Important incidents : Middle East crisis and fall of USSR

Arabs nationalism

They all speak the Arabic language, they are all Muslims (followers of the religion known as Islam), except for about half the population of Lebanon who are Christian; and most of them wanted to see the destruction of Israel so that the Palestinian Arabs could have back the land which they feel is rightfully theirs. Many Arabs wanted to see the unity carried much further into some sort of political and economic union, like the European Community. As early as 1931 an Islamic conference in Jerusalem put out this announcement: 'The Arab lands are a complete and indivisible whole. ..all efforts are to be directed towards their complete independence, in their entirety and unified'.

Several attempts were made to increase unity among the Arab states.

- The Arab League, founded in 1945, included Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, LeObanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen; membership later expanded to include twenty states in 1980. However, it achieved very little politically and was constantly hampered by internal squabbles.
- In the mid-1950s Arab unity (sometimes known as pan-Arabism, 'pan' meaning 'all') received a boost with the energetic leadership of Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, who gained enormous prestige in the Arab world after the 1956 Suez Crisis. In 1958 Syria joined Egypt to form the United Arab Republic with Nasser as President. However, this only lasted until 1961, when Syria withdrew because of resentment at Nasser's attempts to dominate the union.
- After Nasser's death in 1970, his successor, President Sadat, organized a loose union between Egypt, Libya and Syria, known as the Federation of Arab Republics; but it never amounted to much.

In spite of their similarities, there were too many points on which the Arab states disagreed for unity ever to be really close. For example:

- Jordan and Saudi Arabia were ruled (and still are) by fairly conservative royal families who were often criticized for being too pro-British by the governments of Egypt and Syria, which were pro-Arab nationalist as well as socialist.
- The other Arab states fell out with Egypt in 1979 because Egypt signed a separate peace treaty with Israel. This caused Egypt to be expelled from the Arab League.

Other countries interference in middle East

This took place for several reasons.

- Britain and France had been involved in the Middle East for many years. Britain ruled Egypt from 1882 (when British troops invaded it) until 1922 when the country was given semi-independence under its own king. However, British troops still remained in Egypt and the Egyptians had to continue doing what Britain wanted. By the Versailles Settlement at the end of the First World War, Britain and France were given large areas of the Middle East taken from the defeated Turks, to look after as mandates. Map 11.2 shows which areas were involved. Although Britain gave independence to Iraq (1932) and to Jordan (1946), both remained pro-British. France gave independence to Syria and Lebanon (1945) but hoped to maintain some influence in the Middle East.
- The Middle East held a very important strategic position in the world -it acted as a sort of crossroads between the Western nations, the communist bloc and the Third World countries of Africa and Asia.
- At one time the Middle East produced over a third of the world's oil supplies, the main producers being Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In the days before North Sea oil was available, and before nuclear power, the European nations were heavily dependent on oil supplies from the Middle East and wanted to make sure that the oil- producing states had friendly governments which would sell them oil cheaply.
- The lack of unity among the Arab states encouraged other countries to intervene in the Middle East.

Most of the Arab states had nationalist governments which bitterly resented Western influence. One by one, governments which were thought to be too pro-West were swept away and replaced by regimes which wanted to be non-aligned; this meant being free to act independently of both East (communist bloc) and West.

Egypt : At the end of the Second World War, British troops stayed on in the canal zone (the area around the Suez Canal). This was to enable Britain to control the canal, in which over half the shares were owned by the British and French. In' 1952 a group of Egyptian army officers, tired of waiting for the British to leave, overthrew Farouk, the king of Egypt (who they thought was not firm enough with the British), and seized power themselves. By 1954 Colonel Nasser had become President and his policy of standing up to Britain soon led to the Suez War of 1956 (see Section 11.3 for full details). This brought complete humiliation for Britain and was the end of British influence in Egypt.

Jordan : King Abdullah had been given his throne by the British in 1946. He was assassinated in 1951 by nationalists who felt that he was too much under Britain's thumb. His successor, King Hussein, had to tread very carefully to survive. He ended the treaty which allowed British troops to use bases in Jordan (1957) and all British troops were with-drawn.

Iraq : King Faisal and his Prime Minister, Nuri-es-Said, were pro-British; in 1955 they signed an agreement with Turkey (the Baghdad Pact) to set up a joint defence and economic policy. Pakistan, Iran and Britain also joined, Britain promising to help Iraq if she was attacked. The British humiliation in the 1956 Suez War encouraged the anti-British movement in Iraq to act: Faisal and Nuri-es-Said were murdered and Iraq became a republic (1958). The new government was sympathetic towards Egypt and it withdrew Iraq from the Baghdad Pact. This marked the end of Britain's attempt to play a major role in Arab affairs.

Iran : In Iran important changes were taking place. Iran was the only Middle East state which had a frontier with the USSR. In 1945 the Russians tried to set up a communist government in northern Iran, the part which bordered on the USSR and which had a large and active communist party. The Western-educated Shah (ruler) of Iran, Reza Pahlevi, resisted the Russians and signed a defence treaty with the USA (1950); they provided him with economic and military aid, including tanks and jet fighters. The American's saw the situation as

part of the Cold War -Iran was yet another front on which the communists must be prevented from advancing. However, there was a strong nationalist movement in Iran which resented all foreign influence. This soon began to turn against the USA and against Britain too. This is because Britain held a maj ority of the shares in the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and its refinery at Abadan. It was widely felt that the British were taking too much of the prof its, and in 1951 the Premier of Iran, Dr Mussadiq, nationalized the company (took it under the control of the Iranian government). However, most of the world, encouraged by Britain, boycotted Iran's oil exports and Mussadiq was forced to resign. In 1954 a compromise was reached in which British Petroleum was allowed 40 per cent of the shares. Iran now took 50 per cent of the profits, which the Shah was able to use for a cautious modernization and land reform programme.

