

Conflict in the Middle East

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

The area known as the Middle East has been one of the world's most troubled regions, especially since 1945. Wars and civil wars have raged almost non-stop, and there has hardly been a time when the whole region was at peace. The Middle East consists of Egypt, the Sudan, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Turkey, the Yemen republics, the United Arab Emirates and Oman (see Map 11.1). Most of these states, except Turkey and Iran, are peopled by Arabs; Iran, though not an Arab state, contains many Arabs living in the area around the northern end of the Persian Gulf. The Middle East also contains the small Jewish state of Israel, which was set up by the United Nations in 1948 in Palestine.

The creation of Israel in Palestine, an area belonging to the Palestinian Arabs, outraged Arab opinion throughout the world (other Arab states outside the Middle East are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya). The Arabs especially blamed Britain, who, they felt, had been more sympathetic to the Jews than to the Arabs; most of all they blamed the USA, which had supported the idea of a Jewish state very strongly. The Arab states refused to recognize Israel as a legal state and they vowed to destroy it. Although there were four short wars between Israel and the various Arab states (1948–9, 1956, 1967 and 1973), Arab attacks failed, and Israel survived. However, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians dragged on; even at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, no permanent peace agreement had been reached.

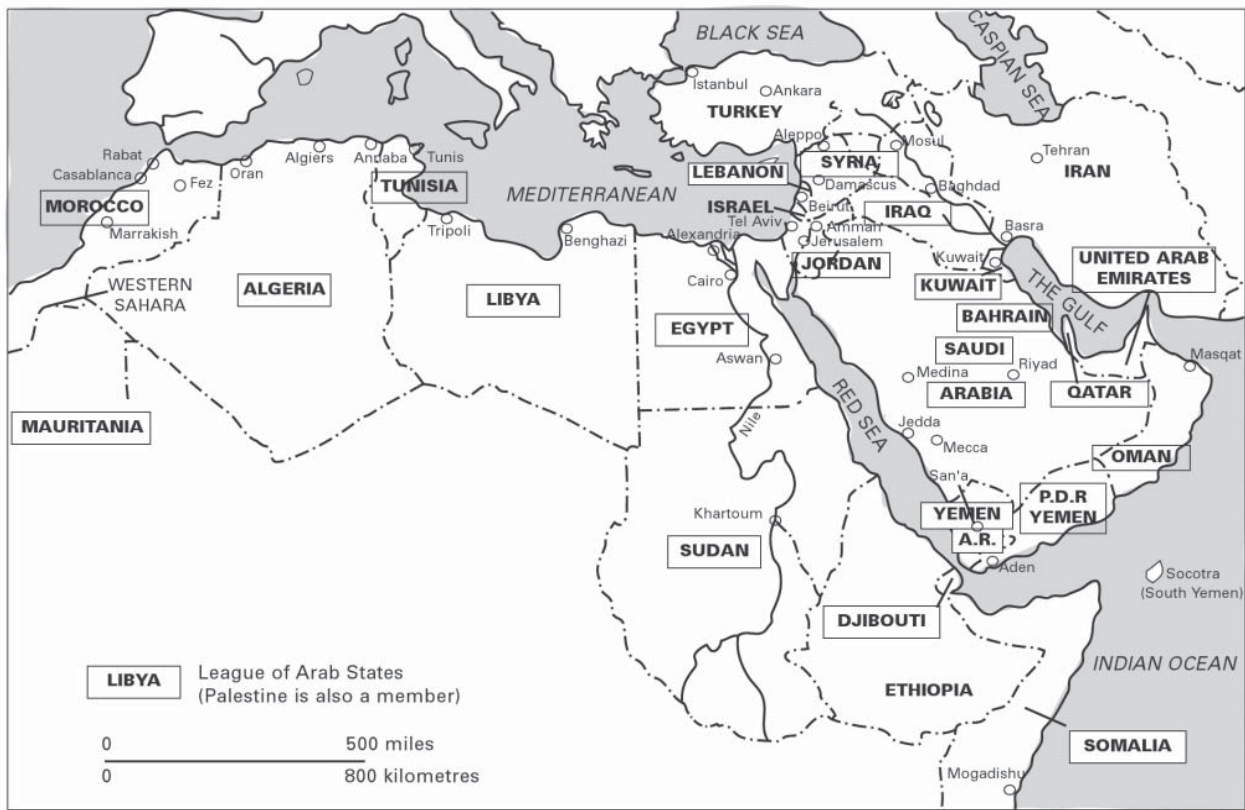
The Arab desire to destroy Israel tended for much of the time to overshadow all other concerns. However, two other themes ran through Middle East affairs which became mixed up with the anti-Israel struggle:

- the desire of some Arabs to achieve political and economic unity among the Arab states;
- the desire of many Arabs to put an end to foreign intervention in their countries.

The Middle East attracted a lot of attention from both western and communist powers, because of its strategic position and rich oil resources. In addition, there were a number of conflicts involving individual Arab states:

- There was civil war in the Lebanon which lasted for close on 15 years from 1975.
- There was a war between Iran and Iraq lasting from 1980 until 1988.
- In the First Gulf War (1990–1) Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait and were driven out again by an international coalition led by the USA.

Interpretations of the Middle East situation vary depending on whose viewpoint one looks at. For example, many British politicians and journalists regarded Colonel Nasser



Map 11.1 The Middle East and North Africa

(Egyptian leader 1954–70) as some kind of dangerous fanatic who was almost as bad as Hitler. On the other hand, most Arabs thought he was a hero, the symbol of the Arab people's move towards unity and freedom.

11.1 ARAB UNITY AND INTERFERENCE FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD

(a) Arabs have several things in common

They all speak the Arabic language, they are nearly 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.

