

Whose Land Is It Anyway?

Issues

What are Jewish claims to the land based on? What is the basis of the Arab claim? Whose land is it anyway?

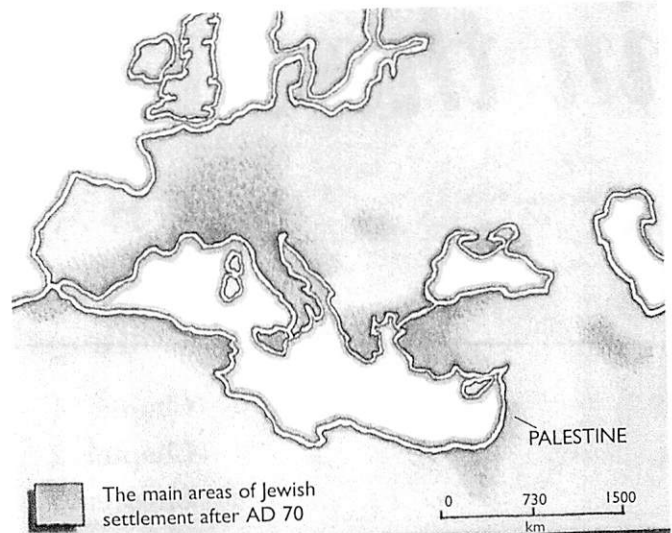
In 1948 the state of Israel was created out of the land of Palestine. Since then there has been almost continuous conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The Middle East has hardly ever been out of the news. Why is this such a live issue? Whose land is it anyway?



A 'Cool it, quick!' An American newspaper's view of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Jewish claim to Palestine

From about 1500 BC, the Jewish people lived in the land of Palestine. In the time of Jesus – first century AD – Palestine was ruled by the Romans. In AD 70 and again in AD 135 the Jews rebelled against their Roman rulers. Roman soldiers crushed both revolts, destroyed the city of Jerusalem and expelled the Jews. Many thousands fled to neighbouring countries and over the next 200 years they settled in almost every part of the Roman empire (see source B). Many became merchants and farmers, bankers and craftsmen. Some became wealthy and even gained important positions in the governments of the new lands in which they lived.



B A map showing the main areas of Jewish settlement after AD 70.

Then, in the Middle Ages, the Jews were expelled from western Europe and many settled in Russia and Poland. But they were often **persecuted**. Almost all Europeans were Christians and they often forced the Jews to live in separate areas. They were not allowed to vote or even to buy their own land. Such anti-Jewish behaviour is known as **anti-Semitism**.

In the nineteenth century, the country with the largest Jewish population was Russia. When the tsar, or emperor, was assassinated in 1881, there were many anti-Jewish riots. The new tsar's government encouraged the persecution of the Jews. **Synagogues** were burnt down, Jewish homes were attacked and thousands of Jews were killed. Many Russian Jews fled to western Europe and the US. But, even there, Jews found that they were not treated as equals and that they were sometimes suspected of being disloyal or untrustworthy.

'Next Year in Jerusalem'

For hundreds of years Jews dreamt and prayed that they would be able to celebrate 'Next Year in Jerusalem'. By the beginning of the twentieth century an increasing number of Jews were demanding a Jewish national home. By 1914, when the First World War broke out, these people were all agreed that this homeland would have to be in Palestine. This was the 'Promised Land', where the Jews (or Israelites) had lived some 2500 years before and where several thousands still remained.



C Making a home in the 'Promised Land'. A couple, recent immigrants from Europe, build a hut to live in.

In 1917 the British were very keen to bring the United States into the First World War against Germany. The British believed that the Jews in America could influence their government's actions and so Britain declared its support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This declaration was made in the form of a letter to Lord Rothschild, a leading British Jew, in November 1917. It became known as the 'Balfour Declaration' because it was signed by the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour.

Zionist slogan about Palestine – 'a land without people for a people without land'.

- 1 What was the main aim of the Zionists?
- 2 Study source D carefully. For many years after this letter was published many Jews regarded the Balfour Declaration as a promise from the British government to help set up a Jewish state.
- a) Does it read like a promise?
- b) If so, a promise to do what?
- c) What does this document say about the non-Jews in Palestine? Why?

D Adapted from the Balfour Declaration.

Foreign Office
December 2nd, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild,
I have much pleasure in expressing to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist ambitions. This has been approved by the Cabinet.

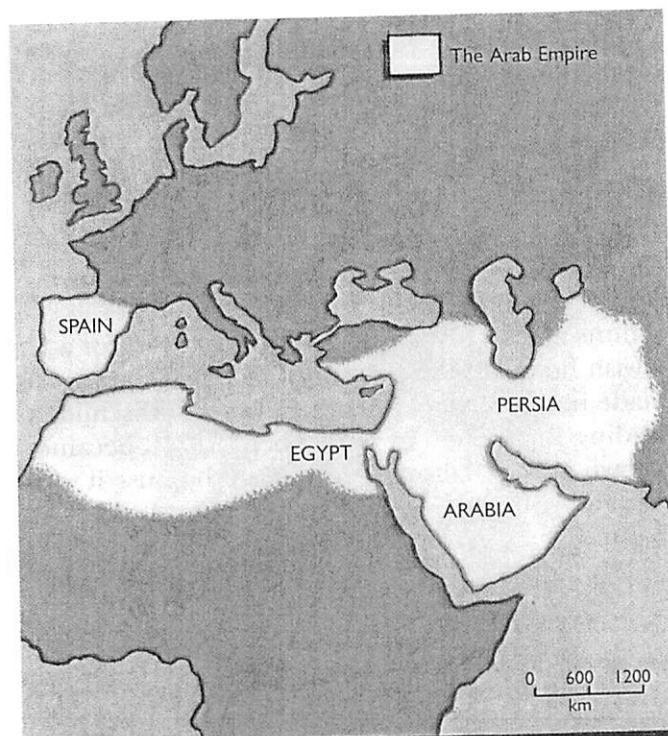
'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people. The Government will make every effort to help bring this about. It is clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may harm the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

