Global History II Siebert / Kaminicki

Middle East

**A Region of Conflict**

Today, as in the past, the Middle East is home to a wide range of peoples. Followers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the three “great” religions that began in this region – all live there. Muslims form the majority in the Arab nations of the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa and in non-Arab nations such as Turkey and Iran. Jews are the majority in Israel. Christian minorities exist in several Middle Eastern countries. The many differences among the peoples of the Middle East have often led to conflict.

**The Establishment of Israel**

**Early emigration** The Zionist movement of the late 1890’s proposed setting up a state where Jews could escape the anti-Semitism that was common in Europe. Jews did not begin to move to Palestine in large numbers, however, until Hitler came to power in Germany in the 1930’s. As the Nazi’s began to persecute the Jewish people, more and more Jews took refuge in Palestine. The Arabs saw the European Jews as foreign intruders. Violence between the two groups was an ongoing problem.

Discouraged by the Arab reaction, Britain gave up its mandate in Palestine (Balfour Declaration). In the British view, having one friendly, westernized state in the Middle East could not make up for the loss of good will among the Arab countries. The Arab population totaled 40 million, and the Middle Eastern oil was vital to Britain’s economy.

WWII, however, made the Zionists more determined than ever to build a Jewish state in Palestine. After the nightmare of the Holocaust, Jewish survivors in refugee camps all over Europe wanted to start new lives in Palestine.

**The partition of Palestine** By 1946, Jews made up more than one third of the population of Palestine. The conflict between Arabs and Jews had turned into open civil war. Unable to find a solution that both sides would accept, in 1947 Britain turned the problem over to the United Nations.

After arguments from both sides were heard, a UN committee decided that both sides had legitimate claims. A partition of Palestine, the UN felt, was the best answer to the problem. The General Assembly recommended dividing Palestine into two states – one Arab, the other Jewish. In 1948, the Jewish state of Israel was created. The Arabs in Palestine refused, however, to accept the UN plan. They did not set up an Arab state, nor did they recognize Israel as a legitimate state.

**Arab-Israeli Wars**

**The 1948 war** On May 14, 1948, when Israel became a state, British troops left Palestine. The next day, the armies of five Arab nations – Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan – attacked Israel. UN diplomats arranged a truce, but the Arab states refused to meet with Israel to draw up a peace settlement.

The 1948 war had lasting effects on the region.

1. Israel held all of its own land, plus about half the territory that the UN had assigned to the Palestinian Arabs.
2. Jordan took nearly all the rest of the land that was considered Palestine.
3. Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip along the coast.
4. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs fled to the Arab states to escape the rule of an Israeli government.

**The Suez Canal crisis** In 1956 the Egyptian leader, Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, seized control of the Suez Canal, which had been run, at the time, by a British and French investment company. Hoping to regain the canal and knock Nasser from power, Britain and France joined with Israel to retake the waterway. The US criticized this action, and the Soviet Union threatened to step in and help Egypt. Britain, France and Israel agreed to call off the attack. UN peacekeeping troops were sent to the Egyptian-Israeli border to prevent further fighting. During the years after the Suez Canal Crisis, clashes continued between Arabs and Israelis.

 **The Six-Day War** In May 1967, Nasser ordered Egyptian forces to blockade the Gulf of Aqaba, a route used by Israelis ships to reach the Red Sea. In June 1967, the Israeli’s, expecting a full-scale Egyptian invasion, struck first. In only a few hours they destroyed the air forces of Egypt and Syria, catching hundreds of planes on the ground. Within six days Israeli forces had shattered the Egyptian army in the Sinai Peninsula. Israeli soldiers took over the Sinai, the Golan Heights of Syria, and the West Back of the Jordan River, including the ancient city of Jerusalem.

**The October War** The Six-Day War humiliated the Soviet Union as well as the Arab states, since the Arabs has used Soviet arms against the Israelis. Hoping to improve its tarnished image in the Arab world, the Soviet Union gave more military aid to Egypt and Syria. Thousands of Soviet advisers trained the solders of Egypt and Syria. Anwar el-Sadat, who became president of Egypt after Nasser, decided to attack Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula. In October, 1973, Egyptian troops and tanks crossed the Suez Canal and overwhelmed the Israeli outposts. At the same time, Syrian soldiers moved into the Israeli occupied Golan Heights. Although Syrian and Egyptian troops were able to make gains during the first few days of the October War, Israeli’s American-equipped military forces soon gained the upper hand. By the end of October War, the Israeli’s held more territory than they had before.

**The Camp David Accords** In 1977 Anwar el-Sadat paid a historic visit to Israel, announcing that Egypt was ready to make peace. At the urging of then US President Jimmy Carter, Sadat agreed to come to the US to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. In 1978 at Camp David, Maryland, Sadat and Begin reached an agreement that became known as the Camp David Accords. Israel agreed to give up the Sinai Peninsula in return for peace and diplomatic recognition. The Accords also called for a five-year period of self-government for the West Bank and Gaza strip, to be followed by a final decision about the status of those areas. This agreement angered other Arab leaders who thought that Sadat had betrayed their cause by making a separate peace with Israel. In 1981 Sadat was assassinated by Muslim radicals who opposed peace with Israel and cooperation with the West. Sadat’s successor, Hosni Mubarak, promised to honor the Camp David Accords. Israel withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula in 1982, but self-government for the occupied territories has not yet come to pass.