (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) action also produced other dramatic results. Oil prices shot up overnight, tripling and quadrupling their levels. The high cost of oil affected industries and homes alike. In addition, inflation became a major problem in the developed world, which experienced serious economic problems as a result of OPEC's action. Oil prices remained high for several years. Gradually, however, they began to decline. Over time, OPEC's strict production limits were abandoned by most member states. At the same time, conservation efforts and advancement in nuclear power production reduced demand for oil worldwide bringing the price even further down. By 1986, world oil prices began to fall dramatically to hit bottom at around \$10 a barrel (for comparison purposes: current oil price is \$56 a barrel, that is almost 6 times more!). All of the developed countries are currently in need of oil from the Middle east where close to 75% of reserves are locate. This concentration of oil makes the region super important and desirable to control.

**Question #3:** How did the OPEC countries (Oil producing countries) react to the Yom Kippur War? What was the consequence of OPEC countries' action? How did the states affected by OPEC embargo deal with this crisis? Why is the Middle East so important to the rest of the world?

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**IV. Intifada – Palestinian Resistance:** Palestinians living in refugee camps had under Israli control as well as in neighboring countries had grown tremendously since 1948. Many supported the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), headed by Yasir Arafat. It stated goal was the destruction of Israel, which PLO claimed had no right to exist on the land they called Palestine. For years, the PLO waged guerrilla warfare against Israelis at home and abroad. Bombings, airplane hijackings, and the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympic games brought PLO demands to attention of the world. At the same time, though, such violent and heartless attacks stiffened Israel's resolve not to negotiate with the PLO. In the late 1980's and again starting in 2000, large numbers of young Palestinians mounted intifadas, or uprisings, against Israeli occupation. Demanding a Palestinian homeland of their own, they disobeyed curfew laws and stoned Israeli troops. Palestinian gunmen fired on Israeli occupying force trying to push them off their land. Israeli army responded with overwhelming force. Hundreds of Palestinians were injured or killed in bloody street fights. Some Palestinian kids were killed and the Israeli troops repeatedly sealed off Palestinian towns and villages, crippling the already fragile Palestinian economy and intensifying Palestinian bitterness.

**Question #4:** What is PLO? Why is this organization so popular with the Palestinians? What is the goal of PLO? How did the PLO try to shed light on the plight of the Palestinians living under Israeli control? What is Intifada? How did Israel react to Intifadas?

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Homework:   13  

1. Why do you think so many Palestinians dislike the government of the United States?
2. What is the major disagreement between Israel and Palestinians?
3. How has the Arab-Israeli conflict affect the world?
4. How do you think this conflict should be resolved?