[Signed by Lord Balfour]

THE ARAB CLAIM TO PALESTINE

For many centuries the Arabs have lived in the lands which we call the Middle East. They form the majority of the population and all speak the same language, Arabic. In the seventh century AD most of the Arabs were converted to the religion of Islam. They became followers of Mohammed and are now known as Muslims. From their homeland in Arabia, they swept across the Middle East and North Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries spreading their new religion by force. Palestine was one of the countries they took over.



A The Arab empire in the eighth century.

In the Middle Ages, the Arab Muslims made important discoveries in mathematics and medicine. Their merchants bought and sold goods in Europe, Africa and Asia, and their lands grew rich. Then, in the sixteenth century, the Turks (who were also Muslims but not Arabs) conquered much of the Middle East. The Arabs were forced to pay taxes and provide soldiers for their Turkish masters.

In the late nineteenth century the Arabs tried several times to remove their Turkish rulers. Their aim was to re-establish Arab rule in the Middle East, including Palestine.

B In 1914 an Arab writer made this appeal:

Arise, O ye Arabs! Take out the sword from the scabbard. Do not let an oppressive tyrant, who only despises you, remain in your country; cleanse your country from those who show their hatred to you, to your race and to your language.

O ye Arabs! You all dwell in one land, you speak one language, so be also one nation and one land.

Do not become divided amongst yourselves.

The Arabs and the First World War

The First World War was a turning point in the Arab struggle for independence as well as in the Jewish struggle for a homeland. Turkey fought on the German side against Britain and its allies. The British were afraid that their supplies of oil from Persia (or Iran, as it's known today) might be cut off by the Turks. So they decided to encourage the Arabs to rebel against their Turkish rulers and seek independence. The British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Herbert McMahon, exchanged several letters with Hussein, the Sharif of Mecca, an important Arab Muslim leader. McMahon promised that if the Arabs fought against the Turks, Britain would be 'prepared to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs'.

An Arab army was raised and led by Prince Faisal, the son of the Sharif of Mecca. The army blew up Turkish trains and disrupted the flow of military supplies to the Turkish soldiers. The Arabs felt that they had fought for their independence from the Turks and now deserved complete self-government.

Arab leaders were therefore angered when they heard that Britain and France had secretly agreed in 1916 to carve up Turkey's Arab lands after the war and share them out between themselves. (This agreement is known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement after the British and French politicians who made it.)

In 1919, the Peace of Versailles confirmed Arab fears. Britain and France were given **mandates**, or orders, to govern certain countries in the Middle East until the Arab people were considered ready to govern themselves. Britain was given mandates over Palestine and Iraq, and British troops and their administrators took control of these lands. France was granted mandates over Syria and Lebanon and soon sent troops in to take control.

British Rule in Palestine

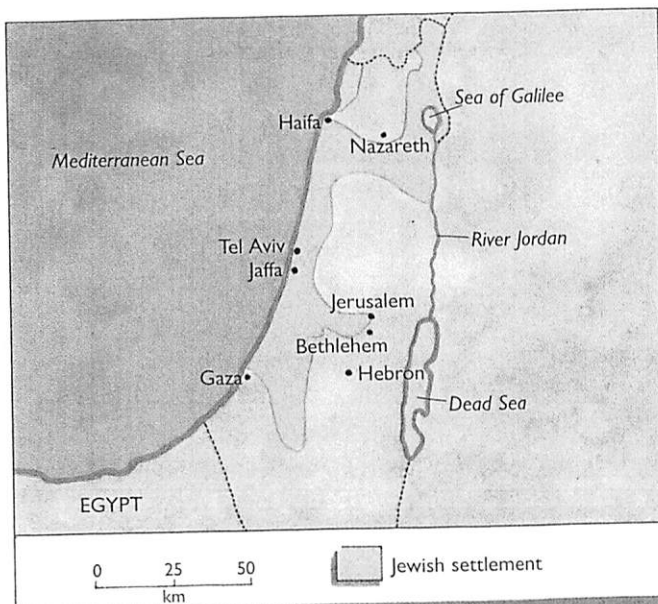
Key Issue

Why did British rule lead to an Arab rebellion?

In 1917 British troops entered Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, driving out the Turks. In 1919 Britain was given a mandate to govern Palestine. For the next 30 years the British government was to rule the country.

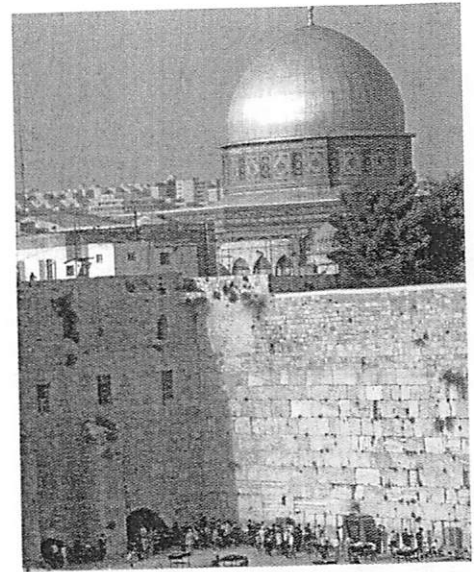
The Arabs of Palestine felt that they had simply exchanged Turkish rulers for British ones. Like the Arabs of Syria and Iraq, they were frustrated and disappointed that they had not been given their independence.

