

## **History Coursework: The Arab-Israeli Conflict**

### 1) Which of these factors have contributed to the current Arab -Israeli conflict and assess which have been most significant?

In 1948 the Jewish state of Israel was created out of the land of Palestine; the homeland of many Arabs who have lived there since the middle ages. Since then there has been continual conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis.

From about 1500 BC, the Jewish people have lived in the land of Palestine. In the first century AD, Palestine was controlled by the powerful Romans. In AD 70 and again in AD 135 the Jews revolted against their Roman Rulers. The Romans crushed both the revolts severely and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, which included most of the temple, and expelled them from their lands. The Jews fled to all corners of the Roman Empire over the next two hundred years and many became wealthy and even gained high positions in the governments of the new lands in which they lived. But during the middle ages, the Jews were expelled from Western Europe and many settled in the East, in Russia and Poland. But they were still persecuted. Nearly all Europeans were Christian and in many countries, they forced the Jews to live in separate areas. They were not allowed land or allowed to vote. Such anti-Jewish behaviour is known as anti-Semitism.

But in the nineteenth century the Russian Tsar was assassinated in 1881, there were many anti-Jewish riots. Then the new Tsar's government encouraged the persecution of Jews. Many Synagogues were burnt down, Jewish homes were attacked and thousands of Jews were killed. Most of the Jews fled back to Western Europe and the United States. But even there, they felt they were not treated as equals.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, an increasing number of Jews were demanding a Jewish homeland. By 1914 these Jews decided that it would have to be in Palestine. This land was known to the Jews as the "Promised Land", so called because the Jews believed God promised it to them. The Jews (or Israelites) had lived there nearly 2500 years before and where several thousands still remained. However it was not all Jews who wanted to have their homeland, the majority of Jews, who lived in Western Europe and the United States were happy where they lived, it was only a small number, mainly from Russia who desired this "Promised Land". So between 1880 and 1914, 60 000 Zionists, so called because Zion is the Jewish name for Jerusalem, settled in Palestine. There they bought land and started to farm and build houses. At this time, Britain needed America to enter the First World War, so they told the Zionist leaders in America (which had a high Jewish population) that if America entered the war they would support the creation of a Jewish state. So America entered the war. The trouble had begun.

The Arabs had been in Palestine and the Middle East since the seventh century AD when they swept across the Middle East and North Africa from their homeland. In their empire they spread their new found religion of Islam by force and settled.

Then in the sixteenth century the expanding Turks, who were Muslims but not Arabs, conquered much of the Middle East. The native Arabs were forced to pay taxes and provide soldiers for the Turkish army.

The First World War was a turning point for both the Arab and Israeli struggle. Turkey had decided to take the side of the Axis against Britain and its allies. Britain

became afraid that it's much needed oil supply from Persia (or modern-day Iran) would be cut-off by the Turks. Therefore the British 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 who was an important Arab Muslim figure. McMahon promised that if the Arabs fought against the Turks then Britain would be "prepared to 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 successfully blew up Turkish trains and disturbed the Turkish military supplies. The Arabs believed they now deserved their independence and complete self-government only to be angered when they heard that Britain and France had secretly agreed to carve up Turkey's Arab lands after the war between themselves. This was known as the Sykes-Picot agreement.

The Peace of Versailles confirmed the Arab fears. Both Britain and France were given mandates to govern countries in the Middle East until the Arab people were considered ready to govern themselves. France was given a mandate over Syria and Lebanon, and Britain was given a mandate over Iraq and Palestine. Both countries sent administrators and troops to take control soon afterwards.

As well as being angry over not gaining their independence, the Palestinian Arabs were being further frustrated by the increasing Jewish immigration into Palestine. This caused many violent riots to break out in Palestine where many Palestinians, Jews and British died and Britain was accused by the Palestinians of being Pro-Zionist.

Meanwhile in Europe, Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, bringing strong anti-Semitism. Thousands of Jews were driven out of Germany. By 1939 there was almost 450 000 Jews in Palestine. The already existing tension in Palestine grew yet stronger as the Palestinians became afraid that they would lose their country to the growing amount of Jews.

In 1937, the British government recommended the partition of Palestine into two separate countries due to terrorism. An Arab country and a Jewish country. However it was rejected by the Arabs and the fighting continued, so the British decided to limit Jewish immigration as the Germans (who Britain was now at war with since 1939) might support the Arab leaders. Due to this, the Jews were angry and thousands took to the streets in protest.

