

GCSE History Coursework – Arab-Israeli Conflict

Question One – What are the main differences between the beliefs of Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews?

The main difference between the Palestinian Arabs and the Israeli Jews is that they both believe they own Israel-Palestine for different reasons. The Arabs believe it belongs to them because they have lived here for as long as anyone can remember. They were born here and they believe that gives them the right to own the whole country. On the other hand, Jewish people also believe that they have the right to the land they call Israel. They believe that God promised them this land as they had nowhere to call their own. Moses lead them to Israel and they have fought the Palestinians for it ever since.

God is not the only one who promised the land to Israel. In Roman times most Jews left Israel. For 2000 years Jews dreamt about returning to the land now occupied by mainly Arabs. Britain got involved in a conflict in an attempt to get the USA to help them with the First World War. To do this they told all American Jews that they promised to establish them a homeland in Palestine providing they keep peace with the Arabs already there. Now that the Jews believed they, once again, had a place to live in Palestine it once again caused conflict with the Arabs. The Arabs also believed that the British were on their side. In 1914 the British made a promise to the Palestinians to support them and maintain Palestine as their homeland. They said they would immediately expel the Turks living there and the Arabs would have the land to themselves.

Another issue that did and still does cause conflict between the Arabs and the Jews is Jerusalem. There are very important religious sites for both sides in this city and they argue over who it belongs to.

Question Two – Chose two events in the past 100 years that are particularly important in shaping the views of today's

a) Palestinian Arabs

b) Israeli Jews

Many events have had a huge effect on shaping the views of both the Palestinian Arabs and the Israeli Jews. One event that had a great influence on both groups is the Six Day War.

The Six Day War started on the 5th of June 1967 and as the name suggests, went on for six days. The Egyptian leader, Nasser had been threatening war for some time, saying he would exterminate all Jews, thinking Israelis wouldn't respond. However in early May, tension was mounting on the border between Syria and Israel. Thinking that Israelis would not want war on two fronts, Nasser told them Egypt was ready for war to look like he was supporting Syria. Israelis were

determined to fight and attacked Egypt. The Egyptian air force was taken out in one day and then, during the next five: Jordan and Syria's air force was destroyed, all Egyptian tanks were captured or destroyed and Israel won control of the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Golan Heights in Syria.

This event shaped the view of both sides. Israel had shown their strength and succeeded in increasing their size by a huge amount. It would have increased Israel's pride after overthrowing three countries in such a short period of time. Jerusalem was now Israeli territory meaning they had their main religious site back. They must have felt safer too as they made their frontiers shorter and easier to defend. They now had control over where the Palestinians lived and how they lived. That was one significant thing for the Palestinians. Their lives were now restricted, they were constantly under heavy police surveillance. Those who didn't live in the occupied territories had to flee to neighbouring Arab states as refugees, 250 000 went to Jordan alone. The Palestinians lost all faith in their support, The Arab states. The Arab views on how to approach the Israelis also changed. They turned to Fatah and terrorism. The Arab states felt humiliated by the fact that they were defeated by the Israelis.

A second example of an event that affected both sides is the Camp David Agreement that took place in 1978.

In September a meeting was held at the American President, Jimmy Carter's country house between him, the Egyptian leader Sadat and the Israeli Prime Minister Begin. After 30 years of conflict Egypt said they would agree to peace if Israel gave them the Sinai Peninsula. After 13 days of debate in America they came to an agreement. Israel was flexible about this because it wasn't part of their promised land. As the Israelis had to give up their settlements in the Sinai Peninsula Egypt allowed them to have more settlements in the West Bank. All of this happened simply because, Egypt wanted its land, Israel wanted settlements and both Israel and America wanted peace.

This agreement affected the Palestinians in many ways. Egypt had gone behind their back so obviously they felt betrayed and lost their trust in them. They were unwillingly pushed out of some of their land that was negotiated without their consent. Egypt gave this land to Israel which resulted in the Arabs having limited local powers. Yasser Arafat was not impressed and refused to commit to a peace agreement.

Israel benefited from this agreement more. They gained land, peace with Egypt and power over Palestinians.

However, other Arab states refused to make peace with Israel. These states felt Egypt had given in and isolated the country for years to

come. Sadat was later assassinated by Egyptian soldiers. They believed that his deal with Israel had disgraced them.

Question Three – Previous outbreaks of violence in Palestine/Israel have been followed by peace talks. What problems need to be overcome for the present violence to end peacefully?

There are still many problems that need to be overcome for both sides in Israel/Palestine to live peacefully together. There have been many attempts at peace though nowadays there is still conflict going on. One attempt at peace is the Camp David agreement that happened in 1978. After thirteen days an agreement was made between the Egyptian and Israeli leaders. Israel said that they would close all settlements in the Sinai Peninsula and give it back to Egypt in exchange for peace from the Egyptian side. Although this was meant to promote peace it stirred up more problems on the Arab side. Palestinians felt that Egypt had gone behind their backs and when Israelis left the Sinai Peninsula it resulted in more settlements in the Gaza strip and the West Bank.

The involvement of Egypt in the conflict resulted in more problems than was needed. There have been other involvements of other countries and this is an ongoing problem.

Another example of this is the Roadmap. This involved the USA, the UN, the EU and Russia. This was a peace plan which covered ongoing preventions of peace such as: extremists and the West Bank. It said that Israel had to stop building settlements in the West Bank and that both sides had to agree to co-operate on security such as controlling suicide bombers.

Another example of these ongoing problems is extremists such as suicide bombers on both sides of the conflict. Fairly recently, even after many peace attempts, there was yet more terrorist activity in the Gaza strip which resulted in Israelis firing rockets in. This goes against what was agreed on in the Roadmap, showing that neither side mind that they break pacts that have been made.

Not all people's views on peace and how to sustain it are the same. For example, the Israelis started to build a security fence around the West Bank whilst most of Europe and America's attention was turned towards the Iraq war. This wall would stop Arabs going in or out and was mainly directed at keeping terrorists under control. They may have thought this would stop Palestinians bombing or creating more conflict but it was not being built fairly. It was cutting Palestinians off from some of their land and completely from Jerusalem. This was not sticking to the green line that was put on the map when a peace agreement was made to show where Palestinians would have and what

would belong to Israelis. It was going inside it and meant that the Arabs lost a lot of their given land.

Jerusalem is another key issue in this conflict. Both sides believe it belongs to them and it is important because it is a religious site to both Arabs and Israelis. As no one knows what to do about this, it was not covered in the Roadmap or any other peace plans.

Also not covered in the Roadmap is the issue of refugees, probably for the same reason. No one knows what to do with them. As well as many Arab refugees in other neighbouring Arab states there are now Israeli refugees moving into West Bank as they have been told, by their own government, to leave the Gaza strip to show they are trying to make peace. However, far from making peace it has created more conflict. The Arabs are yet again angry, although the Israelis have tried to make peace leaving one Arab site they have entered another forcing Palestinians to move once again.

Hard as Israel, Palestine, many other neighbouring states and high authority countries have tried peace is still yet to come. A lot of ongoing problems may never be resolved. It seems as though as soon as one issue is put to rest another is uncovered and conflict begins again.