The Palestinian Arabs were even more angered by increasing Jewish **immigration** and the fact that Jews were buying land in 'their' country. The Jews only bought land in a few areas of Palestine, but in these areas the Arabs claimed they were being driven out. They also accused the British of being pro-Zionist.



A The main areas of Jewish settlement in Palestine.

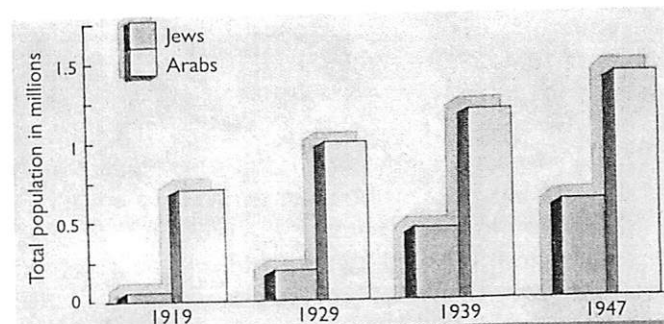
In 1921 an Arab mob set upon the Jews at the port of Jaffa and, after two days of rioting, 200 Jews and 120 Arabs were dead or wounded. In 1929 violence erupted again. This time it started in the city of Jerusalem, which is the Holy City for Jews but also the third most important city for Muslims. In August large Arab crowds attacked Jews inside and outside the city. The attacks spread throughout Palestine and, in four days, 133 Jews were killed



B The Dome of the Rock. Muslims believe that Mohammed rose to heaven from the Rock. Just below it is the Western or 'Wailing' Wall, which Jews believe to be the last remaining part of the ancient Jewish Temple.

(60 of these deaths were in the town of Hebron). During the attacks, 116 Arabs were also killed, mostly by the British police while trying to stop the anti-Jewish violence.

Similar outbreaks, though not so widespread, continued in the early 1930s, especially after 1933. In that year Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany and Nazi anti-Semitism drove many Jews abroad. Thousands fled to Palestine and by 1939 there were nearly 450 000 Jews in the country. Tension remained high and British government reports all came to the same conclusion – that the Arabs were afraid of losing their country as more and more of them became 'landless and discontented'.



C Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine, 1919–47.



D Arab fighters, 1938.

The British were in an impossible position: if they allowed unrestricted immigration, Arab fears and violence would increase. But if they stopped or controlled immigration, the world would accuse them of inhumanity, of not caring for the Jews who were being persecuted by the Nazis.

Arab rebellion, 1936–9

In 1936, widespread fighting broke out as armed Arab bands attacked Jewish settlements. The British responded harshly. They hanged several Arab leaders and destroyed houses suspected of containing Arab terrorists or arms. They also helped to organise the Jewish Defence Force, the **Haganah** (which was set up in the 1920s and was later to develop into the Israeli army).

In 1937 the British government recommended the **partition** of Palestine into two separate states, one Jewish and a second Arab state. The Arabs rejected it and the fighting continued. With the help of more troops, better weapons and transport, the British forces gradually regained control of Palestine.

By 1939, when the rebellion ended, the British government had given up all further ideas of partition. It declared that Britain would continue to rule Palestine. It also said that it would restrict Jewish immigration (see source E). The British government adopted this policy because war was approaching and it feared the growth of friendship between Arab leaders and Germany. Britain needed to keep the friendship of the Arab countries so that oil supplies from the Middle East

would continue to reach Britain.

The Jews were furious. Thousands took to the streets to demonstrate.

E In 1939 the British government declared:

For each of the next five years a limit of 10 000 Jewish immigrants will be allowed ... apart from a special quota in the near future of 25 000 refugees as a contribution to the solution of the Jewish refugee problem.

After the period of five years no further Jewish immigration will be permitted unless the Arabs are prepared to agree to it.



- 1 Why were Palestinian Arabs angry about Jews immigrating to Palestine after the First World War?
- 2 In 1937 the British government recommended the partition of Palestine. Why was that idea dropped only two years later?
- 3 Look at source D.
 - a) What impression does it give?
 - b) This picture was found on the body of an Arab rebel leader who was killed by British troops. Why do you think he might have carried this photograph with him?
- 4 Using the sources and all you have learnt in this chapter, write 100–200 words to explain 'Why did the Arabs rebel in 1936?'

Terrorism and the Birth of Israel

Key Issues

**Why did the British leave Palestine in 1948?
Why did Israel have such a bloody birth?**

The King David Hotel in Jerusalem housed the British military headquarters in Palestine. It was protected by barbed wire, machine guns and patrolling soldiers. At noon on 22 July 1946, a lorry drove up to the entrance of the hotel kitchen. Men dressed as Arabs got out and unloaded their cargo of milk churns. They rolled them into the building. No one guessed that the milk churns contained high explosives or that the 'Arabs' were members of **Irgun**, a Jewish terrorist group. At 12.37 p.m. the explosion tore through the building killing 88 people, including 15 Jews.



A The King David Hotel was blown up by members of Irgun, a Jewish terrorist group in July 1946.

Outrages like this were the result of hatred of British rule which developed amongst the Jews in Palestine. When they heard of the deaths of thousands of Jews in the Nazi **Holocaust**, Zionists began to demand that the Jews in Palestine should be granted their own independent state. They wanted a flag and an army of their own. They wanted a state where the survivors of Nazi persecution could live in peace.