This was not enough for the left and for the devout Muslims. They resented the Shah's close ties with the USA which they considered to be an immoral influence on their country; they also suspected that a large slice of the country's wealth was finding its way into his private fortune. In January 1979 he was forced to leave the country, and an Islamic republic was set up under a religious leader, the Ayatollah (a sort of High Priest) Khomeini. Like Nasser, he wanted his country to be non-aligned.

The creation of Israel and the Arab-Israeli war 1948-49

1. The origin of the problem went back almost 2000 years to the year AD 71, when most of the Jews were driven out of Palestine, which was then their homeland, by the Romans. In fact, small communities of Jews stayed behind in Palestine, and over the following 1700 years there was a gradual trickle of Jews returning from exile. Until the end of the nineteenth century though, there were never enough Jews to make the Arabs, who now looked on Palestine as their homeland, feel threatened.
2. In 1897 some Jews living in Europe founded the World Zionist Organization at Basle in Switzerland. Zionists were people who believed that Jews ought to be able to go back to Palestine and have what they called 'a national homeland'; in other words, a Jewish state. Jews had recently suffered persecution in Russia, France and Germany, and a Jewish state would provide a safe refuge for Jews from all over the world. The problem was that Palestine was inhabited by Arabs, who were alarmed at the prospect of losing their land to the Jews.
3. Britain became involved in 1917 when the Foreign Minister, Arthur Balfour, announced that Britain supported the idea of a Jewish national home in Palestine. After 1919, when Palestine became a British mandate, large numbers of Jews began to arrive in Palestine, and the Arabs protested bitterly to the British that they wanted:
   (a) an independent Palestine for the Arabs;
   (b) an end to the immigration of Jews.

   The British government stated (1922) that there was no intention that the Jews should occupy the whole of Palestine and that there would be no interference with the rights of the Palestinian Arabs. The British hoped to persuade Jews and Arabs to live together peacefully in the same state; they failed to understand the deep religious gulf between the two.
4. Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany after 1933 caused a flood of refugees, and by 1940 about half the population of Palestine was "Jewish: In 1937 the British Peel Commission proposed dividing Palestine into two separate states, one Arab and one Jewish, but the Arabs rejected the idea. The British tried again in 1939, offering an independent Arab state within ten years, and Jewish immigration limited to 10000 a year; this time the Jews rejected the proposal.
5. The Second World War made the situation much worse: there were hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Hitler's Europe desperately looking for somewhere to go. In

1945 the USA pressed Britain to allow 100 000 Jews into Palestine; this demand was echoed by David Ben Gurion, one of the Jewish leaders, but the British, not wanting to offend the Arabs, refused.

6. The Jews, after all that their race had suffered at the hands of the Nazis, were determined to fight for their 'national home'. They began a terrorist campaign against both Arabs and British; one of the most spectacular incidents was the blowing up of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, which the British were using as their headquarters; 91 people were killed and many more injured. The British responded by arresting Jewish leaders and by turning back ships such as the Exodus, crammed with Jews intending to enter Palestine.
7. The British, weakened by the strain of the Second World War, felt unable to cope. Ernest Bevin, the Labour Foreign Secretary, asked the United Nations to deal with the problem, and in November 1947 the UN voted to divide Palestine, setting aside roughly half of it to form an independent Jewish state. Early in 1948 the British decided to come out altogether and let the UN carry out its own plan. Although fighting was already going on between Jews and Arabs (who bitterly resented the loss of half of Palestine), the British withdrew all their troops. In May 1948 Ben Gurion declared the independence of the new state of Israel. It was immediately attacked by Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon.

The country which has the responsiblity for tragedy

Most of the scholars rest of the world seemed to blame Britain for the chaos in Palestine: many British newspapers which supported the Conservative party also criticized Bevin and Britain's Labour government for its handling of the situation. It was said that British troops should have stayed on to ensure that the partition of Palestine was carried out smoothly. The Arabs accused the British of being pro-Jewish for letting far too many Jews into Palestine in the first place and for causing them to lose half their, homeland. The Jews accused the British of being pro-Arab for trying to limit Jewish, immigration.

Bevin blamed the USA for the chaos, and there is some evidence to support his case. It was US President Truman who pressurized Britain to allow 100 000 extra Jews to go to Palestine in April 1946. Although this was bound to upset the Arabs even more, Truman refused to provide any American troops to help keep order in Palestine, and refused to allow any more Jews to enter the USA. It was Truman who rejected the British Morrison Plan (July 1946) which would have set up separate Arab and Jewish provinces under British supervision. It was the Americans who pushed the plan for partition through the UN, even though all the Arab nations voted against it; this was bound to cause more violence in Palestine.

Some historians have defended the British, pointing out that they were trying to be fair to both sides, and that in the end, it was impossible to persuade both Arabs and, Jews to accept a peaceful solution. The British withdrawal was understandable. It would force the Americans and the UN to take the responsibility for the situation they had helped create. It would save the British a lot of expense since 1945 they had already spent over £100 million trying to keep the peace, and they could not afford to continue.

