

The Tensions and Conflicts in the Middle East during the Cold War

After the United Nations partitioned and formed the Arab State of Palestine and the Jewish State of Israel, both the United States and the Soviet Union officially recognized Israel's existence. However, tensions between Arabs and Jews would often lead to conflict and war.

1945	World War II ends and the events of the Holocaust are made public
1947	The United Nations partitions Palestine between Jews and Arabs
May 1948	The withdrawal of Great Britain from the region takes effect and Israel declares itself an independent nation
May 1948	The United States and the Soviet Union officially recognize the State of Israel
May 1948	Six neighboring Arab nations invade Israel. (Arab-Israeli War). Israel defeats its invaders, gaining large areas of Arab lands and causing over 700,000 Arabs to become refugees.
1956	The Suez Canal is nationalized, taken over by the Egyptian government. Egypt closes the canal to Israeli shipping. Supported by British and French forces, Israel invades Egypt (Suez Crisis). The United Nations sends an emergency force to the Egyptian side of the Egypt-Israel border. Israel withdraws and Egypt reopens the canal
1967	Israel wins the Six Day War against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria gaining significant areas of land.
1967	Eight Arab nations meet and agree on the Khartoum Resolution that expresses their stance against the State of Israel. "No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it."
1973	The Yom Kippur War is started by Egypt and Syria. Israel defeats its attackers and the United States help negotiate a cease-fire agreement.

In 1964, The **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)** was formed with the goal of **self-rule** for the Arab Palestinians and to end the presence of Israel in the Middle East. One of the group's leaders was **Yasser Arafat** who helped coordinate guerilla and terrorist attacks on Israel.

In the early 1990's, Arafat spoke at the United Nations declaring the desire for peace in the region. This led to the **Oslo Accords in 1993** however peace did not last long.

On September 13, 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Negotiator Mahmoud Abbas signed a Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, commonly referred to as the "Oslo Accord," at the White House. Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, and the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist in peace. Both sides agreed that a Palestinian Authority (PA) would be established and assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a five-year period. Then, permanent status talks on the issues of borders, refugees, and Jerusalem would be held. While President Bill Clinton's administration played a limited role in bringing the Oslo Accord into being, it would invest vast amounts of time and resources in order to help Israel and the Palestinians implement the agreement. By the time Clinton left office, however, the peace process had run aground, and a new round of Israeli-Palestinian violence had begun.

Source: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/oslo>

In 1977, **Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat** visited **Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin**. In 1978, **President Jimmy Carter** tried to further peace talks by inviting both men to Washington, D.C. and then hold talks at the president’s retreat in Maryland called Camp David. The three men worked on a peace treaty known as the **Camp David Accords**. The two Middle Eastern leaders signed the treaty in 1979 but other Arab nations still refused to recognize Israel. **Sadat was later assassinated** by Muslims opposed to his goal for peace.



Anwar el-Sadat, Jimmy Carter and Menachem Begin

Other American Peace-Keeping Efforts in the Middle East

President Bill Clinton continued to try and keep peace in the Middle East after the Camp David Accords but suicide bombers, cross-border attacks and other acts of violence delayed any peacekeeping efforts.

President George W. Bush hosted a **Middle East Peace Conference** in Annapolis, Maryland in November 2007. **Israel’s Prime Minister Ehud Olmert**, **Palestinian President Mahamoud Abbas**, and representatives from 49 other nations were in attendance. Despite promises, it did not have a long-term success as the region continued to see violence and disagreements between factions.

President Barack Obama sent his **Secretary of State Hillary Clinton** to the Middle East on several occasions. Both Obama and Clinton were staunch supporters of Israel,

President Donald Trump indicated his support for Israel, sending his son-in-law, **Jared Kushner** on multiple trips to Israel.

The United States foreign policy clearly supports Israel and the nation’s safety and security are vital to America.



Proxy Wars were common in the Middle East starting during the Cold War as the United States and the Soviet Union tried to influence political power within one country over another. **A proxy war is an armed conflict between two states or non-state actors which act on the instigation or on behalf of other parties that are not directly involved in the hostilities.** The current proxy war in the Middle East between Saudi Arabia and Iran is an example of the destructive impact of proxy wars. The conflict has resulted in the Syrian Civil War, the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the current civil war in Yemen, and the re-emergence of the Taliban.

The importance of Oil from the Middle East

Peace in the Middle East does not cover only Arab-Israeli relations, it is also directly related to the key resource of the region, **oil**. Over 65% of the world's oil reserves are in the Middle East. The United States is still dependent on oil from the region. During the Cold War, American foreign policy revolved around protecting its interests because of the oil, a policy still in force today.

Iran - In 1954 the Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddegh, tried to nationalize the country's foreign-owned oil industry. The **CIA** secretly arranged to overthrow his government and put the **Shah** to the throne of Iran, **Mohammad Reza Pahlavi** in power. This helped American's supply of oil but it would later fall apart with the take-over by **Shia cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini**, the leader of the Iranian revolution, who first came to political prominence in 1963 when he led opposition to the Shah and his program of reforms known as the "White Revolution."

The Iran-Iraq War in 1980 started when Iraqi troops invaded Iran. Iraqi President **Saddam Hussein** wanted to control the oil-rich region on the western border that was disputed by the two nations. When both sides began to attack oil tankers in the Persian Gulf, the United States and other nations sent warships to the region to secure the shipping lanes. The United Nations brokered a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq in 1988 but the outcome of this conflict would eventually lead to the **Persian Gulf War** between Iraq and the United States in 1990.

Also during the Cold War, **religious and political turmoil increased tensions** in this unstable region.

The Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979 was when the Islamic fundamentalists overthrew the Shah's regime. The Shah was suffering from terminal cancer and **President Jimmy Carter** allowed him to get treatment in America. In response, rebels stormed the **U.S. Embassy in Tehran** and took 50 Americans hostage. The siege **lasted 444 days**, one that ended once the new President, **Ronald Reagan**, was sworn in at his inauguration.

The Civil War in Lebanon between Christians and Muslims called for an international peacekeeping force to enter the country. In October 1983, terrorists drove a truck filled with explosives into a U.S. Marine barracks, killing over 300 people. In 1984, President Reagan admitted the peace-keeping mission was a failure and withdrew the American troops assigned to the region.

Terrorism is still a major foreign policy concern in the Middle East. Islamic Fundamentalist groups such as **Al Qaeda**, **ISIS** and the **Taliban** were formed because of the Cold War. The attack on the United States on **September 11, 2001**, would be a tragic event in American history caused by unrest in the Middle East during the Cold War.