During the Second World War, many Palestinian Jews fought in the British army but after the war they became impatient with British rule. Jewish leaders in Palestine thought the British were stopping them from having their own independent state. For this reason, Jewish terrorists began to bomb British army bases, barracks, bridges, trains and railways in Palestine. Between 1945 and 1948 over 300 British soldiers or officials were killed in Palestine.

Despite such acts there was widespread sympathy in Europe and the United States for the Jews who had survived the Nazi concentration camps. The large Jewish population in the United States gave millions of dollars to Zionist leaders and forced US President Truman to put pressure on the British.

DAILY EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY LORD LEVERHURST
FRIDAY AUGUST 1 1947
No. 12598
Weather: Warm

PALESTINE THUGS THREATEN MORE KIDNAPPINGS
ATTLEE MAY TELL OF CUTS IN BREAD AND BUTTER
HOLIDAYS ABROAD BANNED FOR BRITISH CHILDREN

HANGED BRITONS: Picture that will shock the world



B This photograph appeared on the front page of the *Daily Express* in August 1947. It shows two British soldiers who had been hanged by members of Irgun. This hanging was in revenge for the execution of three of Irgun's members.



C The Haganah refugee ship arrived in Palestine with 25 000 illegal refugees on board. The banner on the ship reads, 'The Germans destroyed our families and homes – don't you destroy our hopes.'

'The choice for the Jews is between becoming a state and being exterminated,' (Chaim Weizmann, later President of Israel, writing to US President Truman, April 1948).

Truman said Britain should allow 100 000 Jewish refugees to enter Palestine. The British government refused, claiming that it would be unfair to the Arabs. British leaders said it would lead to civil war in Palestine.

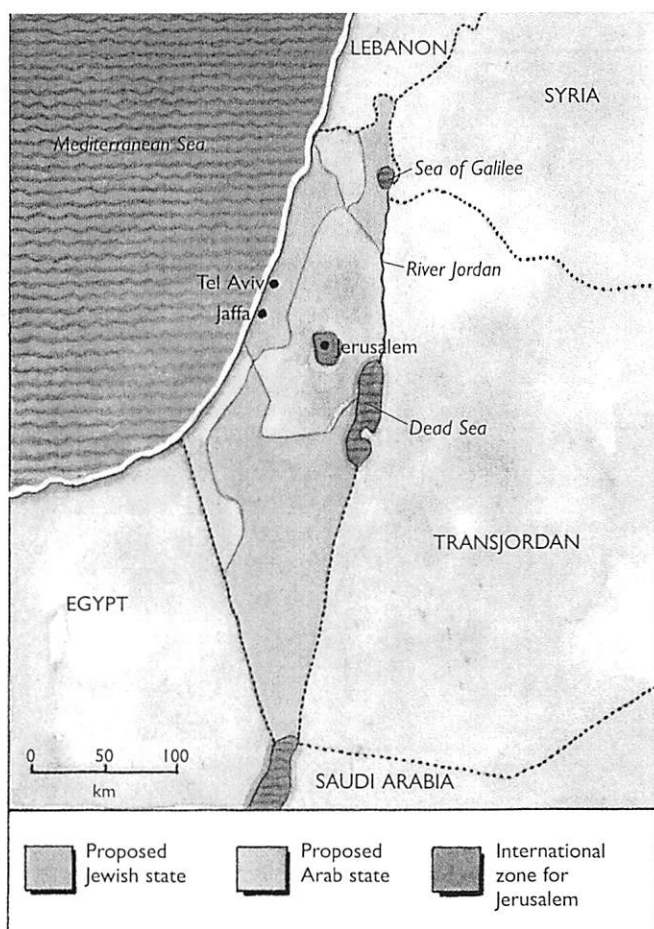
The British continued to stop boatloads of illegal Jewish immigrants from landing in Palestine. In 1947, for example, a ship called *The Exodus*, carrying 4500 refugees from Europe, was prevented from landing its passengers and was sent back to Europe. As a result of actions like these, the British authorities came in for worldwide criticism.

The British were also exhausted after the war, with food shortages and rationing at home, and could hardly afford to keep 100 000 troops in Palestine. After 30 years of trying to solve the problems of Palestine, the British government announced, at the end of 1947, that it would hand over Palestine to the United Nations (UN).

- 1 Why was the King David Hotel such an obvious target for Irgun to attack?
- 2 How did the Holocaust affect the situation in Palestine after the war?
- 3 Study source C. What does the banner say? How might this photograph have been used as **propaganda**?
- 4 Why do you think the British decided to hand over Palestine to the United Nations?
- 5 A Zionist leader, Israel Sieff, later wrote: 'The British government's policy towards Palestine had, by 1947, led to such bloody chaos that the British threw in their hand and asked for the future of Palestine to be dealt with by the United Nations.' To what extent do you agree with this interpretation?

THE UN PARTITION PLAN

In November 1947 the United Nations voted to divide Palestine and set up both a Jewish and an Arab state (see source A). The Palestinian Arabs rejected this plan, especially as the Jews were to be given the larger area. The Arabs did not wish to give up their land. They felt that the western powers should find a home for the Jews elsewhere. After all, the Arabs were not responsible for the Holocaust.



A The UN partition plan. What problems might you expect in a state which is divided into three parts?

Palestinian Jews accepted the plan but not all of them were happy with it. This was because many Jewish settlements were to be included in the Arab state and the Holy City of Jerusalem was to be an international zone.

B Menachem Begin, leader of Irgun, announced:

The partition of the homeland is illegal. It will never be recognised ... It will not bind the Jewish people. Jerusalem was and will for ever be our capital ...