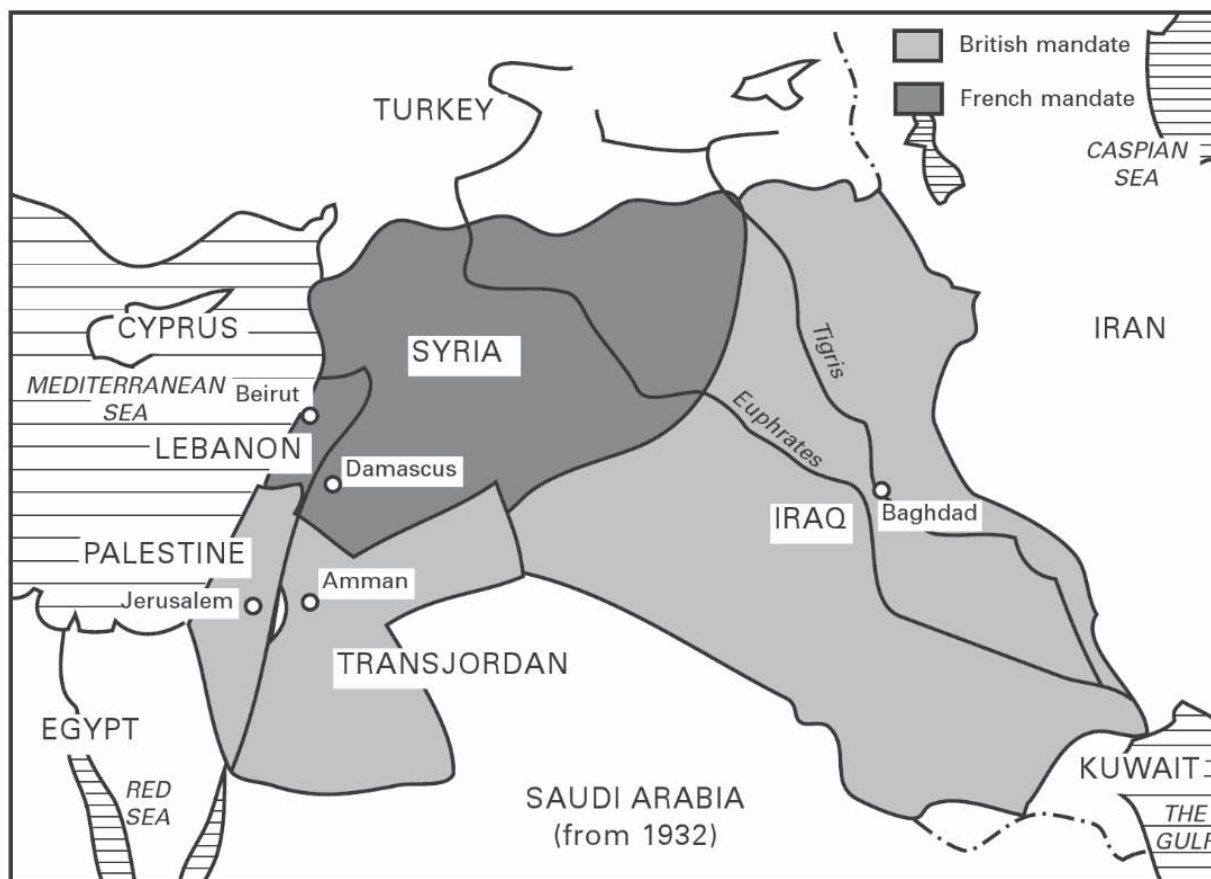
- *The Arab League, founded in 1945*, included Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Yemen; membership later expanded to include 20 states in 1980. However, it achieved very little politically and was constantly hampered by internal squabbles.
- In the mid-1950s Arab unity (sometimes 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 (see Section 11.3). 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 (see Section 11.6). This caused Egypt to be expelled from the Arab League.

(b) Interference in the Middle East by other countries

- British and French involvement in the Middle East stretched back 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



Map 11.2 Areas given to Britain and France as mandates at the end of the First World War

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 the advent of 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 that 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.

1 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 was thought not to be 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.

2 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 withdrawn.

3 Iraq

King Faisal of Iraq 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.

4 Iran

Important changes were taking place in Iran, 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 that 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 Americans saw the situation as part of the Cold War – Iran was yet another front where they thought it vital to prevent a communist advance. However, there was a strong nationalist movement in Iran which resented all foreign influence. Feelings soon began to turn against the USA and against Britain too. This was because Britain held a majority 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 profits, 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.

11.2 THE CREATION OF ISRAEL AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR, 1948-9

(a) Why did the creation of the state of Israel lead to war?

- 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, however, 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 understandably 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 an independent Palestine for the Arabs, and an end to the immigration of Jews.

The British government stated (1922) that there was no intention of the Jews occupying the whole of Palestine and that there would be no interference with the rights of the Palestinian Arabs. Balfour himself said in his declaration: 'nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine'. 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; and they failed to keep Balfour's promise.

- 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. From 1936 onwards there were violent protests by Arabs and an uprising, which the British suppressed with some brutality, killing over 3000 Arabs. *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 10 000 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.

(b) Who was to blame for the tragedy?

- *Most of the 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 pressured 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 more responsibility for the situation they had helped create. It would save the British, who since 1945 had spent over £100 million trying to keep the peace, further expense which they could ill afford.

(c) The war and its outcome

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 because they fought desperately, and many of their troops had gained military experience fighting in the British army during the Second World War (some 30 000 Jewish men volunteered to fight for the British). The Arab states were divided among themselves and poorly equipped. The Palestinians themselves were demoralized, and their military organization had been destroyed by the British during the uprisings of 1936–9.

The most tragic outcome of the war was that the Palestinian Arabs became the innocent victims: they had suddenly lost three-quarters of their homeland, and the majority were now without a state of their own. Some were in the new Jewish state of Israel; others found themselves living in the area – known as the West Bank – occupied by 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. The city of 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.

11.3 THE SUEZ WAR OF 1956

(a) Who was to blame for the war?

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 over-reacted by using force, and most British historians agree.
- 1 *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 port of Eilat, which the Israelis had taken from Egypt in 1949.
 - 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 (see Section 24.5(c)), 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.
 - 2 *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 towards the building of a dam at Aswan (July 1956); their intention was to force Nasser to abandon his new links with the communists.
 - 3 *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.

- 4 *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 jackboots'. 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 shareholders and had promised that the ships of all nations (except Israel) would be able to use the canal.
- 5 Secret talks took place between the British, French and Israelis and a 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.

(b) Events in 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.

(c) The outcome of the war

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

- The war failed to overthrow Nasser, and his prestige as the 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. Following Britain's humiliation, the Israelis now looked towards the USA as their chief supporter.