Result of the war : Most people expected the Arabs to win easily, but against seemingly overwhelming odds, the Israelis defeated them and even captured more of Palestine than the UN partition had given them. They ended up with about three-quarters of Palestine plus the Egyptian port of Eilat on the Red Sea. The Israelis won partly because they fought desperately, and partly because the Arab states were divided among themselves and poorly equipped; King Abdullah of Jordan was more interested in seizing the area of Palestine west of the River Jordan (known as the West Bank) so that he could make it part of his own state, than in giving it to the Palestinian Arabs. The most tragic outcome of the war was that the Palestinian Arabs became the innocent victims who found themselves without a state or a

homeland. Some were in the new Jewish state of Israel, others who lived in the area seized by King Abdullah, found themselves living in Jordan. After some Jews had slaughtered the entire population of an Arab village in Israel, nearly a million Arabs fled into Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria where they had to live in miserable refugee camps. Jerusalem was divided between Israel and Jordan. The USA, Britain and France guaranteed Israel's frontiers, but the Arab states did not regard the ceasefire as permanent. They would not recognize the legality of Israel, and they regarded this war as only the first round in the struggle to destroy Israel and liberate Palestine.

The Suez War an important event in intrernational relation

It is possible to blame different countries depending on one's point of view:

the Arabs blamed the Israelis, who actually began hostilities by invading Egypt; .the communist bloc and many Arab states blamed Britain and France, accusing them of imperialist tactics (trying to keep control in the Middle East against the wishes of the Arab nations) by attacking Egypt. They accused the Americans of encouraging Britain to attack;

the British, French and Israelis blamed Colonel Nasser of Egypt for being anti Western. However, even the Americans thought that Britain and France had overreacted by using force, andmost British historians agree.

Colonel Nasser, the new ruler of Egypt, was aggressively in favour of Arab unity and independence, including the liberation of Palestine from the Jews; almost everything he did irritated the British, Americans or French:

He organized guerrilla fighters known as fedayeen (self-sacrificers) to carry out sabotage and murder inside Israel, and Egyptian ships blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba leading to the Israeli port of Eilat.

In 1936 Britain had signed an agreement with Egypt which allowed the British to keep troops at Suez. This treaty was due to expire in 1956, and Britain wanted it renewed. Nasser refused and insisted that all British troops should withdraw immediately the treaty ended.

He sent help to the Algerian Arabs in their struggle against France, prodded the other Arab states into opposing the British-sponsored Baghdad Pact, and forced King Hussein of Jordan to dismiss his British army chief-of-staff.

He signed an arms deal with Czechoslovakia (September 1955) for Russian fighters, bombers and tanks, and Russian military experts went to train the Egyptian army.

The Americans were outraged at this, since it meant that the West no longer controlled arms supplies to Egypt. Egypt now became part of the Cold War: any country which was not part of the Western alliance and which bought arms from Eastern Europe was, in American eyes, just as bad as a communist country. It was seen as a sinister plot by the Russians to 'move into' the Middle East. The Americans therefore cancelled a promised grant of 46 million dollars towards the building of a dam as Aswan (July 1956); their intention was to force Nasser to abandon his new links with the communists.

Crisis point was reached when Nasser immediately retaliated by nationalizing the Suez Canal, intending to use the income from it to finance the dam. Shareholders in the canal, the majority of whom were British and French, were promised compensation.

Anthony Eden, the British Conservative Prime Minister, took the lead at this point. He believed that Nasser was on the way to forming a united Arabia under Egyptian control and communist influence, which could cut off Europe's oil supplies at will. He viewed Nasser as another Hitler or Mussolini, and according to historian Hugh Thomas, 'saw Egypt through a forest of Flanders poppies and gleaming j ackboots'. He was not alone in this: Churchill remarked: 'We can't have this malicious swine sitting across our communications', and the new Labour leader, Hugh

Gaitskell, agreed that Nasser must not be appeased in the way that Hitler and Mussolini had been appeased in the 1930s. Everybody in Britain ignored the fact that Nasser had offered compensation to the share holders and had promised that the ships of all nations (except Israel) would be able to use the canal.

Secret talks took place between the British, French and Israelis and plan was hatched: Israel would invade Egypt across the Sinai peninsula, whereupon British and French troops would occupy the canal zone on the pretext that they were protecting it from damage in the fighting. Anglo-French control of the canal would be restored, and the defeat, it was hoped, would topple Nasser from power.

Recent research has shown that the war could easily have been avoided and that Eden was more in favour of getting rid of Nasser by peaceful means. In fact there was a secret Anglo-American plan (Omega) to overthrow Nasser using political and economic pressures. In mid-October 1956 Eden was still willing to continue talks with Egypt; he had called off the military operation, and there seemed a good chance of compromise being reached over control of the Suez Canal. However, Eden was under pressure from several directions to use force. MI6 (the British intelligence service) and some members of the British government, including Harold Macmillan (Chancellor of the Exchequer), urged military action. Macmillan assured Eden that the USA would not oppose a British use of force. In the end, it was probably pressure from the French government which caused Eden to opt for a joint military operation with France and Israel. The war: The war began with the planned Israeli invasion of Egypt (29 October). This was a brilliant success, and within a week the Israelis had captured the entire Sinai peninsula. Meanwhile the British and French bombed Egyptian airfields and landed troops at Port Said at the northern end of the canal. The attacks caused an outcry from the rest of the world, and the Americans, who were afraid of upsetting all the Arabs and forcing them into closer ties with the USSR, refused to support Britain, although they had earlier hinted that support would be forthcoming. At the United Nations, Americans and Russians for once agreed: they demanded an immediate ceasefire, and prepared to send a UN force. With the pressure of world opinion against them, Britain, France and Israel agreed to withdraw, while UN troops moved in to police the frontier between Egypt and Israel.