After the Second World War, there was further pressure on the British government as the already high demand of Jewish immigration flow increased with more vigour after the dreadful Jewish experiences in Europe. America which had a large population of Jews put pressure on the British government to let 100 000 Jewish refugees into Palestine. But the British refused and claimed that it would cause civil war in Palestine. Terrorism became worse so in 1947, they handed Palestine to the United Nations (UN).

In November 1947, the UN voted to divide Palestine into two states. The Palestinian Arabs strongly rejected the plan as the Jews were to be given the larger area of land. They felt that the Western Powers should find a home for them elsewhere; after all, it wasn't the Arabs who were responsible for the holocaust. The Jews reluctantly accepted the plan but many weren't completely happy as many Jewish settlements and Jerusalem, their holy city, was to be part of the new Arab state. After the plan was published the fighting became worse. Both sides struggled to control the roads into Jerusalem. During the fighting many civilians were killed on both sides. Soldiers from Iraq and Syria advanced into Palestine to help their fellow

Arabs. The Jewish Defence Force, Haganah, mobilised and organised the Jewish defence.

In May 1948, the British finally withdrew from Palestine and some 300 000 Arabs withdrew from the land that was to be the new Jewish state of Israel. The fighting had begun.

Many factors have contributed towards the current situation between the Arabs and the Israelis. I will look at how these factors have contributed and which have been most significant.

The refugee problem is enormous. During the 1948-1949 fighting between Israel and neighbouring Arab states, 700 000 Arabs fled from their homes in Palestine to the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the other neighbouring Arab countries. The United Nations now reckons that there is about 2 500 000 Palestinian refugees today. After the 1948-1949 fighting the United Nations formed the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). They set up the refugee camps and provided food and the bare necessities needed. They also provided basic medical and education systems.

The conditions in these camps were awful. One British observer describes the conditions, "families huddled bleakly in overcrowded tents. They are without adequate food or sanitation". This was very true. Initially, large families were kept in small tents, and later small huts of concrete and mud were built. The ground when it rained was churned by the many refugees into mud. In these damp conditions with wet clothes and blankets, influenza became an epidemic, killing thousands, many of which were the young and elderly. Other diseases also spread rapidly among these conditions and the lack of food made hunger widespread. Most of the children in the camps were educated but were unable to make the most of this as many couldn't leave the camps for work. Then the Israelis decided to not allow the refugees to return to their lands in Israel but allowed any Jew in the world to go and live in Israel in the "Law of Return", which made matters worse. The Israelis solution to the issue of the refugees is that the Palestinians should be dissolved into the surrounding Arab states as their language, background and religions are very similar. The Palestinians thought otherwise. The large refugee problem contributed largely to the current conflict in that it caused the first sparks of conflict as some Palestinian Arabs became very angered because of the lack of hope; therefore establishing the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO).

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was set up in 1964, with the aim of uniting all Palestinians in the fight to win back land from the Israelis using any means necessary. Most of its members were recruited from the refugee camps as some people there would rather die fighting for their land and against their enemy, than to be kept in the camps. Yasser Arafat founded the largest group in the PLO, called Fatah. With the support of the Arab states surrounding Israel, they made a number of attacks on their enemy. Unfortunately for them, this changed after the six-day war. Before the six-day war, they had been provided by Jordan, Syria and Egypt which had given them vital support and supplies. However, the countries had been weakened by losses from the war, and were concerned with their own losses than the Palestinians. From now on the Palestinians believed they had to continue their fight alone, especially as all of their land was now under Israeli rule. When the West bank was taken over by Israel, a further 350 000 Palestinians fled from their homes, mostly to Jordan. There, many joined the PLO and increased the number of attacks on Israel. The Israelis became increasingly annoyed. So, in 1968 the Israelis launched a full-scale attack on a major Fatah base in Karameh. With the aid of Jordanian troops, the

PLO managed to knock out several Israeli tanks and planes and killed 28 Israeli troops. This inspired thousands of Palestinians to join the PLO. With the increased strength and numbers, between 1967 and 1970, Fatah forces managed to kill over 500 Israeli troops. The PLO has also carried out acts of extreme terrorism. In 1972, nine Palestinians murdered eleven Israeli athletes at the Olympic Games in Germany. This made the PLO unpopular at first, but when people learnt more about the Palestinian's situation and how they were subjected to refugee camps with no hope, the question of "What's the difference between terrorism and freedom fighting?" came up. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation has contributed largely to the current situation. Due to the Palestinians retaliating against their bad conditions, the Israelis fought back just as harshly to defend themselves. The circle of hate continues to repeat itself, with both sides wanting revenge. The PLO has contributed a lot to the fighting and if they had not been set up, then there would be less fighting. However, with the Palestinians in such a desperate situation, it would only take time for a group such as the PLO to emerge out of the hate.