11.4 THE SIX-DAY WAR OF 1967

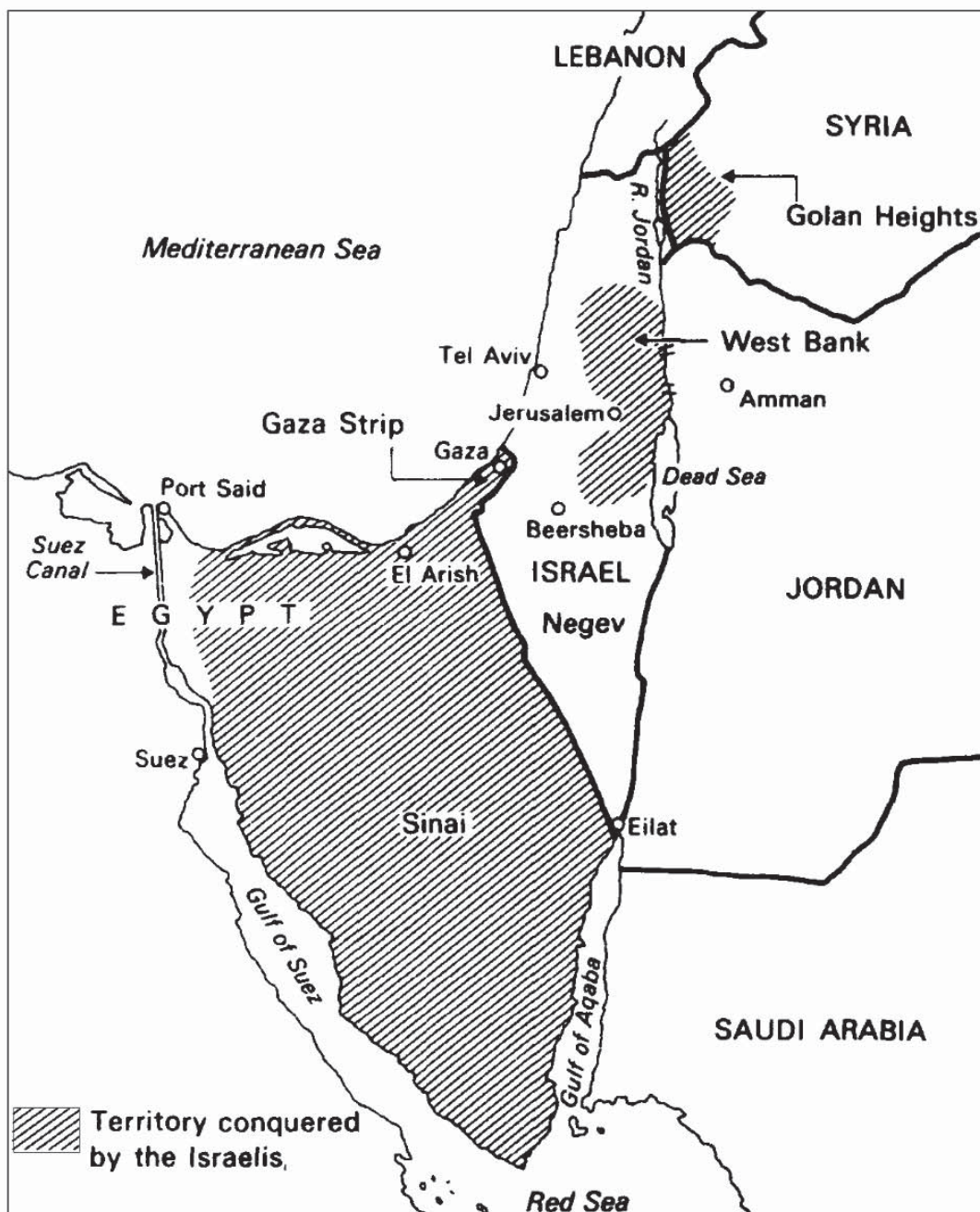
The Arab states had not signed a peace treaty at the end of the 1948–9 war and were still refusing to give Israel official recognition. In 1967 they joined together again in a determined attempt to destroy Israel. The lead was taken by Iraq, Syria and Egypt.

(a) The build-up to war

- 1 *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.'
- 2 *In Syria*, political upheavals 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*. Founded in 1957, Fatah eventually became the core section of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), with Yasser Arafat as one of its leaders. The Syrians also began to bombard Jewish settlements from the Golan Heights, which overlooked the frontier.
- 3 *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 a thousand 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 under way 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.
- 4 *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.

- 5 *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.
- 6 *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, and inadequate Arab preparations and communications.



Map 11.3 The situation after the 1967 war

(b) Results of the war

- 1 *For the Israelis it was a spectacular 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 (see Map 11.3), 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.
- 2 *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 and improve their relations with Egypt and Syria, the Russians began to supply them with modern 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.

11.5 THE YOM KIPPUR WAR OF 1973

(a) Events leading up to the war

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 (PFLP), embarked on a series of terrorist attacks to draw world attention to the grave injustice being done to the Arabs of Palestine. They hijacked airliners and flew three of them to Amman, the capital of Jordan, where they were blown up (1970). This was embarrassing for King Hussein of Jordan, who now favoured a negotiated peace, and in September 1970 he expelled all PLO members based in Jordan. However, terrorist attacks continued, reaching a horrifying climax when some members of the Israeli team 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.* He was worried that PLO terrorism would turn world opinion against the Palestinian cause. He was prepared to work either with the USA or with 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 modern Russian weapons and their army had been trained by Russian experts.

(b) The war began on 6 October 1973

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.

(c) The outcome 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), which enabled 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.

11.6 CAMP DAVID AND THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI PEACE, 1978–9

(a) Why did the two sides begin to talk to each other?

- 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 the dangers, Sadat offered to go to Israel and talk to the Knesset (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 Menachem 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, which began in September 1978 at Camp David (near Washington).

(b) The peace treaty and its aftermath

With Carter acting as intermediary, the talks led to a peace treaty being signed in Washington in March 1979. *The main points agreed were:*

- The state of war that 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 mounted among West Bank Arabs 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 Iran–Iraq War (see Section 11.9), which occupied much of the Arab world's attention. But beginning in December 1987 there were massive demonstrations by Palestinians living in the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (see Map 11.3). The *intifada* ('shaking off'), as it was known, was a long campaign of civil disobedience involving strikes, non-payment of taxes, and an attempt to boycott Israeli products. They were protesting against repressive Israeli policies and the brutal behaviour of Israeli troops in the camps and in the occupied territories. An Israeli clampdown failed to quell the *intifada*, which continued for over three years. The Israelis' tough methods earned them UN and worldwide condemnation.

11.7 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 concessions 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.