The result of the wars

This was a complete humiliation for Britain and France, who achieved none of their aims, and it was a triumph for Nasser.

- The war failed to overthrow Nasser, and his prestige as leader of Arab nationalism against interfering Europeans was greatly increased; for the ordinary Arab people, he was a hero.
- The Egyptians blocked the canal, the Arabs reduced oil supplies to western Europe where petrol rationing was introduced for a time, and Russian aid replaced that from the USA.
- The British action soon lost them an ally in Iraq, where premier Nuri-es-Said came under increasing attack from other Arabs for his pro-British attitude; he was murdered in 1958.
- Britain was now weak and unable to follow a foreign policy independently of the USA.
- The Algerians were encouraged in their struggle for independence from France which they achieved in 1962. The war was not without success for Israel: although she had been compelled to hand back all territory captured from Egypt, she had inflicted heavy losses on the Egyptians in men and equipment, which would take years to make good. For the time being the fedayeen raids ceased and Israel had a breathing space in which to consolidate.

The Six-Day War of 1967

The Arab states had not signed a peace treaty at the end of the 1948-9 war and were still refusing to give Israel official recognition. In 1967 they joined together again in a determined attempt to destroy Israel. The lead was taken by Iraq, Syria and Egypt.

Caeses of the war

In Iraq a new government came to power in 1963 which was influenced by the ideas of the Ba'ath party in neighbouring Syria. Supporters of the Ba'ath (meaning 'resurrection') believed in Arab independence and unity and were left-wing in outlook, wanting social reform and better treatment for ordinary people. They were prepared to co-operate with Egypt, and in June 1967 their president, Aref, announced: 'Our goal is clear -to wipe Israel off the map'.

In Syria political upheavels brought the Ba' ath party to power in 1966. It supported El Fatah, the Palestinian Liberation Movement, a more effective guerrilla force than the fedayeen. The Syrians also began to bombard Jewish settlements from the Golan Heights which overlooked the frontier.

In Egypt Colonel Nasser was immensely popular because of his leadership of the Arab world and his attempts to improve conditions in Egypt with his socialist policies. These included limiting the size of farms to 100 acres and redistributing surplus land to peasants. Attempts were made to industrialize the country, and over 1000 new factories were built, almost all under government control. The Aswan Dam project was vitally important, providing electricity, and water for irrigating an extra million acres of land. After early delays at the time of the Suez War in 1956, work on the dam eventually got underway and the project was completed in 1971. With all going well at home and the prospect of effective help from Iraq and Syria, Nasser decided that the time was ripe for another attack on Israel. He began to move troops up to the frontier in Sinai and closed the Gulf of Aqaba.

The Russians encouraged Egypt and Syria and kept up a flow of anti-Israeli propaganda (because Israel was being supported by the USA). Their aim was to increase their influence in the Middle East at the expense of the Americans and Israelis. They hinted that they would send help if war came.

Syria, Jordan and Lebanon also massed troops along their frontiers with Israel, while contingents from Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Algeria joined them. Israel's situation seemed hopeless.

The Israelis decided that the best policy was to attack first rather than wait to be defeated. They launched a series of devastating air strikes which destroyed most of the Egyptian air force on the ground (5 June). Israeli troops moved with remarkable speed, capturing the Gaza Strip and the whole of Sinai from Egypt, the rest of Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. The Arabs had no choice but to accept a UN ceasefire order (10 June), and it was all over in less than a week. Reasons for the spectacular Israeli success were:

- The slow and ponderous Arab troop build-up which gave the Israelis plenty of warning;
- Israeli superiority in the air;
- Inadequate Arab preparations and communications.

Outcome of the war

For the Israelis it .was a great success: this time they had ignored a UN order to return the captured territory; this acted as a series of buffer zones between Israel and the Arab states, and meant that it would be much easier to defend Israel. However, it did bring a new problem how to deal with about a million extra Arabs who now found themselves under Israeli rule. Many of these were living in the refugee camps set up in 1948 on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip.

It was a humiliation for the Arab states, and especially for Nasser, who now realized that the Arabs needed outside help if they were ever to free Palestine. The Russians had been a disappointment to Nasser and had sent no help. To try to improve their relations with Egypt and Syria, the Russians began to supply them with modem weapons. Sooner or later the Arabs would try again to destroy Israel and liberate Palestine. The next attempt came in 1973 with the Yom Kippur War.

The Yom Kippur War of 1973

Several things combined to cause the renewed conflict:

1. Pressure was brought to bear on the Arab states

by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) under its leader Yasser Arafat, for some further action. When very little happened, a more extreme group within the PLO, called the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, embarked on a series of terrorisi attacks to draw world attention to the grave injustice being done to the Arabs of Palestine. They hi-jacked airliners and flew three of them to Amman, the capital of Jordan, where they were blown up (1970). This was embarrassing for Kir.; Hussein of Jordan, who now favoured a negotiated peace, and in September 1970 he expelled all PLO members based iz. Jordan. However, terrorist attacks continued, reaching a horrifying climax when some members of the Israeli tein were murdered at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

2. Anwar Sadat, the President of Egypt since Nasser's death in 1970, was becoming increasingly convinced of the need for a negotiated peace settlement with Israel, before PLO terrorism turned world opinion against them. He was prepared to work either with the USA or the USSR, but he hoped to win American support for the Arabs, so that the Americans would persuade the Israelis to/agree to a peace settlement. However, the Americans refused to get involved.
3. Sadat, together with Syria, decided to attack Israel again, hoping that this would force the Americans to act as mediators. The Egyptians were feeling more confident because they now had modem Russian weapons and their army had been trained by Russian experts.

