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## THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE DEBATE



2 Page Text and Comprehension

## UNDERSTANDING WHO WE WERE

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# Fighting Over the Holy Land

Jerusalem was the capital city of Israel during the time of Jesus and had been the Jewish capital city for over 1000 years. In 70 AD, Israel ceased to exist as a nation when the Roman Empire crushed a Jewish revolt and destroyed Jerusalem and their temple, sending the Jews throughout the world. Since Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, the main Jewish Temple had been built in the city, although it was also destroyed by the Romans.



*The Western Wall or "Wailing Wall" is all that remains of the Jewish Temple complex of Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock, a holy Muslim site, is seen in the background, directly on top of the location of the old Jewish Temple.*

Once the Romans had destroyed the Jewish rebellion and sent the Jewish people throughout the world, other groups of people settled in the region, although a country was not formed. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, the Islamic prophet Muhammed (583-609) started the religion of Islam, which claimed that Jesus of Nazareth (33BC-0) was a prophet of the true God, Allah. Tradition held that Muhammad ascended to heaven at the end of his life on the same mountain where the Jewish temple had once stood in Jerusalem, leading Muslims to build their oldest Holy site, the Dome of the Rock there. With the Jews gone, the Palestinians largely converted to Islam, and came to think of Palestine as their country.

During the Middle Ages, Christians and Muslims fought to control Jerusalem during the Crusades. Christians believed that Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem, and therefore considered it to be one of the most holy cities in Christendom. At the end of the Crusades, the Ottoman Empire took control of Palestine and continued Muslim control of the region until World War 1. The British took of the land in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. By this point, Jews began to move back into Palestine in Jewish resettlement camps in order to attempt to re-establish control over their ancestral land. This effort was viewed by the Muslim Palestinians as an invasion, although the number of Jews was small, so the overall impact was seen as minor.

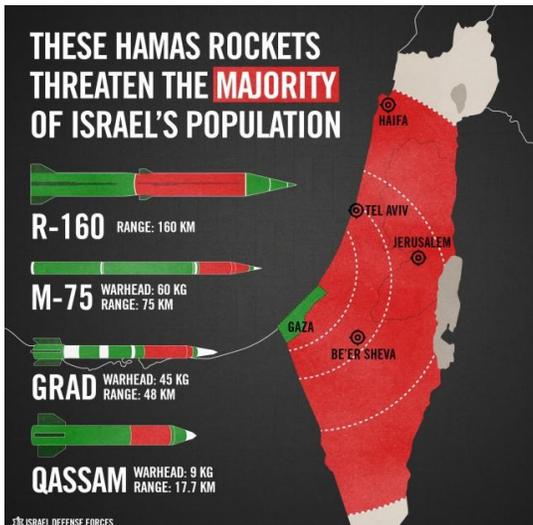
After the Holocaust, the British and the United Nations gave the land outright to the Jewish people, resurrecting the nation of Israel which had been dead for almost 2,000 years. In creating the nation of Israel, the Palestinians were essentially forced by the British to give up their land to the Jews. Initially, the land of Israel was split between Israel and the Palestinians, although Israel was the only officially recognized nation. Certain parts of the region, especially the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and sections of Jerusalem were divided between Israeli and Palestinian control.

Several wars have been fought in Israel since its creation, between Israel and the surrounding countries. Israel, historically with the United States' support, has been successful in all of the conflicts. In many of the conflicts, they have been forced to give land back to the people they have taken it from by the United Nations. Israel also represents the most religiously and politically tolerant nation in the Middle Eastern region, making it a natural ally of the Western nations. The Palestinians, who were rejected by surrounding nations as well, were largely left in resettlement camps in undesirable parts of Palestine.



*Palestinian groups believe that Israel is guilty of human rights violations.*

For decades, outside countries have tried to broker a “Two-State Solution” where both Palestine and Israel could coexist as nations. All attempts have failed due to each refusing to compromise over control of Jerusalem and other key regions of the area. Currently, the Palestinians have no nation at all, and all attempts to create their own country have failed. The Palestinian Authority, the Palestinians’ unrecognized government, sponsors Hamas, a terrorist organization responsible for many attacks against Israelis. For their part, the Israelis continue to aggressively colonize parts of the region not currently under their control in an attempt to extend their influence further in the region.



Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organization, regularly launches rockets at Israeli cities. Hamas is responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians. (Photo Credit: idf.il)

In 2000, US President Bill Clinton (1946- ) met with the leaders of Israel and Palestine in order to attempt to create a lasting peace between the groups. This was not the first, nor has it been the last meeting between leaders of the two groups and an outside country, but lasting peace has been elusive. The peace talks held in 2000 were the closest the two groups have been to a lasting peace, and Americans and Israelis involved in the peace talks have consistently blamed the

Palestinian leader, Yasir Arafat for making unreasonable demands.

The normal position of the United States has been to attempt to negotiate a cease-fire agreement between both sides that may at some point grow into a full resolution of what land belongs to what group. While normally attempting to be neutral in these discussions, the US government has taken both sides. In 2017, the United States government announced that it was officially going to be moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This move, which was condemned in the General Assembly of the United Nations, showed strong support for Israel’s claim to control all of Jerusalem.



President Bill Clinton (center) with Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat (right) and Israeli leader Ehud Barak (left)

### Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Why is Jerusalem an important city to Jews and Muslims?
2. What event led the European nations to create a new country for the Jewish people?
3. What did the US announce in 2017 that gave more support to the Israeli side of the conflict?

Write about it.

If you were president of the world and could make a decision that everyone had to follow, who would you give the land to?

Further controversy exists over the Israeli nuclear weapons program which was begun in the 1950’s. Israel has never declared a successful nuclear weapons test, although what was thought to have been a nuclear test was executed in the South Atlantic Ocean in 1979 and was never claimed by any country. This theory is highly disputed by scientists and has no country has ever claimed responsibility for a nuclear test at that time. Israel has not confirmed or denied the existence of a nuclear weapons program, although many experts currently estimate its nuclear armament to be somewhere between 80-200 warheads.

# TEACHERS GUIDE

## Answer Key

1. Jerusalem is an important city to the Jews because it was the capital city of Israel and the location of their main temple. It is important to the Muslims because the Dome of the Rock Mosque is located in Jerusalem.
2. The event that led to the Europeans creating a new country for the Jewish people was the Holocaust.
3. In 2017, the United States government announced that it was moving its embassy to Jerusalem, which recognized that city as the capital city of Israel.

## Questions for Further Discussion

What gives a group of people the right to claim ownership of land?

Can we tolerate religions whose beliefs encourage violence?

Should the international community punish Israel for developing nuclear weapons without permission?

Should the Palestinians be punished by the international community for encouraging and supporting Hamas?