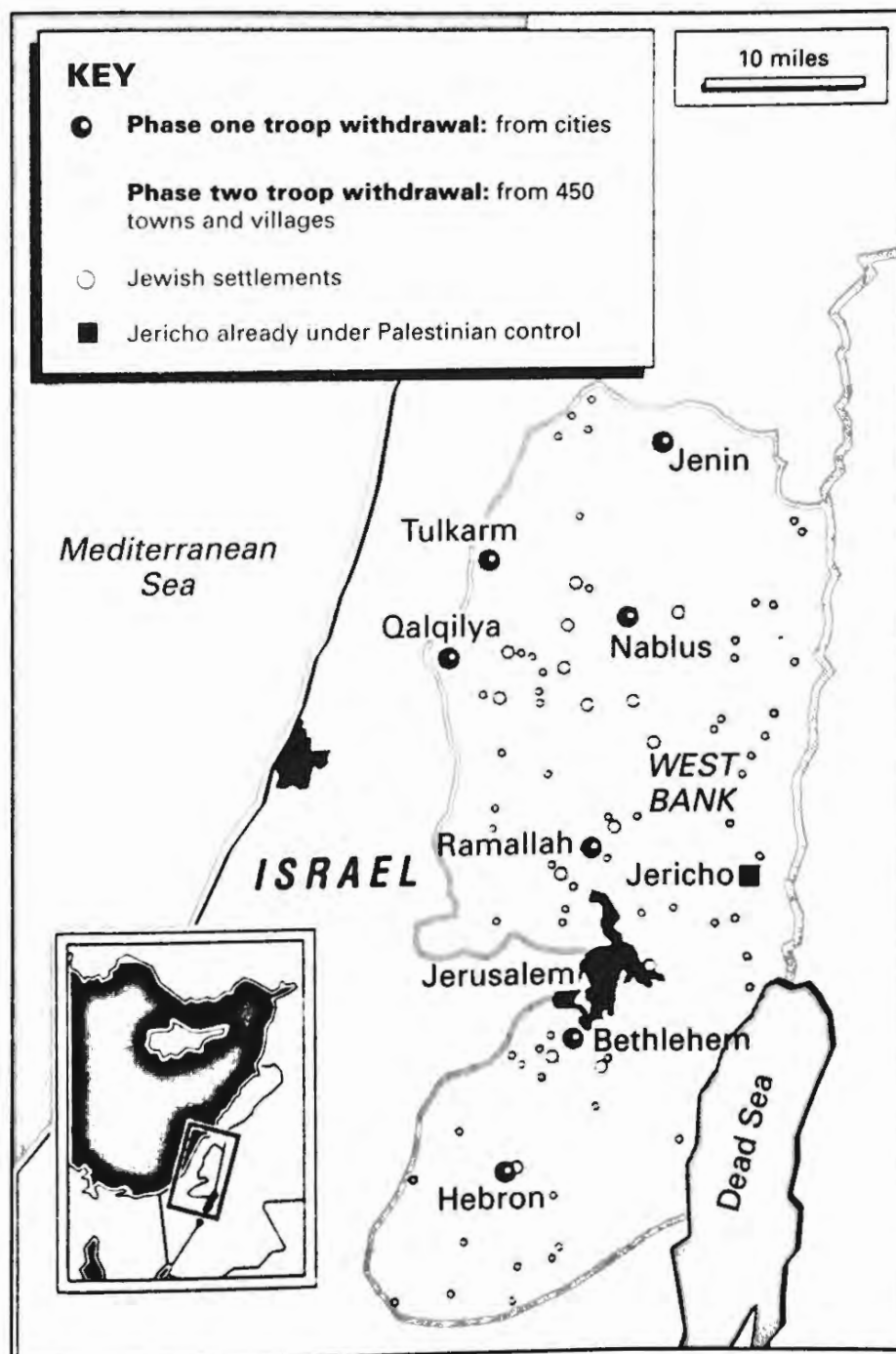
(a) The peace accord of September 1993

This, the first major breakthrough, took place at a conference in Oslo, and became known as *the Oslo Accords*. *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, especially Yossi Beilin, the Israeli deputy foreign minister, and Mahmoud Abbas (also known as Abu Mazen), one



Map 11.4 The Israeli-Palestinian Agreement, 1995

Source: *The Guardian*, 25 September 1995

of Arafat's advisers. Two years later they took an even more momentous step forward, building on the Oslo Accords.

(b) Self-rule for the Palestinians (September–October 1995)

- 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 they had held since 1967 (see Map 11.4). The areas would then remain demilitarized.
- The areas would be ruled by a parliament or Palestinian Council of 88 members, to be elected early in 1996 by all West Bankers and Arab residents of Jerusalem aged over 18. East Jerusalem was to be the capital.
- 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 Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli fanatic shortly after addressing a peace rally (4 November 1995). Peres became prime minister; the murder caused a revulsion 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 government 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 (Islamic Resistance Movement), claimed 63 lives; the militant Shiite Islamic group Hezbollah (Party of God), based in Lebanon, shelled villages in northern Israel from southern Lebanon. All this enabled the hardline 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.

11.8 CONFLICT IN THE LEBANON

Originally part of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire, Lebanon (see Map 11.5) 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.

(a) What caused civil war to break out in 1975?

1 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.



Map 11.5 **The Lebanon**

Source: *The Guardian*, May 1996

There were four main Christian groups:

- Maronites (the wealthiest and most conservative);
- Greek Orthodox;
- Roman Catholics;
- 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 Druze, 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 43 seats in

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

2 The presence of 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 destabilizing 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.

3 A dispute between Muslims and Christians over fishing rights (1975)

The delicate balance between Muslims and Christians was upset in 1975 by a dispute over fishing rights. 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 had 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 the Israelis, who 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).

(b) Chaos continues

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, while Israeli planes bombed the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila. 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 hardliners went to Iraq and the rest dispersed into different Arab countries, where they were, on the whole, not welcome. The Israelis withdrew and a multinational 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 1984 an alliance 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 Hezbollah (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 apparently 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.

(c) Peace at last

Although assassinations of leading figures continued, the situation gradually stabilized. *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'. Israeli troops remained in southern Lebanon to safeguard their northern frontier.

(d) The July War of 2006

The Israelis eventually removed their troops from southern Lebanon, but not until 2000. However, they still occupied an area known as the Sheba'a farms, which, so they claimed, was part of Syria, and therefore there was no need for Israeli troops to move out. Hezbollah insisted that the Sheba'a farms belonged to Lebanon, and therefore Israel must withdraw. Many observers suspected that both Hezbollah and Syria, which supported Hezbollah, were using the situation as a pretext to justify continued hostility to Israel. They wanted to show support for the Palestinians, who were now involved in the second *intifada*. The

dispute simmered on until in July 2006 Hezbollah decided to test Israel's reactions and at the same time help Hamas, which was being attacked by Israel: they ambushed an Israeli patrol. In total, eight Israeli soldiers were killed and two were taken prisoner. Hezbollah believed that Israel would be too busy with Hamas to retaliate. They were sadly mistaken. In fact Israel had been looking for an excuse to destroy Hezbollah, and the USA was urging them to take action, as part of the general 'war on terror'.

The very day after the attack on the patrol, the Israeli response began. The Lebanese coast was blockaded, and air strikes put Beirut airport out of action and destroyed Hezbollah's headquarters. After a few days, Israeli ground troops invaded. It soon became clear that Israel intended to destroy Hezbollah's fighting ability by bombing its arsenal of rockets, killing its leaders, cutting it off from its supply lines and from its supporters. This did not prevent Hezbollah from retaliating by firing rockets into Israel at an average of over a hundred a day for the 34 days that the war lasted. But Israeli bombing did enormous damage to civilians and their property in southern Lebanon, and if anything, increased support for Hezbollah. In August 2006 the UN succeeded in arranging a cease-fire, but not before over a thousand Lebanese civilians and some 200 Hezbollah fighters had been killed and around a million civilians made homeless. On the Israeli side 118 soldiers and around 40 civilians were killed. Hezbollah claimed victory, but privately they admitted that it was a hollow victory and that had they known what Israel's response would be, it would never have kidnapped the soldiers. For Israel it left a rare taste of defeat; the ground invasion was poorly organized and ineffective, and it somewhat dented Israel's reputation for invincibility. David Hirst, in his book about Lebanon, concludes that what was meant to be a demonstration of strength by Israel turned out to be an almost comic illustration of ineffectuality. It seemed that Israel had learned nothing from the 1982 Lebanon War.