The war began: Egyptian and Syrian forces attacked early on the feast of Yom Kippur, a Jewish religious festival, hoping to catch the Israelis off guard. After some early Arab successes, the Israelis, using mainly American weapons, were able to turn the tables. They succeeded in hanging on to all the territory they had captured in 1967 and even crossed the Suez Canal into Egypt. In one sense Sadat's plan had been successful -both the USA and the USSR decided it was time to intervene to try to bring about a peace settlement. Acting with UN co-operation, they organized a ceasefire which both sides accepted.

The reslut of the war: The end of the war brought a glimmer of hope for some sort of permanent peace. Egyptian and Israeli leaders came together (though not in the same room) in Geneva. The Israelis agreed to move their troops back from the Suez Canal (which had been closed since the 1967 war) enabling the Egyptians to clear and open the canal in 1975 (but not to Israeli ships).

An important development during the war was that the Arab oil-producing states tried to bring pressure to bear on the USA and on Western European states which were friendly to Israel, by reducing oil supplies. This caused serious oil shortages, especially in Europe. At the same time producers, well aware that oil supplies were not unlimited, looked on their action as a way of preserving resources. With this in mind, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) began to raise oil prices substantially. This contributed to inflation and caused an energy crisis in the world's industrial nations.

Camp David (1978-79)

Reasons for talk

1. President Sadat had become convinced that Israel could not be destroyed by force, and that it was foolish to keep on wasting Egypt's resources in fruitless wars. But it took great courage to be the first Arab leader to meet the Israelis face to face. Even to talk with Israeli leaders meant conceding that Egypt recognized the lawful existence of the state of Israel. He knew that the PLO and the more aggressive Arab states, Iraq and Syria, would bitterly resent any approach. In spite of all the dangers, Sadat offered to go to Israel and talk to the Knesset (the Israeli parliament).
2. The Israelis were suffering economic problems, partly because of their enormous defence expenditure, and partly because of a world recession. The USA was pressing them to settle their differences with at least some of the Arabs. They accepted Sadat's offer; he visited Israel in November 1977, and Menahem Begin, the

Israeli Prime Minister, visited Egypt the following month.

3. President Carter of the USA played a vital role in setting up formal negotiations between the two sides at Camp David (near Washington) which began in September 1978.

The Peace Treaty and its aftermath: With Carter acting as intermediary, the talks led to a peace treaty being signed in Washington (March 1979).

The main points agreed were:

- The state of war which had existed between Egypt and Israel since 1948 was now ended;
- Israel promised to withdraw its troops from Sinai;
- Egypt promised not to attack Israel again and guaranteed to supply her with oil from the recently opened wells in southern Sinai; .Israeli ships could use the Suez Canal.

The treaty was condemned by the PLO and most other Arab states (except Sudan and Morocco) and there was clearly a long way to go before similar treaties could be signed by Israel with Syria and Jordan. World opinion began to move against Israel and to accept that the PLO had a good case; but when the USA tried to bring the PLO and Israel together in an international conference, the Israelis would not co-operate. In November 1980 Begin announced that: Israel would never return the Golan Heights to Syria, not even in exchange for a peace treaty; and they would never allow the West Bank to become part of an independent Palestinian state; that would be a mortal threat to Israel's existence.

At the same time resentment among West Bank Arabs mounted at the Israeli policy of establishing Jewish settlements on land owned by Arabs. Many observers feared fresh violence unless Begin's government adopted a more moderate approach.

The peace also seemed threatened for a time when President Sadat was assassinated by some extremist Muslim soldiers while he was watching a military parade (October 1981). They believed that he had betrayed the Arab and Muslim cause by doing a deal with the Israelis. However, Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, bravely announced that he would continue the Camp David agreement.

For most of the 1980s the Arab-Israeli feud was overshadowed by the tan-Iraq War which occupied much of the Arab world's attention. But in 1987 there were massive demonstrations by Palestinians living in the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. They were protesting against Israeli repressive policies and the brutal behaviour of Israeli troops in the camps and in the occupied territories. An Israeli clampdown failed to quell the unrest, and the Israelis' tough methods earned them UN and worldwide condemnation.

Peace between Israel and the PLO: The election of a less aggressive government (Labour) in Israel in June 1992 raised hopes for better relations with the Palestinians. Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres both believed in negotiation, and were prepared to make con- cessions in order to achieve a lasting peace. Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader, responded and talks opened. But there was so much mutual suspicion and distrust after all the years of hostility that progress was difficult. However, both sides persevered and by early 1996, remarkable changes had taken place.

The peace accord Of September 1993: This was the first major breakthrough. It was agreed that:

- Israel formally recognized the PLO;
- The PLO recognized Israel's right to exist and promised to give up terrorism;
- The Palestinians were to be given limited self-rule in Jericho (on the West Bank) and in part of the Gaza Strip, areas occupied by Israel since the 1967 war. Israeli troops would be withdrawn from these areas.

Extremist groups on both sides opposed the agreement. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine still wanted a completely independent Palestinian state. Israeli settlers on the West Bank were against all concessions to the PLO. However, the moderate leaders on both sides showed great courage and determination, and two years later they took an even more momentous step forward.

