

Q. Write the history of the foundation of the state of Israel.

The area known as the Middle East has been one of the world's most troubled regions. The Middle East consists of Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Turkey, the Yemen republics, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. 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. It also produced over a third of the world's oil supplies and the European nations heavily dependent on oil supplies from the Middle East wanted to make sure that the oil-producing states had friendly governments which would sell them oil cheaply. The Middle East contains the small Jewish state of Israel which was set up by the United Nations in 1948 in Palestine. The creation of the state of Israel in Palestine, an area belonging to Palestinian Arabs, outraged Arab opinion throughout the world and led to protracted conflict between the Arabs and the state of Israel.

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 their homeland, by the Romans. 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. 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. The father of modern Zionism was Leon Pinsker, a Jew from Russia, a nation where anti-Semitism had become state policy. Pinsker published in 1882 a pamphlet *Auto-Emancipation: An Appeal to His People by a Russian Jew*. His appeal was instrumental in creating the *Lovers of Zion*, an organization responsible for launching the first wave of emigrants to Palestine. At the time, the region contained virtually no Jews. But by the end of the 1880s, however, the Jewish population was 30,000-40,000 about 5 percent of the total population. Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jew, became the best-known publicist of the Zionist cause. In 1897 he published a pamphlet entitled *The Jewish State*. The problem however was that Palestine was inhabited by Arabs who were understandably alarmed at the prospect of losing their land to the Jews.

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. But the Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany after 1933 caused a flood of refugees and by 1940 about half the population of Palestine was Jewish. In 1937 the British Peel Commission proposed dividing Palestine into two separate states, one Arab and one Jewish, but the Arabs rejected the idea. The Second World War made the situation much worse as there were hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Hitler's Europe desperately looking for somewhere to go. The Jews after all that their race had suffered in the hands of the Nazis were determined to fight for their 'national home'. Britain weakened by the strain of the Second World War felt unable to cope with the problem. It 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. The British withdrew all their

troops although fighting was already going on between the Jews and Arabs over the division of Palestine. 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. 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. But the Arabs did not regard this struggle as final as they regarded this war only first round in the fight to destroy Israel and liberate Palestine.

The Suez War of 1956

Colonel Nasser the new ruler of Egypt was aggressively in favour of Arab unity and independence. He organized guerrilla fighters known as fedayeen ("self-sacrificers") to carry out sabotage and murder inside Israel. 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. But Nasser refused and insisted that all British troops should withdraw immediately and the treaty ended. He also signed an arms deal with Czechoslovakia in 1955 for Russian troops and weapons and Russian military experts went to train the Egyptian army. Egypt thus became part of the Cold War. The Americans outraged at Egypt's link with Russia cancelled a promised grant of \$46 million towards the building of a dam at Aswan (July 1956) their intention being to force Nasser to abandon his new links with the communists. A crisis point however was reached when Nasser immediately retaliated by nationalizing the Suez Canal, Secret talks now took place between the British, French and Israelis and a plan was hatched for Israel to invade Egypt. The attack however 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 demanded immediate ceasefire. With the pressure of world opinion against them Britain, France and Israel agreed to withdraw.

The Six-Day War of 1967

In 1967 the Arab states joined together again in a determined attempt to destroy Israel. The lead was taken by Iraq, Syria and Egypt. But the Israeli air strikes destroyed most of the Egyptian force. It was a humiliating defeat for the Arab states who made another attempt to destroy Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

The Yom Kippur War of 1973

Anwar Sadat the President of Egypt since Nasser's death together with Syria decided to attack Israel again. The 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. The USA and the USSR intervened and a plan of ceasefire was accepted by both the Arabs and Israel.

Camp David and the Egyptian-Israeli peace

President Sadat had become convinced that Israel could not be destroyed by force. The Israelis in turn were suffering from economic problems as a result of their enormous defense expenditure. When Sadat offered to go to Israel for peace talks they accepted his offer. 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). As a result the state of war that had existed between Egypt and Israel since 1948 was now ended. The treaty however was condemned by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and most other Arab states. Sadat was assassinated by extremist Muslim soldiers though his successor Hosni Mubarak bravely announced that he would continue the Camp David agreement.

The Oslo Accords

In the meantime Yasser Arafat the PLO leader agreed to talks with the Israeli government. 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.

Most of the world's leaders welcomed this brave attempt to bring peace to the troubled region but once again extremists on both sides thwarted peace attempts so that the peace process between the two countries still remains in doubt.