11.9 THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR, 1980-8

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

(a) 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 Shias 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.

(b) 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 modern 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 become 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 fundamentalist brand of Islam, wanted to see Iran's ability to dominate the Persian Gulf controlled. As early as November 1980 an Arab 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 times brought American, Russian, British and French warships into the region, raising the international temperature. In 1987 the situation took a more dangerous turn as oil tankers, whatever their nationality, were threatened by mines; which side was responsible for laying them was open to debate.
- *The success of Iran's Shia fundamentalist troops, especially the 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, was 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 44 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 bombard each other's capital cities, Tehran (Iran) and Baghdad (Iraq), causing thousands of deaths.

(c) 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.

11.10 THE GULF WAR, 1990–1

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).

(a) Saddam Hussein's motives

- 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. After all, the USA had been supporting him all the way through his war against the Iranian regime that had overthrown the Shah, an American ally. The Americans valued him as a stabilizing influence within the region and in Iraq itself – they had taken no action when Saddam had suppressed the Shias, nor when he brutally crushed the Kurds (who were demanding an independent state) in the north of Iraq, in 1988.

(b) 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. Saddam 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 Saudi Arabia provided troops; Germany and Japan donated cash. When the 15 January deadline passed, *Operation 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 90 000 compared with less than 400 for the allies), Saddam was allowed to withdraw 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.

(c) The aftermath of the war – Saddam Hussein survives

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 rebellions were 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 zones', 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 questions 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.

11.11 ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS FIGHT AGAIN

(a) The failure of the Oslo Accords

Binyamin Netanyahu, Israeli prime minister from May 1996 until May 1999, never accepted the agreements reached in Oslo. He spent much of his time in office trying to backtrack from the commitments made by the previous Israeli government and allowed the building of large Jewish settlements on the outskirts of Jerusalem, which would cut off Arab villages on the eastern side of Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. This only caused more violent protests from the Palestinians; Yasser Arafat released some Hamas activists from jail and suspended security co-operation with Israel. US president Clinton

tried to keep the peace process on course by calling both sides together at Camp David in October 1998, but little progress was made. Netanyahu, facing recession and rising unemployment, called an election in May 1999. In the contest for prime minister, the candidate of the Labour Party (now calling itself 'One Israel') was Ehud Barak, a retired general. He campaigned on promises of economic growth and a renewed drive for peace, and he won a decisive victory.

Barak's victory raised great hopes: he wanted a comprehensive peace settlement which included Syria (which had not signed a peace treaty with Israel after the 1973 war) as well as the Palestinians, and he tried hard to achieve one. Sadly his efforts failed.

- Although the Syrians agreed to talk, negotiations finally broke down in March 2000 when they insisted that there should be a return to the pre-Six-Day-War frontiers before any further talks could take place. Barak could not agree to this without alienating a majority of Israelis.
- In spite of this, in May 2000 Barak went ahead with his election promise to withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon, where they had remained policing a security zone since 1985.
- Barak offered to share Jerusalem with the Palestinians, but Arafat refused to compromise and continued to demand full Palestinian sovereignty in East Jerusalem.

By the summer of 2000, Barak's government was falling apart, many of his supporters feeling that he was making too many concessions to the Arabs and getting nothing in return. An American-sponsored summit meeting at Camp David in July failed.

Clinton made one last effort to bring peace before his term as president ended. (The new president, George W. Bush, was due to take office on 20 January 2001.) At a meeting in the White House (in December 2000) he announced his new plan to representatives of both sides. It moved some way towards accommodating Palestinian demands: it required the Israelis to withdraw completely from Gaza and from about 95 per cent of the West Bank, and there was to be an independent Palestinian state. With regard to Jerusalem, 'the general principle is that Arab areas are Palestinian and Jewish ones are Israeli'. At a conference held at Taba in Egypt to discuss the plan (January 2001), agreement seemed tantalizingly close; only the question of Jerusalem remained as a major obstacle, but neither side would compromise over this critical issue. The Oslo peace process had well and truly foundered.

(b) The problem of Jerusalem

The Oslo Accords had by-passed several vital questions, such as the status of Jerusalem, the right of return of the 1948 refugees, and the future of the Jewish settlements in the areas occupied by Israel since 1967. The intention was that these thorny problems would be negotiated towards the end of a five-year transition period, but the first time they were discussed in detail was at Clinton's Camp David summit in July 2000.

The original UN intention when Israel was created was that Jerusalem should be under international control. However, the fighting of 1948–9 ended with Jordan ruling East Jerusalem and Israel occupying West Jerusalem. This position remained until the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel captured East Jerusalem, along with the entire West Bank, from Jordan; it is still occupied by the Israelis today. *The problem is that Jerusalem has great symbolic and emotional significance for both sides.* For the Jews, Jerusalem was their ancient capital city, and they believe that Temple Mount was the site of their Temple in biblical times. For the Muslims, Jerusalem, known as Al-Haram al-Sharif, is the site from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven.

The Israelis were determined to hold on to Jerusalem; they took over Arab land and built new Jewish settlements, in violation of international law. International opinion and the UN repeatedly condemned these Israeli activities. However, in 1980 the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) passed the Jerusalem Law which stated that 'Jerusalem, complete and unified, is the capital of Israel.' This provoked a storm of criticism from moderate Israelis who thought it was unnecessary, from world opinion, and from the UN Security Council which passed a resolution reprimanding Israel. Even the USA, which almost always supported Israel, abstained on this vote. This is why the 1995 agreements, which for the first time recognized the possibility of Jerusalem being divided, were such a major breakthrough. It also explains why the Palestinians were so bitterly disappointed when Netanyahu dropped the idea, following the assassination of Yitzak Rabin (see Section 11.7(b)). When Clinton's Camp David summit failed in July 2000, another outbreak of violence was inevitable.

(c) Sharon and the intifada

On 28 September 2000, Ariel Sharon, the leader of the opposition Likud party, surrounded by a large contingent of security men, paid a highly publicized visit to Temple Mount in Jerusalem. He claimed that he was going to deliver 'a message of peace'. But to most of the rest of the world it seemed that this was a gesture to emphasize Israeli sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem, and even a deliberate attempt to provoke violence, which would end the peace process. If this was indeed his motive, he was all too successful. His visit sparked off riots which spread from Temple Mount across the entire West Bank and Gaza, and among Arabs in Israel. It soon turned into a full-scale uprising, which became known as the al-Aqsa (Jerusalem) intifada ('shaking-off'). After the failure of Clinton's final attempts to bring peace, in January 2001, Sharon was elected prime minister, defeating Barak, who was seen as being too fond of offering concessions to Yasser Arafat (February 2001).