MENACHEM BEGIN

Age : 38 years
Height : 175 cms
Build : Thin
Complexion : Sallow
Hair : Dark
Eyes : Brown
Nose : Long, hooked
Peculiarities : Wears spectacles:
flat footed; bad teeth
Nationality : Polish
Occupation : Clerk.

C WANTED! This is a photograph of Menachem Begin which was published by the British authorities in Palestine. A reward was offered for information leading to his arrest. Begin, who had lost both his parents and a brother in Nazi concentration camps, was the leader of Irgun. The Irgun was responsible for bombing the King David Hotel and the Deir Yassin massacre (see next page).

After the publication of the partition plan, fighting between Arabs and Jews grew worse. There was a particularly bitter struggle to control the roads leading to Jerusalem and massacres of civilians were carried out by both sides. Soldiers from Syria and Iraq began to cross into Palestine to help the Arabs, while the Haganah organised Jewish defence forces.



D Arab refugees flee from their homes.

By 14 May 1948, when the British finally withdrew, over 300 000 Arabs had fled from what was to become the new Jewish state. Arabs and Jews have argued about the causes of this flight ever since.

What caused the Arab flight?

In the weeks before the British withdrawal from Palestine, some of the bloodiest fighting took place in and around Jerusalem. In one incident, on 10 April 1948, Irgun fighters attacked the village of Deir Yassin (which was inside what was to be Arab territory under the UN partition plan) and killed the inhabitants.

E Menachem Begin wrote a book called *The Revolt* in 1951.

The civilian population of Deir Yassin was actually given a warning by us before the battle began. The fire of the enemy was murderous. Our men were compelled to fight for every house: to overcome the enemy they used large numbers of hand-grenades.

Throughout the Arab world and the world at large, a wave of lying propaganda was let loose about 'Jewish atrocities' ... the Arabs began to flee in terror, even before they clashed with Jewish forces ... This Arab propaganda spread a legend of terror amongst Arabs and Arab troops, who were seized with panic at the mention of Irgun soldiers. The legend was worth half a dozen battalions to the forces of Israel.

F A French Red Cross official, who visited the scene of the massacre the next day, wrote a report.

The press and radio spread the news everywhere among Arabs as well as Jews. In this way a general terror was built up among the Arabs ... Driven by fear, the Arabs left their homes to find shelter among their kindred [relatives]; first isolated farms, then villages, and in the end, whole towns were evacuated.

G The Britain/Israel Public Affairs Centre, an Israeli information service, takes a different view:

If the Arabs were so attached to their land, why did they leave it during a crisis? The blame must belong to Arab leaders who, expecting a quick victory by their combined armies over Israel, encouraged Arabs to leave Palestine, promising that on their return they would be able to claim the property of the Jews as well. Arab propaganda led them to fear what would happen to them if they stayed, and threatened that they would also be considered traitors to the Arab cause.

H S. Penrose, a British historian, wrote:

There is no doubt that frightful massacres such as that which took place at Deir Yassin in April 1948 were carried out for the major purpose of frightening the Arab population and causing them to take flight. The Zionist radio repeated incessantly for the benefit of Arab listeners 'Remember Deir Yassin!'.

I Erskine Childers, an Irish journalist, wrote in 1961:

I next decided to test the charge that the Arab evacuation orders were broadcast by Arab radio – which could be done thoroughly because the BBC monitored all Middle East broadcasts throughout 1948. The records, and companion ones by a US monitoring unit, can be seen at the British Museum.

There was not a single order, or appeal, or suggestion about evacuation from Palestine from any Arab radio station, inside or outside Palestine in 1948. There is a repeated monitored record of Arab appeal, even flat orders, to the civilians of Palestine to stay put.



- 1 Why do you think the bloodiest fighting took place around Jerusalem?
- 2 a) Who does Begin (source E) blame for the Arab flight?
b) What do you think he means by 'The legend was worth half a dozen battalions to the forces of Israel'?
- 3 Read source G. Who is blamed for the Arab flight? How does the author explain this?
- 4 a) What does the author of source H see as the motive for the attack on Deir Yassin?
b) Does the last sentence prove that Irgun attacked Deir Yassin in order to cause the Arabs to flee from their homes?
- 5 a) Which of the earlier sources, if any, does source I contradict?
b) How useful is this source for a historian studying the causes of the Arab flight?
- 6 'Sources E and F are first-hand accounts and therefore more reliable as evidence for the historian studying the causes of the Arab flight than the other sources.' Explain whether you agree with this statement, making reference to each of the sources.

The War of 1948–9

Key Issue

How did Israel survive its first war?

When the state of Israel was created, none of the Arab states recognised its right to exist. As far as they were concerned, Palestine had been occupied by Zionists and Israel ought to be destroyed. Over the next 25 years there were to be four major wars between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

The next four chapters examine the causes and

consequences of each of those wars. They look at the underlying or general causes as well as at particular or immediate causes. They also explain why much bigger Arab states have been unable to defeat the Israelis on the battlefield.

The invasion of Israel

On 14 May 1948, David Ben-Gurion announced the founding of the new state of Israel. Immediately, armies from the Arab states of Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon and Iraq invaded.

The Arabs of Palestine were disorganised and lacked good leaders. Many of the armies from the other Arab states were poorly trained or badly equipped. They certainly had no coordinated plan of campaign. The only efficient and experienced Arab force was the Arab Legion from Transjordan. It captured and held the eastern part, the Old City, of Jerusalem.