Self-rule for the Palestinians

- Israel agreed to withdraw its troops from most of the West Bank (except Hebron) in stages over several years, handing over both civil and security powers to the PLO. This would end Israeli control of the areas which they had held since 1967.
- The areas would be ruled by a parliament or Palestinian Council of 88 members tq be elected early in 1996 by all West Bankers and Arab residents of Jerusalem aged over 18.
- All Palestinian prisoners held by Israel (about 6000) would be released, in three phases. Most of the world's leaders welcomed this brave attempt to bring peace to the troubled region. But once again extremists on both sides claimed that their leaders were guilty of 'shameful surrender'. Tragically Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli right-winger shortly after addressing a peace rally November 1995). Peres became Prime Minister; the murder caused a revolsion of feeling against the extremists and the agreement was gradually put into operation. In January 1996 King Hussein of Jordan paid an official public visit to Israel for the first time, 1200 Palestinian prisoners were released and talks opened between Israel and Syria. The promised elections were held; although the extremists urged people to boycott them, there was an encouragingly large turnout of over 80 per cent. As expected, Yasser Arafat became the new Palestinian President and his supporters were in a large majority in the newly elected parliament. This was expected to hold office until 1999, when, it was hoped, a permanent peace agreement would have been reached.

However, the situation changed rapidly during the spring of 1996: four suicide bombings carried out by the militant Palestinian group, Hamas, claimed 63 lives; the militant Shiite Islamic group, Hizbollah, shelled villages in northern Israel from southern Lebanon. All this enabled the hard-line Likud leader, Binyamin Netanyahu, who denounced Labour policy as 'too soft' towards the Palestinians, to win a narrow victory in the election of May 1996. This dismayed much of the outside world and threw the whole peace process into doubt.

Civil war in Lebanon

Originally part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, Lebanon was made a French mandate at the end of the First World War and became fully independent in 1945. It soon became a prosperous state, making money from banking and from serving as an important outlet for the exports of Syria, Jordan and Iraq. However, in 1975 civil war broke out, and although all-out war ended in 1976, chaos and disorder continued right through the 1980s as different factions struggled to gain influence.

Reason for civil war

Religious differences : The potential for trouble was there from the beginning, since the country was a bewildering mixture of different religious groups, some Muslim, some Christian, which had developed independently, separated from each other by mountain ranges.

There were four main Christian groups:

- Maronites (the wealthiest and most conservative);
- Greek Orthodox;
- Roman Catholic;
- Armenians.

There were three Muslim groups :

➢Shia-the largest group, mainly poor working class;

➢Sunni-a smaller group, but wealthier and with more political influence than the Shia;

➢Druze-a small group living in the centre of the country, mainly peasants.

There was a long history of hatred between Maronites and Druzes, but this seemed to be kept in check by the carefully framed constitution which tried, to give fair representation to all groups. The President was always a Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni, the Speaker (chairman of parliament) a Shia, and the army chief of staff a Druze. Of the 44 seats in parliament, the Maronites

were allowed 13, Sunni 9, Shia 8, Greek Orthodox 5, Druze 3, Roman Catholics 3 and Armenians 2.

Palestinian refugees from Israel : This complicated the situation even more. By 1975 there were at least half a million of them living in squalid camps away from the main centres of population. The Palestinians were not popular in Lebanon because they were continually involved in frontier incidents with Israel, provoking the Israelis to hit back at the Palestinians in southern Lebanon. In particular the Palestinians, being left-wing and Muslim, alarmed conservative and Christian Maronites who looked on the Palestinians as a dangerous destabilising influence. By 1975 the PLO had its headquarters in Lebanon, and this meant that Syria, the chief supporter of the PLO, was constantly interfering in Lebanon's affairs.

A dispute between Muslims and Christians over fishing rights (1975) : This upset the delicate balance. It began as an apparently minor incident, but it escalated when some Palestinians sided with the Muslims, and a group of right-wing Christians known as the Phalange began to attack Palestinians. Soon a full-scale civil war developed: the Maronites saw it as a chance to expel the Palestinians who had formed an alliance with the Druze (long-term enemies of the Maronites).

It is probably impossible to discover with complete certainty which side was responsible for the escalation of the war. Both sides claimed that the original fishing dispute could have been settled easily, and each blamed the other for escalating the violence. Either way, the PLO were certainly involved: the Phalangists claimed that PLO guerrillas fired on a church where some party leaders were attending Mass; the PLO claimed that the Phalangists started it by attacking a bus carrying Palestinians.

For a time it looked as though the Druze would win, but this alarmed Israel, which threatened to invade Lebanon. The Syrians did not want this to happen, and so in 1976 President Assad of Syria sent troops into the Lebanon to keep the PLO under some sort of control. Order was restored and it was a setback for the Druze and the PLO. It was the Syrians who now controlled Lebanon; Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader, had to agree to withdraw his troops from the area around Beirut (the capital of Lebanon).

Conflict continued

It was over ten years before something approaching peace was restored in Lebanon, as different conflicts raged in different places.

1. In the south, bordering on Israel, fighting soon broke out between Palestinians and Christians; the Israelis seized this opportunity to send troops in to help the Christians. A small semi-independent Christian state of Free Lebanon was declared under Major Haddad. The Israelis supported this because it acted as a buffer zone to protect them from further Palestinian attacks. The Palestinians and Muslims counter-attacked, and although by 1982 there were 7000 UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in the Lebanon) troops in the area, it was a constant struggle to keep the peace.
2. In 1980 there was a short struggle between supporters of the two main Maronite groups (the Gemayel and Chamoun families) which was won by the Gemayels.
3. In 1982, in reprisal for a Palestinian attack on Israel, Israeli troops invaded Lebanon and penetrated as far as Beirut. For a time the Gemayels, supported by the Israelis, were in control of Beirut. During this period the Palestinians were expelled from Beirut, and from then on the PLO was divided. The hard-liners went to Iraq and the rest dispersed into different Arab countries where they were, on the whole, not welcome. The Israelis withdrew and a multi-national force (made up of troops from the USA, France, Italy and Britain) took their place to maintain the peace. However, a spate of attacks and suicide bombings forced them to withdraw.
4. In 19 84 an aliiance of Shia militia (known as Amal) and Druze militia backed by Syria, drove

President Gemayel out of Beirut. Then the Shia and Druze themselves came to blows in a struggle for control of West Beirut. Yasser Arafat used the general confusion to rearm his Palestinians in the refugee camps.