Sharon immediately announced that there would be no further negotiations while violence continued. His aim was to control the intifada by a combination of tough military action and international pressure. The Israelis started to build a protective wall around the West Bank; they claimed it was purely defensive, but unfortunately for the Palestinians, a number of their villages were trapped on the Israeli side of the barrier, which also included Jewish settlements built on Arab land. The more drastic the military action taken by Israel, the less international support it got. *For the next three years the tragic cycle of suicide bombings, massive Israeli retaliations, and short ceasefires interspersed with fruitless international efforts at mediation, continued unabated.* For example:

- A Hamas suicide bomber killed five Israelis in Netanya, a popular seaside resort. The Israelis responded with 16 air strikes, killing 16 Palestinians on the West Bank (May 2001).
- In August 2001 Israelis assassinated Abu Ali Mustafa, deputy leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), in Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority.
- Following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the USA, President Bush took steps to prevent the Palestine issue becoming mixed up in his 'war on terrorism'. He announced new plans for peace, including an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.
- The PFLP assassinated the Israeli tourism minister, a hardline anti-Palestinian and friend of Sharon (October 2001).
- Hamas suicide bombers killed 25 Israelis in Haifa and Jerusalem; ten others were killed when a bomb exploded in a bus. Israel responded by occupying Ramallah, and surrounding Arafat's headquarters. Arafat condemned terrorism and called for

an immediate ceasefire; Hamas called a halt to the suicide bombings (December 2001). The ceasefire lasted just over four weeks.

- During the early months of 2002, fighting became more vicious. After Palestinian gunmen had killed six Israeli soldiers near Ramallah, the Israelis occupied two large Palestinian refugee camps at Nablus and Jenin. The Palestinians carried out more attacks, and the Israelis sent 150 tanks and 20 000 troops into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and attacked Arafat's compound in Ramallah once again. It seemed that Sharon was doing everything he possibly could to injure Arafat, short of actually having him directly assassinated. There was heavy fighting in the Jenin refugee camp, and the Palestinians claimed that Israeli forces had carried out a massacre. The UN sent a team to investigate these claims, but the Israelis refused to let them in (February–April 2002). In March the UN for the first time endorsed the idea of an independent Palestinian state; UN secretary-general Annan accused Israel of the 'illegal occupation' of Palestinian land.
- Nevertheless the UN team collected sufficient information to publish a report on conditions in the West Bank and Gaza (referred to as 'the Occupied Territories'), in September 2002. It charged Israel with causing a humanitarian catastrophe among the Palestinians: the economy had been destroyed, unemployment stood at 65 per cent, half the population was living on less than \$2 a day, schools and houses had been bulldozed and demolished, people deported and curfews imposed; ambulances were being prevented from passing roadblocks.
- The USA and Israel saw Yasser Arafat as the main obstacle to progress, since he would make no significant concessions and was either unwilling or unable to bring a lasting halt to Palestinian attacks. Having failed to kill him in the attacks on his compound, the Israeli leadership tried to sideline him by refusing to meet him and demanding the appointment of another leader to represent the Palestinians in negotiations. Consequently, in March 2003, Mahmoud Abbas was appointed to the newly created post of prime minister, although Arafat remained president, and continued to be the real power in the Palestinian Authority.

(d) The 'road map' for peace?

This new peace plan was drawn up originally in December 2002 by representatives of the European Union, Russia, the UN and the USA. Formal discussion had been delayed by the Israeli general election of January 2003 (won by Sharon), by the war in Iraq, and by US and Israeli insistence that they would only deal with Abbas rather than Arafat. At last, on 30 April 2003 it was formally presented, separately, to Abbas and Sharon. *The 'road map' aimed to achieve a final settlement of the entire Palestinian–Israeli conflict by the end of 2005. Its basic points were:*

- the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state existing side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours;
- there should be 'an unconditional cessation of violence' by both sides, a freeze on new Israeli settlements, the dismantling of all the 'illegal' ones built since Sharon came to power in March 2001 and a new Palestinian constitution and elections – all to be achieved by the end of May 2003;
- after the Palestinian elections, there would be an international conference to draw up the provisional frontiers of the new state – by the end of 2003;
- over the next two years – up to the end of 2005 – Israel and Palestine would negotiate final details such as the remaining settlements, refugees, the status of Jerusalem, and the frontiers.

The 'road map' was accepted in principle by both the Palestinians and the Israelis, although Sharon had a number of reservations; for example, he would not recognize the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their former homes in Israel. The Israeli cabinet voted narrowly in favour of the plan, the first time that they had countenanced the idea of a Palestinian state which would include some of the territory they had occupied since the Six-Day War in 1967. Referring to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Sharon made a historic statement: 'To keep 3.5 million people under occupation is bad for us and for them. I have come to the conclusion that we have to reach a peace agreement.'

(e) What brought about the Israeli change of attitude?

Sharon's change of heart did not come totally out the blue: already in November 2002 he had persuaded his Likud party to accept that an eventual Palestinian state was now inevitable and that 'painful concessions' would have to be made once violence ended. Fighting on this platform, Likud won the general election of January 2003, and Sharon remained prime minister. A combination of reasons caused him to relinquish his hardline vision of a Greater Israel stretching from the Mediterranean to the River Jordan, and including the whole of Jerusalem.

- After almost three years of violence, even Sharon began to realize that his policy was not working. The ferocity and determination of the Palestinian resistance astonished and dismayed most Israelis. Although international opinion condemned Palestinian suicide bombings, the disproportionate Israeli responses were even more unpopular; it was the Palestinian underdogs who won the sympathy of the rest of the world, except the USA, which almost invariably supported and financed Israel.
- Moderate Israeli opinion had turned against the hardline approach and many Israelis were horrified at events such as the 'massacre' in the Jenin refugee camp. Yitzhak Laor, an Israeli writer and poet, wrote: 'There's no doubt that Israel's "assassination policy" – its killing of senior politicians – has poured petrol on the fire. ... The bulldozer, once the symbol of the building of a new country, has become a monster, following the tanks, so that everybody can watch as another family's home, another future disappears. ... Enslaving a nation, bringing it to its feet, simply doesn't work.' One estimate suggested that 56 per cent of Israelis supported the 'road map'.
- Even President Bush eventually began to lose patience with Sharon. The USA denounced the attacks on Arafat's headquarters and told Sharon to withdraw his troops from the West Bank, pointing out that his attacks on the Palestinians were threatening to destroy the American-led coalition against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden. Bush was afraid that unless he did something to curb Sharon, the Arab states – Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia – might withdraw from the coalition. Bush also threatened to reduce US aid to Israel. Sharon's first reaction was anger and defiance, but in the end he had to listen – a gradual withdrawal of troops from the West Bank got under way.
- Population trends have been suggested as another possible influence on Sharon. At the beginning of 2004 the population of Israel and Palestine was around 10 million – 5.4 million Jews and 4.6 million Arabs. At current rates of population growth, the number of Palestinian Arabs would overtake the number of Jews in the next six to ten years; within 20 years, this trend would threaten the very existence of the Jewish state. This is because, if it is a genuinely democratic state, which the Israelis claim to want, the Palestinians must have equal voting rights, and would therefore be in a majority. The best solution for both sides would be peace, and the creation of two separate states, as soon as possible.