On the other fronts, the Israelis resisted and the United Nations ordered a cease-fire in June. The Israelis now reorganised and acquired fresh weapons. Fighting broke out twice more and by January 1949 Israel had driven out the Arab armies and even occupied some of the land which the UN had granted to the Arabs (see source C). In addition about 700 000 Palestinian Arabs had fled their homes. Israel refused to hand back the land it had occupied in the fighting, while the Arab governments refused to accept that the state of Israel existed. There was no peace treaty, only a truce.



A Palestinian Arab troops, 1948.



B Israeli Jewish troops, 1948.

How did Israel survive?

The Israeli state had survived its first great test because the Jews had defended it fiercely and successfully in the war. Jewish soldiers were disciplined and hardened by their experience in fighting with the British in the Second World War and against them after it. They were well-led and organised. Above all, they were fighting to save their new country.

The people of Israel realised that they were surrounded by enemies. They were convinced that the Arabs wished to drive them into the sea and would try to attack again. The Israeli army would have to be constantly on the alert. Israeli men were liable to be called up for military service.

The Israeli army helped to shape the new nation as well as defend it. The Jews of Israel had come from different parts of Europe and the US. Between 1949 and 1954 another 700 000 arrived. Many were from North Africa and other parts of the Middle East. In the army they all received a similar training, lived together and had to learn Hebrew. It was experience in the army that helped to make the newly arrived Jews into true Israelis.

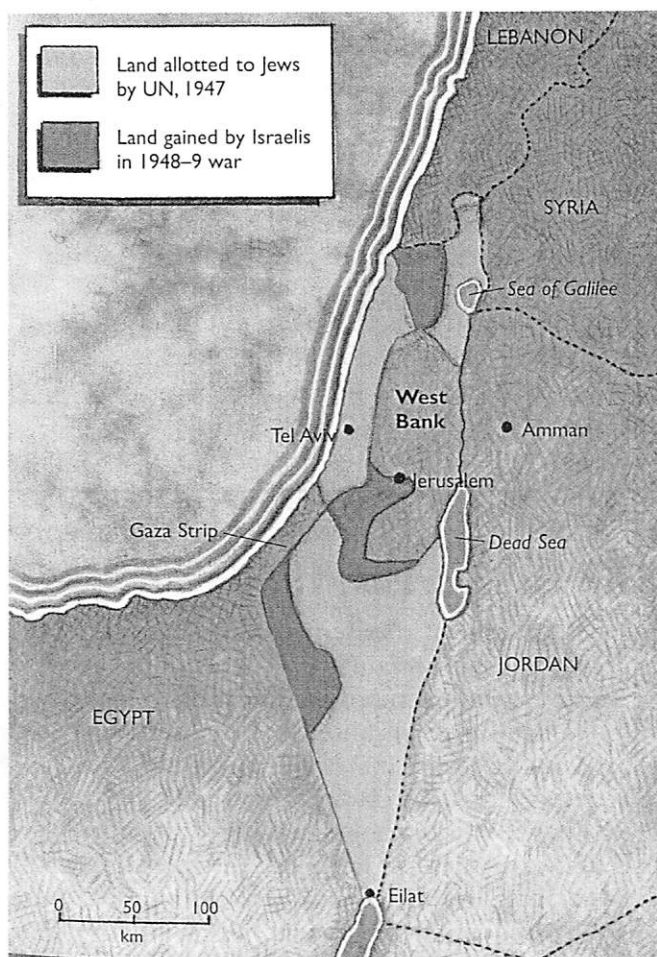
At the end of the 1948–9 war, 160 000 Arabs remained in Israel. They became Israeli citizens.

Many Israelis went to live and work on kibbutzim. These were (and still are) large cooperative farms in which all the property and work was shared. Different families ate together and shared living quarters.

With financial aid from the United States and Germany, the Israelis irrigated and cultivated vast areas of desert. They established chemical, shipbuilding and motor industries.

A nation on guard

Israel is a small country and none of the Israelis felt really safe from attack. They feared that the Palestinian Arabs, most of whom had left Israel, would try to win back the lands they had lost. Nearly half a million Arabs had fled to the two areas of Palestine that were not taken over by Israel. These two areas were the West Bank, which became part of the state of Jordan, and Gaza, a thin strip of land which the Egyptians controlled (see source G). Palestinian fighters, or **fedayeen**, on the West Bank and in Gaza carried out raids into Israeli territory. The Israelis retaliated fiercely.



C Map showing Israeli gains in the 1948–9 war.

- 1 Look at sources A and B. How do they compare? In what ways are these photographs useful for an understanding of the outcome of the 1948–9 war?
- 2 a) Draw a table like the one below. Then, using the text and sources in this chapter, make notes in order to complete it.

Reasons for Israel's victory, 1948–9

| Israeli strengths | Arab weaknesses |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| | |

- b) What other factors, besides those mentioned in this chapter, might help to explain Israeli success?
- c) Now write 100–200 words in answer to the question 'How do you explain Israel's success in the war of 1948–9?'

The Suez War of 1956

Key Issues

What led to the outbreak of a second Arab-Israeli war? Why did Britain and France become so involved? Who won and who lost the war?

The Arab states were shocked by their defeat at the hands of the Israelis in 1948–9. It showed how weak and divided they were. It made them bitterly anti-western. The Arabs felt that the United States had bullied the United Nations into creating the new state of Israel. They suspected that the western powers would use Israel as a base from which to keep an eye on the new Arab states.

Also, the Arab governments were still not completely independent, even after the Second World War. The mandates had ended but there were still many western troops and advisers in the Middle East. For instance, in Egypt, which was the most powerful Arab state, there were 70 000 British troops in the Suez Canal area. The Canal was owned and run by the British and French. It was a vital route for oil supplies to the West.