On 8<sup>th</sup> December 1987, an Israeli army vehicle crashed into a lorry killing four of the Palestinians on board. Rumours spread that it was a deliberate act of revenge for the killing of two Israelis two days before. The funerals became mass demonstrations. At one of the funerals a youth was shot dead by an Israeli soldier. As tension increased thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip took to the streets in protest. They made barricades from tyres, corrugated iron and building materials where they stoned Israeli army patrols. The Intifada shocked Israel and the surrounding Arab states. In fact, it shocked the world. The Israeli response to the Intifada was to insist on an "Iron Fist" policy. Live ammunition was used to counter the threat. All over the world, television and newspapers caught images of Israeli troops firing on teenagers. This caused a lot of unpopularity for the Israelis, so instead the Israelis took up a policy of "might, power and beatings". But still the death toll rose as demonstrators were tear-gassed, beaten and schools were closed by the Israelis. The Israelis were condemned for their actions by world-wide opinion. By September 1988, 346 Palestinians had been killed, many were under 16. The Intifada caused yet more hatred between the Palestinians and Israelis. The thirst for revenge on both sides has caused more tension and conflict.

Religion is also a major factor. The city of Jerusalem has special religious significance to both groups, the Israelis, who are Jews, and the Palestinians, who are Muslims. Muslims believe that Mohammed rose to heaven from the Dome of the Rock, an important temple; whilst the Jews believe that the Western, or "Wailing", wall is the last remaining part of the Jewish temple. Both, therefore, bearing claim to the city and ready to fight for it. The Israelis also believe that the land of Palestine has been promised to them by God as it is to be their homeland. Because the Israelis believe the land was promised by God, they do not care whether the UN approves of their actions as in their eyes, God is the ultimate judge. Also many Palestinians believe Allah is on their side; and in extreme some become suicide bombers as they believe that martyrs go straight to heaven. Religion is a major factor to the current conflict. As it was the fact that the Israelis believed that Palestine was their homeland that made them invade and take over Palestinian land in the first place.

Having examined many different factors of the current conflict, I have come to conclusion that religion has contributed to the Arab-Israeli conflict to the greatest extent and is therefore more significant. Without religion, the Jews would not have invaded as it wouldn't be their "Promised Land" and the Muslims wouldn't hate the Jews. Religion is both sides strongest claim to Palestine; therefore it has the highest

significance to the conflict. The refugee problem and the conditions of the refugee camps is the next highest factor as the number of refugees made the conditions of the refugee camps worse; therefore angering more refugees which the PLO was mainly made up of. The PLO became stronger because of the desperation and hopelessness of the refugees. Therefore the PLO as a factor is due to the refugee problem and the conditions of the refugee camps.

2) Sources D and E have different views on whether the PLO should be considered “terrorists” or “freedom fighters”. Why do these interpretations differ? Explain your answer using sources A-F and your own knowledge.

Sources D and E differ greatly as they are taken from different sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Source D is a Palestinian view while Source G is an Israeli perspective. In this essay I will analyse the six sources given in turn, which include sources D and E, and explain why the interpretations disagree with each other.