(f) Difficult times ahead

Although both sides had accepted the 'road map' in principle, there were still grave doubts about exactly where it was leading. By the spring of 2004 no progress had been made to implement any of the points, and the plan was well behind schedule. In spite of all efforts, it had proved impossible to achieve a lasting ceasefire; violence continued and Mahmoud Abbas resigned in exasperation, blaming the Israelis for acting 'provocatively' every time the Palestinian militant groups – Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah – began a ceasefire. He was also involved in a power struggle with Arafat, who would not give him full powers to negotiate in his own way. He was replaced by Ahmed Qurie, who had been involved in the Oslo discussions in 1993.

In October 2003 some Israeli critics of Sharon, including Yossi Beilin (who had also been involved in the Oslo Peace Accords), held talks with some Palestinian leaders and together they produced a *rival, unofficial peace plan*. This was launched with great publicity at a ceremony in Geneva in December, and was welcomed as a sign of hope. The Israelis made some concessions: Jerusalem would be divided and incorporated in the Palestinian state, Israel would give up sovereignty over Temple Mount, and would abandon about 75 per cent of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank; these would be incorporated in the new Palestinian state. However, in return the Palestinians were required to give up the right of return for refugees and to accept financial compensation. For the vast majority of the Palestinians, this issue was at the heart of the conflict, and they could never willingly submit to such an agreement. For the Israelis, the abandonment of so many settlements was equally anathema. The stalemate continued during 2004.

(g) Why did the peace process stall in this way?

Basically the reason was that although the 'road map' and the so-called Geneva Accords represented some concessions by the Israelis, they did not go nearly far enough. Several vital points were omitted which the Palestinians had a right to expect would be included.

- There was no real acknowledgement that the Israeli presence in Gaza and the West Bank was an illegal occupation and had been since 1967. Israel ignored a UN order to evacuate all territory captured during the Six-Day War (including the Golan Heights, taken from Syria).
- Frontiers were referred to as 'provisional'. Palestinians suspected that Sharon's idea was to have a weak Palestinian state made up of a number of enclaves separated from each other by Israeli territory, and therefore easily dominated by the Israelis.
- There was the thorny problem of Israeli settlements. The 'road map' mentioned the dismantling of 'illegal' settlements built since March 2001, which numbered about 60. This implied that all the earlier settlements – almost 200 of them, housing over 450 000 people, half of them in or near East Jerusalem, the rest in the West Bank and Gaza – were legal. But these were also arguably illegal, having been built on occupied territory. There was no mention in the 'road map' of these being dismantled.
- There was no reference to the massive security wall, 347 km long, being built by the Israelis in the West Bank, stretching from north to south, and looping round to include some of the larger Israeli settlements. The wall cut through Palestinian lands and olive groves, in some places cutting the Palestinians off from the farms which provided their livelihood. It was estimated that when the wall was finished, 300 000 Palestinians would be trapped in their townships, unable to get to their land.

- Above all there was the question of the refugees and their dream of returning to their pre-1948 homelands, a desire formulated in a number of UN resolutions. On the Israeli side, they believed that if the Palestinian dream became reality, that would destroy their own particular dream – the Jewish state.

In January 2004, Sharon announced that if no progress was made towards a negotiated peace, Israel would go ahead and impose its own solution. They would withdraw from some settlements and relocate the Jewish communities. Frontiers would be redefined to create a separate state of Palestine, but it would be smaller than that envisaged in the 'road map'. The situation was thrown into chaos once again in March 2004 when the Israelis assassinated Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder and leader of Hamas.

Later that month Sharon announced his new unilateral solution: the Israelis would dismantle their settlements in the Gaza Strip, but keep control of all but a token four of the settlements on the West Bank. Although this was a fundamental shift away from the 'road map' by the Israelis, it received unqualified support from President Bush, who said that it was unrealistic to expect a full Israeli withdrawal from land occupied during the 1967 war, and equally unrealistic for Palestinian refugees to expect to return 'home'. Predictably this caused complete outrage across the Arab world; tensions were further inflamed in April 2004 when the Israelis assassinated Dr al-Rantissi, Sheikh Yassin's successor, and warned that Yasser Arafat could be the next target. This provoked a violent response from Palestinian militants; the Israelis retaliated by launching an attack on the Rafah refugee camp in Gaza, killing some 40 people, including children.

Yasser Arafat appeared to be extending an olive branch when he told an Israeli newspaper that he recognized Israel's right to remain a Jewish state and was prepared to accept the return of only a fraction of the Palestinian refugees. This offer was unpopular with Palestinian militants, and there was no positive response from the Israelis.

Meanwhile the International Court of Justice at The Hague had been considering the legality of the West Bank security wall; the Palestinians were delighted when the court ruled (July 2004) that the barrier was illegal, and that the Israelis should demolish it and compensate the victims. However, Prime Minister Sharon rejected the court's decision, saying that Israel had a sacred right to fight terrorists in whatever ways were necessary. The Israelis showed further defiance with an announcement that they planned to build a new settlement near Jerusalem, which would surround Palestinian East Jerusalem and make it impossible for East Jerusalem to become the capital of a Palestinian state. This violated Israel's agreement in the 'road map' not to build any more settlements; the announcement provoked condemnation from the rest of the world, except the USA, which gave tacit approval.

The situation changed with the death of Yasser Arafat in December 2004. The Palestinian prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas (also known as Abu Mazen), who was the leader of Fatah, won a decisive victory in the election for a new president, taking about 70 per cent of the votes (January 2005). He was a moderate who had constantly opposed violence; consequently President Bush of the USA, who had refused to deal with Arafat, signalled his willingness to meet the new president, and urged both the Palestinians and Israel to reduce tension and move towards peace. Later in 2005 the Israelis obligingly withdrew their troops from Gaza, along with thousands of Jews who had settled in the territory. However, Israel still controlled the Gaza Strip's land borders as well as its territorial waters and its airspace, so that it was effectively isolated, except for its short frontier with Egypt.