At the end of 1986 the situation was extremely complex

- Shiite Amal militia, backed by Syria, alarmed at the renewed strength of the PLO which seemed likely to set up a state within a state, were besieging the refugee camps, hoping to starve them into surrender.
- At the same time an alliance of Druze, Sunni and communists was trying to drive Amal out of West Beirut. Another more extreme Shia group known as Hizbollah (Party of God), which was backed by Iran, was also involved in the struggle.
- Early in 1987 fierce fighting again erupted between Shia and Druze militia for control of West Beirut. Several European and American hostages were seized, including Terry Waite, the Archbishop of Canterbury's special envoy, who had gone to West Beirut to try to negotiate the release of some earlier hostages.
- With the country seeming to be in a state of total disintegration, President Assad of Syria, responding to a request from the Lebanese government, again sent his troops and tanks into West Beirut (February 1987). Within a week calm had been restored.

Peace Treaty: Although assassinations of leading figures continued, the situation gradually stabilised. In September 1990 important changes were introduced in the country's constitution, giving the Muslims fairer representation. The membership of the National Assembly was increased to 108, equally divided between Christians and Muslims. The government, with Syrian help, gradually restored its authority over more and more of the country and managed to get most of the militia armies disbanded. The government also succeeded in getting all the Western hostages released, the last of them in June 1992. All this was very much because of the Syrian presence; in May 1991 the two states signed a treaty of 'brotherhood and co-ordination'. However, this was strongly criticized by the Israelis, who claimed that the treaty marked the 'virtual annexation of Lebanon by Syria'.

War between Iran and Iraq 1980-81

The Middle East and the Arab world were thrown into fresh confusion in September 1980 when Iraqi troops invaded Iran.

Iraq's motives: President Saddam Hussein of Iraq had several motives for launching the attack.

He was afraid of militant Islam spreading across the border into Iraq from Iran. Iran had become an Islamic republic in 1979 under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini and his fundamentalist Shiite Muslim supporters. They believed that the country should be run according to the Islamic religion, with a strict moral code enforced by severe punishments. According to Khomeini, 'in Islam the legislative power to establish laws belongs to God Almighty'. The population of Iraq was mainly Sunni Muslim, but there was a large Shia minority. Saddam, whose government was non-religious, was afraid that the Shia's might rise up against him, and he had some of their leaders executed early in 1980. The Iranians retaliated by launching raids across the frontier.

The Iraqis claimed that the Iranian border province of Khuzestan should rightfully belong to them. This was an area peopled largely by Arabs, and Saddam hoped that they would rally to support Iraq (most Iranians were Persians, not Arabs).

There was a long-standing dispute over the Shatt-el-Arab waterway. This was an important outlet for the oil exports of both countries, and it formed part of the frontier between the two states. The Shatt-el-Arab had once been completely under Iraqi control, but five years earlier the Iranian government had forced Iraq to share control of it with Iran.

Saddam thought that the Iranian forces would be weak and demoralized so soon after the

fundamentalist takeover, so he expected a quick victory.

It soon became clear that he had miscalculated badly.

The war drags on: The Iranians quickly organized themselves to deal with the invasion, which began with the Iraqi seizure of the disputed waterway. The Iranians replied with mass infantry attacks against heavily fortified Iraqi positions. On paper Iraq seemed much the stronger, being well supplied with Soviet tanks, helicopter gunships and missiles, and some British and American weapons as well. However, the Iranian revolutionary guards, inspired by their religion, and ready to become martyrs, fought with fanatical determination; eventually they too began to get modem equipment (anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles) from China and North Korea (and secretly from the USA). As the war dragged on, Iraq concentrated on strangling Iranian oil exports, which paid for their arms supplies; Iran meanwhile captured Iraqi territory, and early in 1987 their troops were only ten miles from Basra, Iraq's second most important city, which had to be evacuated. By this time the territorial dispute had been lost in the deeper racial and religious conflict: Khomeini had sworn never to stop fighting until his Shia Muslim fundamentalists had destroyed the 'godless' Saddam regime.

The war had important international repercussions.

The stability of the entire Arab world was threatened: the more conservative states - Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait -gave cautious support to Iraq; but Syria, Libya, Algeria, South Yemen and the PLO were critical of Iraq for starting the war at a time when, they believed, all Arab states should have been concentrating on the destruction of Israel. The Saudis and the other Gulf states, suspicious of Khomeini's extreme brand of Islam, wanted to see Iran's ability to dominate the Persian Gulf controlled. As early as Kovember 1980 anArab summit conference in Amman (Jordan) to draw up new plans for dealing with Israel, failed to get off the ground because the anti-Iraq states, led by Syria, refused to attend.

The attacks on Iran's oil exports threatened the energy supplies of the West, and at various tunes brought American, Russian, British and French warships into the region, raising the international temperature. In 1987 the situation took a more dangerous turn as ofl-tankers, whatever their nationality, were threatened by mines; winch side was responsible for laying them was open to debate.