A group of young Egyptian army officers was determined to get rid of the British troops and achieve full independence for their country. In 1952, after years of planning, they overthrew the unpopular monarchy and took control of the government. Their leader was General Neguib, but the real organiser was Colonel Nasser.

B Colonel Nasser was one of the army officers who overthrew the unpopular Egyptian King and his government in 1952. In 1954 he became President of Egypt.



Nasser

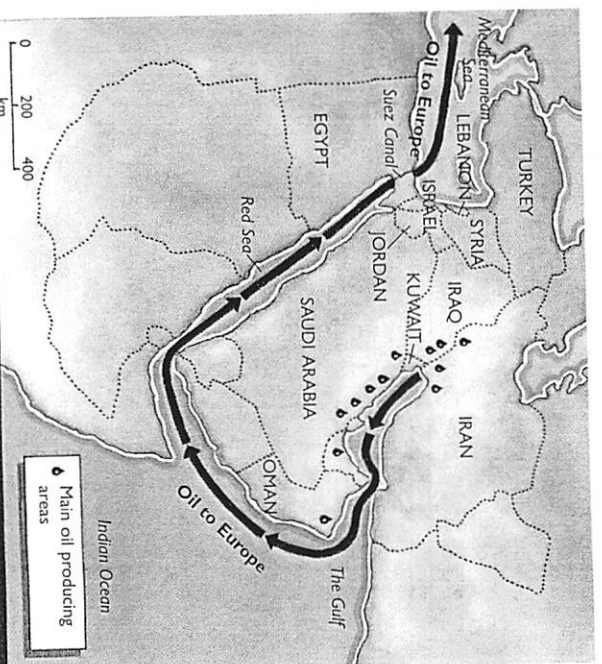
In 1954 Nasser became President and, after long discussions, he persuaded the British to withdraw their troops from the Suez Canal zone. Britain and the United States still wished to keep on good terms with Nasser. They wanted Arab support in the Middle East against communist Russia. They particularly wanted an alliance with Egypt as it was the strongest, most developed Arab nation, and because the Suez Canal passed through its territory.

Nasser wanted Egypt to be neutral and was not willing to join an anti-Russian alliance. He did, however, need arms to strengthen Egypt's army. This became very urgent in February 1955 when the Israeli government decided to hit back at Egypt for encouraging Palestinian raids into Israel. Israeli troops attacked the Egyptian army headquarters in Gaza and killed 50 Egyptian soldiers. For three days Palestinian refugees in Gaza ran riot and demanded: 'Arms, give us arms, we shall defend ourselves! Even in Cairo, the crowds wanted revenge.'

The Suez Crisis, 1956

In September 1955, Nasser shocked the West by agreeing to buy Russian arms from Czechoslovakia.

Britain and the United States thought they could still control Nasser because he depended on them for money to build the Aswan High Dam. This was a huge project on the River Nile which would create hydro-electric power for Egyptian industry and allow vast areas of land to be irrigated. In July 1956, Britain and the USA refused to lend Egypt any more money. Perhaps they hoped to persuade Nasser to be more cooperative. Maybe they thought they could force the Egyptians to replace



A The Suez Canal oil route from the Middle East to Europe.

Nasser told the crowd:
'We dug the Canal with our
lives, our skulls, our bones,
our blood.'

him. But Nasser shocked the West again. He was not going to be pushed around any longer. He would prove that Egypt was independent now. Before a huge crowd, on 26 July, he announced that the Suez Canal was 'our Canal'. Egypt would **nationalise** it and use the profits to build the Aswan Dam. He said that Britain and France could 'choke on their rage'. This daring act thrilled the Arabs in Egypt and elsewhere.

Britain and France were furious. The British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, was determined not to let Nasser 'have his thumb on our windpipe'. The British and French withdrew their pilots who guided ships through the Canal. But the Egyptians kept it running and the traffic increased.

C In September 1956, Eden wrote to the US President:

... the seizure of the Suez Canal is, we are convinced, the opening move in a planned campaign designed by Nasser to expel all western influence and interests from Arab countries. He believes that if he can get away with this, his prestige in Arabia will be so great that [Arab] governments will have to place their united oil resources under the control of a united Arabia led by Egypt and under Russian influence. When that moment comes Nasser can deny oil to western Europe and we here shall all be at his mercy.

On 24 October the British and French Foreign Ministers secretly met the Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, in France. Ben-Gurion wished to teach the Egyptians a lesson. He wanted to end the border raids from Gaza and force Egypt to recognise the state of Israel. He also wanted to break the Egyptian **blockade** of the Tiran Straits which prevented ships from reaching the port of Eilat (see source C on page 13). Furthermore, he was worried about the increasing military strength of Egypt and the fact that the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan had been put under the same command.

France, like Britain and Israel, also wanted to teach Egypt, especially Nasser, a lesson. Nasser had been sending aid to the Algerians in their fight against French rule.

There were other high-level meetings between Britain, France and Israel. Although it was denied at the time, a joint campaign against Egypt was being planned.



D This cartoon was published in Britain after Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal.

1 Draw a table like the one below in order to summarise the main events leading up to the outbreak of the 1956 war. In the case of each event, add a sentence or some notes to explain the motive of those involved. The first one has been done for you.

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|--|
| Sept 1955 | Nasser decided to buy Russian arms | He needed arms for defence against Israel and the West would not supply them |
| July 1956 | | |
| 26 July | | |
| 24 Oct | | |

2 Study source C again.

- What are Eden's main fears?
 - How do you think Nasser would answer each of these accusations?
 - To whom was Eden writing? How might this influence the content and style of his letter?
- 3 What is the message of the cartoon in source D? How useful is it as a historical source?