Source A are the words of a member from the PLO who spoke in the 1970's in an interview. However, the interviewer is unknown. We are told when the book was published and the page it is to be found in. This makes it obvious that the PLO member who spoke the words is a Palestinian leader. The source explains why the PLO acts as they do. For example if the PLO were to hijack a plane it would cause more attention than if they were to kill a hundred Israelis in a common battle. They then continue to say “For decades world opinion has been neither for nor against us.” This shows that they just wanted to be noticed and that they have been forced to carry out extreme acts to get the public's attention. They then carry on to say, “At least the world is talking about us now.” This tells us that they have achieved their aim and reinstates that it was their initial aim. The quote was published in a history book, which makes it most likely to be reliable and accurate. The source is very useful as it portrays the general opinion of the PLO and its main aims, views and principals. The PLO's purpose of being interviewed and permitting the publication of the conversation was to allow the world to understand why they carry out their acts and their reasons for doing so, hopefully gaining more support for their cause. However it does not tell us both sides of the conflict. The source was probably purposely biased with only one viewpoint as it was intentional to get people thinking about the issue and to gain support for the Palestinian cause. The source agrees with my opinion of the general Palestinian opinion. From my own knowledge, I know that when the interview was held, there was one big question that the world was struggling to find. Are the PLO terrorists or freedom fighters?

Source B is the quote of a Palestinian civilian in 1998. The source is clearly trying to persuade the interpreter that the PLO and Palestinians are not terrorists; and that they have been simply forced to turn to violent ways because they have no other options, even if they think it is not the right thing to do. The Palestinian says that the Palestinians have tried to do the right thing but it got them no where. The Palestinian describes this when they say, “For 22 years we have waited for the United Nations and the United States, for liberty, for freedom and democracy. There was no result.” What the Palestinians do now has been forced upon them as a last resort. This source is also probably reliable as it has come from a history book and it also agrees with my understanding of the general Palestinian citizen's opinion. It is also most likely to be

biased and the citizen has been brought up with this view and never considered or possibly known any other view. From my own knowledge, I know that the intifada had just ended after an attempted peace agreement. The Palestinians would now be desperate after 22 years of being homeless. This source is trying to persuade those who do not agree with the PLO's methods, that the PLO are not terrorists.

Source C is a letter from a Palestinian student in Lebanon to his parents in 1968. The information is most likely to be biased as it's written by a Palestinian. In the letter he expresses the feelings of not just himself, but many Palestinians. The source shows how desperate he, and how many other Palestinians, have become. The source shows that they want one simple thing. To return to their land. Once again the source is one-sided and is biased. It does not tell us about the Israeli argument and want of a homeland. I know from my own knowledge that the Six Day War had ended the year before, in which the Israelis had won against Egypt Jordan and Syria. The source is probably reliable as it has come from a history book.

Source D is a quote from a 17-year-old Palestinian speaking to a British journalist. The first thing he states is, "We are not terrorists." This immediately makes the source biased as he is a Palestinian. He then continues to explain how all the attacks are aimed at the military targets and not aimed at civilians. He then says that he regrets those civilians who do die, but there is no alternative. The source tries to justify Palestinian actions and explain why they are necessary. I know from my own knowledge that in 1972, 11 Israeli civilians were murdered at the Olympic Games. This tests the reliability. The source was also published in a history book, so is therefore probably reliable.

Source E is a non-factual opinion of a "typical" Israeli in the 1970's. We do not know if this was a typical Israeli but as it is published in a history book, it should be quite reliable. The source differs greatly from the others as it is the only "typical" Israeli viewpoint. None of the statements in the sources have any evidence, which questions its reliability. The source explains how the PLO have, "more sophisticated weapons than most armies." From my own knowledge I know that this is false as it is a fact that Israel has much more modern and advanced weaponry as it is supplied by other countries, mainly the USA, with a vast amount of money and weaponry. All of this questions the source's reliability. However, it is still a useful possible insight into Israeli opinion.

Source F is a response to the murder of Mr Sieff, managing director of Marks and Spencer and who happened to be a Jew. The source condemns the PLO and even compares them with "Barbary pirates". The source is an opinion and not a fact. The author of this source wrote it for the public and after this kind of event, it was biased against the PLO. The source was published in a history book and is most likely to be reliable.

After examining the sources, we can see why the interpretations of the sources D and E differ. Both of the sources are probably biased to their own opinion and belief. We can see from these sources how each side of the conflict views the other and how over the years the hate has increased. The two sources are different because on both sides, the hate of the other side has been increased as the young are brought up to hate their "enemy". If this continues the issue may not be resolved for a long time. Their different religious groups nearly make the situation impossible to solve, as both sides fight fiercely for the same piece of land. This is why they have never come to a successful negotiation as nobody is willing to sacrifice anything for peace. If each nation continues to disagree with each other over certain pieces of land; there will never be a solution to this issue.