The success of Iran's Shia fundamentalist troops, especially its threat to Basra, alarmed the non-religious Arab governments, and many Arabs were afraid of what might happen if Iraq was defeated. Even President Assad of Syria, at first a strong supporter of Iran, as worried in case Iraq split up and became another Lebanon; this could well destabilize Syria itself. An Islamic conference held in Kuwait (January 1987) was attended by representatives of forty-four nations, but Iran's leaders refused to attend, and no agreement could be reached on how to bring the war to an end.

The war entered a new and even more terrible phase towards the end of 1987 when both sides began to born bard each other's capital cities, Tehran (Iran) and Baghdad (Iraq), causing thousands of deaths.

The end of the war, 1988: Although neither side had achieved its aims, the cost of the war, both economically and in human lives, was telling heavily. Both sides began to look for a way to end the fighting, though for a time they continued to pour out propaganda; Saddam talked about 'total victory' and the Iranians demanded 'total surrender'. The UN became involved, did some straight talking to both sides, and succeeded in arranging a ceasefire (August 1988). This was monitored by UN troops, and against all expectations, the truce lasted. Peace negotiations opened in October 1988 and terms were finally agreed in 1990.

The Gulf War (1990-91)

Even before he had accepted the peace terms at the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein began his next act of aggression. His forces invaded

and quickly occupied the small neighbouring state of Kuwait (August 1990).

Saddam Hussein's purpose

His real motive was probably to get his hands on the wealth of Kuwait, since he was seriously short of cash after the long war with Iran. Kuwait, though small, had valuable oil-wells which he would now be able to control.

He claimed that Kuwait was historically part of Iraq, though in fact Kuwait had existed as a separate territory -a British protectorate -since 1899, whereas Iraq had not been created until after the First World War.

He did not expect any action from the outside world now that his troops were firmly entrenched in Kuwait, and he had the strongest army in the region. He thought Europe and the USA were reasonably amenable to him since they had supplied him with arms during his war with Iran. Nor had anybody interfered when he brutally crushed the Kurds (who were demanding an independent state) in the north of Iraq.

The world unites against Saddam Hussein: Once again, as in the case of Iran, Saddam had miscalculated. President Bush of the USA took the lead in pressing for action to remove the Iraqis from Kuwait. The UN placed trade sanctions on Iraq, cutting off her oil exports, her main source of income. Saddam was ordered to remove his troops by 15 January 1991, after which the UN would use 'all necessary means' to clear them out. Sad darn hoped that this was all bluff and talked of 'the mother of all wars' if they tried to throw him out. But Bush and Margaret Thatcher had decided that Saddam's power must be curbed; he controlled too much of the oil that the industrial West needed. Fortunately for Britain and the USA, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt were also nervous about. What Saddam might do next; so they supported the UN action.

In spite of frantic diplomatic efforts, Saddam Hussein felt that he could not lose face by withdrawing from Kuwait, though he knew that an international force of over 600 000 had been assembled in Saudi Arabia. More than thirty nations contributed with troops, armaments or cash; for example the USA, Britain, France, Italy. Egypt, Syria and SaudiArabia provided troops; Germany and Japan donated cash. When the 15 January deadline passed, operatio-Desert Storm was launched against the Iraqis.

The campaign, in two parts, was quickly successful. First came a series of bombing attacks on Baghdad (the Iraqi capital whose unfortunate citizens again suffered heavy casualties, and on military targets such as roads and bridges. The second phase, the attack on the Iraqi army itself, began on 24 February. Within four days the Iraqis had been driven out of Kuwait and routed. Kuwait was liberated and Saddam Hussein accepted defeat. However, although Iraq lost many troops (some estimates put Iraqi dead at 90000 compared with less than 400 for the allies), Saddam was allowed to with- draw with much of his army intact. The retreating Iraqis were at the mercy of the allies, but Bush called a ceasefire, afraid that if the slaughter continued, the allies would lose the support of the other Arab nations.

The aftermath of the war: The war had unfortunate consequences for many of the Iraqi people. It was widely expected outside Iraq that after this humiliating defeat, Saddam Hussein would soon be overthrown. There were uprisings of Kurds in the north and Shia Muslims in the south, and it seemed as though Iraq was breaking up. However, the allies had left Saddam enough troops, tanks and aircraft to deal with the situation, and both rebel- lions. jvere ruthlessly crushed. At first nobody intervened: Russia, Syria and Turkey- had Kurdish minorities of their own and did not want the rebellion spreading over from Iraq. Similarly a Shiite victory in southern Iraq would probably increase the power of Iran in that region, and the USA did not want that. But eventually world opinion became so outraged at Saddam's continued ruthless bombings of his people that the USA and Britain, with UN backing, declared the areas 'no-fly /ones', and used their air power to keep Saddam's aircraft out. And so Saddam Hussein remained in power.

The war and its aftermath were very revealing

about the motives of the West and the great powers. Their primary concern was not with international justice and moral ques- tions of right and wrong, but with their own self-interest. They only took action against Saddam in the first place because they felt he was threatening their oil supplies. Often in the past when other small nations had been invaded, no international action had been taken. For example, when East Timor was occupied by neighbouring Indonesia in 1975, the rest of the world ignored it, because their interests were not threatened. After the Gulf War, Saddam, who on any assessment must rank as one of the most brutal dictators of the century, was allowed to remain in power because the West thought that his survival was the best way of keeping Iraq united and the region stable.