THE FIGHTING OVER SUEZ, 1956

On 29 October Israeli forces invaded the Sinai peninsula in Egypt and advanced towards the Suez Canal. The following day, Britain and France ordered Egypt and Israel to cease fighting and withdraw 16 kilometres from the Canal. If either side refused, Britain and France would use force. The Israelis were a long way from the Canal and therefore agreed, but Nasser refused to withdraw from the Canal because it was Egyptian territory.

On 31 October, British and French planes bombed Egyptian airfields and destroyed most of the air force. On 5 November British and French troops landed at Port Said and advanced along the Canal. Egypt responded by sinking ships to block the Canal.

At the United Nations, the Arab states condemned the Anglo-French action. They stopped oil supplies to the West. Even more

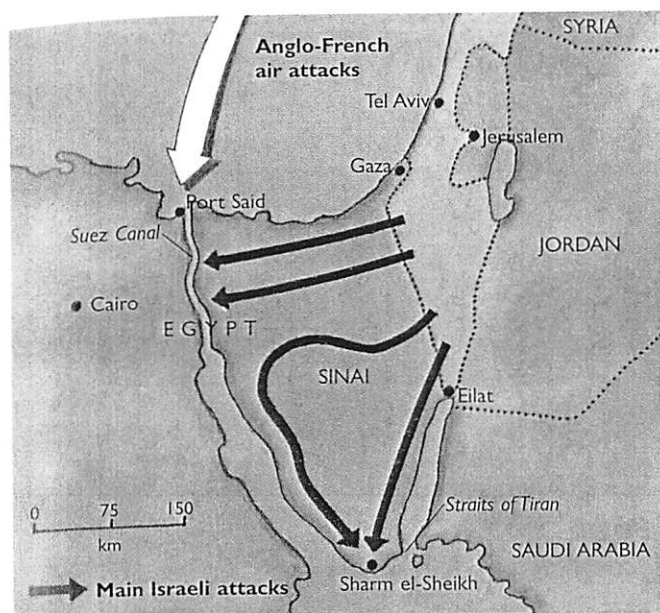
worrying for Britain was the fact that its ally, the United States, condemned the action. The US government was furious that Britain and France had used force. It threatened to cut off financial aid to Britain, which would ruin the economy. The Russians went further and threatened to use military force. On 6 November, the UN proclaimed a cease-fire and sent an emergency force to the Canal. The British and French withdrew.

Leader of the Arab world

Nasser became the hero of the whole Arab world. He had stood up to Britain and France, who had dominated the Middle East for so long, and he had gained complete control of the Canal. He lost territory when the Israelis captured Sinai, but he was persuaded to withdraw by the Americans in 1957. In addition, Nasser could claim that the Egyptian army had only been defeated because the Israelis had Anglo-French support.



A Port Said, at the northern end of the Suez Canal, was bombed by the British navy before troops landed.



B The 1956 war. The Straits of Tiran were Israel's outlet to trade with Asia and Africa.

The Israelis also made gains. When they withdrew from Sinai, UN troops moved in to guard the border between Egypt and Israel. In particular, UN forces were posted to Gaza to prevent more raids on Israel and to Sharm-el-Sheikh to guard the passage of Israeli shipping through the Straits of Tiran.

One of the main effects of the Suez crisis was to make many of the Arab states even more anti-western and willing to seek Russian aid. The Soviet Union now began to supply most of Egypt's weapons and to pay for the building of the Aswan Dam and many other projects. However, Nasser did not want Egypt to be tied to Russia and he was certainly not a communist. He wanted Egypt and the other Arab states to be neutral.

In 1964 Nasser invited the leaders of the Arab states to a conference in Cairo. Although many of them mistrusted each other, one thing united them all: opposition to the state of Israel and support for the Palestinians.

Who won and who lost the Suez-Sinai War?

C An American historian writing in 1979:

Curiously, in western eyes, the Suez War made Nasser a hero. One of its purposes was to destroy him and at the beginning of the fighting few would have given him even odds to survive. However, he did; more, he claimed with some justice a political victory within a military defeat.

When the British and French forces landed on the Suez Canal, Nasser ordered the sinking of ships which were filled with concrete in order to obstruct the British and French advance along the Canal.

D Moshe Dayan, an Israeli army general, writing in his memoirs, *The Story of My Life*:

It may be said right away that the three main purposes were achieved: our ships could now use the Gulf of Aqaba; an end to fedayeen terrorism; and the prevention of a joint attack on Israel by the Egypt-Syria-Jordan military command. In addition the victory in Sinai meant that Israel emerged as a state that would be welcomed as a friend and ally. Further, Nasser learned to respect the power of Israel's army.

E Nasser sums up the results:

We were able after Suez to take over all the foreign property in our country and therefore the Suez War regained the wealth of the Egyptian people to be used in the interests of the Egyptian people. Then, of course, it was clear for the Egyptian people that they could defend their country and secure the independence of their country.

- 1 Study source A. How might the Egyptian government have used a photograph like this?
- 2 a) 'The Israelis gained little from the war because they had to withdraw from the land they had conquered.' Does source D and what you have read in this chapter support this view?
- b) In what ways had Nasser won 'a political victory within a military defeat' (source C)?

Extended writing

Using the sources and the text of this chapter, write 250–400 words to answer the question: 'Who gained more from the 1956 war – Israel or Egypt?' Explain your verdict fully. You may find it helpful to mention the following:

- a) Who gained in military terms?
- b) Who gained politically?
- c) Who became stronger or became more secure?