By the end of 2005 Abbas was seen as weak and ineffective by all sides – Palestinians, Israelis and Americans. *In January 2006 Hamas won a majority in the Palestinian elections for the legislature, with 74 seats to 58 for the opposition* (mainly supporters of the more moderate Fatah). The Israelis announced that no further peace talks could take place

while ‘terrorists’ were in power. In July 2006 the Israelis unsuccessfully tried to destroy Hezbollah, which had just ambushed an Israeli patrol on their frontier with southern Lebanon (see Section 11.8 (d)). Meanwhile, the more moderate Palestinian party, Fatah, refused to accept the January election result and violence broke out; by the spring of 2007 something approaching a Palestinian civil war between Fatah and Hamas supporters seemed to be under way. There is evidence that the USA was financing Fatah and Abbas, who was still president, in the hope of destroying Hamas. Another complicating factor was that Egypt distrusted Hamas, which was an offshoot of the Muslim Brothers, Egypt’s largest opposition group to President Mubarak. By the end of 2007 Palestine was split in two: the West Bank ruled by Fatah, and the Gaza Strip ruled by Hamas. The two areas were separated by Israeli territory and communication between the two was often difficult (see Map 11.3). However, in November 2007, in an attempt to get the peace process moving again, Abbas met Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert in Annapolis (USA). But Hamas was not invited to take part in the talks, and so, not surprisingly, no progress was made.

Israel refused to negotiate with Hamas, and did all they could to destabilize the Hamas regime in Gaza, although they had been democratically elected. The blockade of Gaza, which had been intensified since Hamas took over, aimed to prevent the entry of goods of all types, including food, and to cut fuel supplies. Early in 2008 a group of aid agencies reported that the population of the strip were having to survive on less than a quarter of the volume of supplies they had been importing at the end of 2005. A six-month truce was agreed beginning in June 2008 – Hamas promised to stop firing rockets into Israel, while Israel undertook to ease its stranglehold on Gaza. However, by the end of 2008 the situation in Gaza had not improved; there was very little evidence of a relaxation in the blockade; in fact conditions were said to be worse than at any time since the Israeli occupation began in 1967. Fuel shortages and lack of spare parts were having a disastrous effect on treatment of sewage, water supply and medical facilities; in short, Gaza was in the grip of a humanitarian crisis. Even a retired general of the Israeli Defence Force (Gaza Division), Shmuel Zakai, was critical of his own government. He claimed that they had made a central error by failing to take advantage of the truce to improve the economic conditions of the Palestinians. ‘You cannot just land blows,’ he said, ‘leave the Palestinians in Gaza in the economic distress they’re in, and expect that Hamas will sit around and do nothing.’ The Israelis also violated the truce in November 2008 when troops entered Gaza and killed six members of Hamas. In response Hamas launched Qassam rockets and Grad missiles into Israel.

According to Henry Siegman, formerly a director of the American Jewish Congress, at this point Hamas ‘offered to extend the truce, but only on condition that Israel ended its blockade. Israel refused. It could have met its obligations to protect its citizens by agreeing to ease the blockade, but it didn’t even try.’ In fact, the opposite happened: the Israelis began a propaganda campaign against Hamas ‘terrorism’, and closed Gaza to journalists. *On 27 December 2008 they launched a major air attack on Gaza targeting weapons depots; a week later ground troops invaded the territory.* After 22 days the Israelis called a ceasefire. But damage from the aerial bombardment was indiscriminate and disastrous: 15 out of 27 hospitals were put out of action or destroyed, together with schools, police stations, mosques, factories and Hamas government buildings. About 10 000 small family farms were destroyed, which badly disrupted food supplies over the next few months. Out of 110 primary healthcare facilities, 43 were badly damaged. Altogether over 1000 Palestinians were killed and about 5000 injured; 50 000 were left homeless, half a million had no running water and a million were left without electricity. Much of the Gaza Strip was left in ruins. On the other side, 13 Israelis were killed. Amnesty International later confirmed that the Israelis had used white phosphorous shells made in the USA. These cause fires that are extremely difficult to extinguish: when the UN compound in Gaza City

was hit, the fires destroyed hundreds of tons of emergency food and medicines which were about to be distributed to hospitals and medical centres.

Following the ceasefire, the blockade of Gaza continued, although the Israelis did allow in some humanitarian medical aid. However, the Red Cross reported that the blockade was still damaging the economy and that there was a shortage of basic medical supplies. Israel justified the attacks and the continued blockade on the need to protect their people from rockets. But Henry Siegman claims that this is a lie: 'it cannot be said that Israel launched its assaults to protect its citizens from rockets. It did so to protect its right to continue the strangulation of Gaza's population. Everyone seems to have forgotten that Hamas declared an end to suicide bombings and rocket fire when it decided to join the Palestinian political process, and largely stuck to it for more than a year.'

The Israelis blithely ignored the mounting international criticism flooding in from most parts of the world (except from the USA), calling on them to ease or lift the blockade. In July 2010 British prime minister David Cameron warned: 'humanitarian goods and people must flow in both directions. Gaza cannot and must not be allowed to remain a prison camp'; to which the Israeli embassy in London retorted: 'the people of Gaza are the prisoners of the terrorist organisation Hamas. The situation in Gaza is the direct result of Hamas rules and priorities.' Eventually it was Egypt which relented and partially opened its frontier with Gaza, but only for people, not supplies. In February 2011 the UN reported that Israel had co-operated to some extent between January 2009 and June 2010 by allowing fuel and cooking gas into Gaza, but added that this had not resulted in any significant improvement in people's livelihoods.

Then in May 2011 there was a dramatic change in the situation: following months of protest demonstrations and increasing violence, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt resigned (see Section 12.7(c)). Not long before this, US president Obama had described him as 'a stalwart ally, in many respects, to the United States ... a force for stability and good' in the Middle East. Yet many people had viewed Mubarak as one of the most brutal dictators in the region. One of his main opponents was the Muslim Brotherhood, who had close associations with Hamas. Egypt immediately opened its border with Gaza completely. There was great rejoicing as the people of Gaza began to look forward to better times ahead. But this was somewhat premature: in November 2012 Israel launched a series of air attacks on Gaza, claiming that their action was in retaliation for hundreds of rockets recently fired from Gaza into Israel. Lasting for eight days, the Israeli attacks killed over 160 Palestinians, including many children, and destroyed several military sites in Gaza. Five Israelis were killed. Egypt's president, Mohamed Morsi, helped to broker a ceasefire. Both sides claimed victory, but there was still no commitment by Israel to end their blockade of Gaza. Until that point was reached, it seemed likely that Hamas would continue its rocket campaign.

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QUESTIONS

- 1 Why and with what results did the Arabs and Israelis fight the wars of 1967 and 1973?
- 2 'Terrorism and violence rather than peaceful diplomacy.' How far would you agree with this view of the activities of the PLO in the Middle East in the period 1973 to 1995?
- 3 How successful was President Nasser as leader of Egypt?
- 4 'The USA and the USSR intervened in the Middle East in the period 1956 to 1979 purely to preserve political and economic stability in the region.' How valid do you think this view is?
- 5 Assess the reasons why the Six-Day War of 1967 was followed by the Yom Kippur War only three years later.
- 6 To what extent have the violent actions of some Palestinians been the main obstacle to the establishment of a Palestinian state?

 There is a document question about the USA and the 1990–1 Gulf War on the website.