

## Intractable Dispute: The History of the Israel-Arab Conflict

The course surveys the main events, perceptions and causes of the Israel-Arab dispute. Readings and class lectures and discussions will present essential facts and interpretations about the dispute – the course will provide information needed to gain an understanding of the conflict's twists and turns, starting in Ottoman-controlled Palestine at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process at the start of this century. Viewpoints characteristic of all antagonists in the conflict will be considered in depth, as will insights and interpretations offered by outside mediators and scholars. Paper assignments and examinations will ask students to address critically why the Israeli-Arab dispute has continued for over a century, and why some participants and outsiders have suggested that it could be irresolvable.

The course is open to all students, and will provide general background information about nationalist movements, overviews of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, and basic information about relevant Middle East sociopolitical contexts.

The course will start with a discussion of population groups and settlement patterns in Ottoman-controlled Palestine prior to the arrival of nationalist (early Zionist) Jewish groups in the 1880s. It will consider ways in which the growth of the Zionist-oriented population of Palestine, the "New Yishuv," became intertwined in conflicts with Arab groups. Concurrently, we will study the development of Palestinian nationalism, and discuss how it emerged both in the context of political transformations in the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East (particularly in the World War I era), and also in response to Zionist activities on the ground. Jewish-Arab relations under the British Mandate in Palestine will be studied, with a focus on the causes and characters of the two major uprisings in this period, in 1929, and 1936-1939.

A major focus of the course will be the 1948 war, its various phases and repercussions. We will study major battles and turning points in the war, both in its early "civil war" stage (focused mainly on skirmishes between Yishuv residents and Palestinians), and its transformation after mid-May 1948 into a fight between the new Jewish state and armies from neighboring Arab countries. The origins and facts of the mass exodus of Palestinians in 1948 will be studied in detail. By relating to literary texts and film, we will also consider how two very different interpretations of the 1948 experience – the first regarding the war as the fulfillment of historical promise, redemption after the Holocaust, and a virtually miraculous victory, the second perceiving the tragic defeat and mass exodus of Arab villagers and townspeople as a "Naqba" catastrophe – have become the basis of two different narratives of the Israeli-Arab dispute.

Attempts to negotiate solutions to the evolving dispute in the 1950s and early 1960s will be discussed, along with the issue of violent Arab border crossings (fedayeen attacks). We will study 1) the international background, and causes and results, of the 1956 Sinai campaign, 2) the rise of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, 3) Israel's military government policies toward its Arab population through the early 1960s, and 4) the background of the 1967 Six Day War.

How did Israel's sweeping triumph in the 1967 war change the course of its dispute with Palestinians and Arab states? We will address this question by considering how Jewish and Arab leaders and movements responded after June 1967 to significantly altered geopolitical circumstances. The course will discuss ways in which Arab states and intellectuals wrestled with the demonstration of Israeli power in the Six Day War; and we will examine the rise of religious Zionist groups, and the origins of settlement movements, after the 1967 war.

The course will consider how one Arab leader, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, dramatically transformed the nature of the Israeli-Arab dispute. It will examine Sadat's calculations and maneuvers as he pressed to overturn the humiliation of the 1967 defeat, and initiated a daring surprise attack against Israel in October 1973. This Yom Kippur War was a major turning point in the dispute – the course will consider whether the war can be considered the last example of a war between Israel and Arab states, and a transition to conflict between Israel and popular uprisings and religious/political movements. The aftermath of the 1973 war will be considered in detail. We will discuss fateful decisions reached by Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to negotiate and sign the Camp David peace accords between Israel and Egypt at the end of the 1970s, and consider whether ways in which this first, famous Camp David summit might have set a precedent for future peaceful settlement of the dispute.

Since this hopeful movement of the Israel-Egypt peace accord, Israel has been involved in two wars in Lebanon, and two mass "intifada" Palestinian uprisings. The course will consider Israel's aims and policies during the first Lebanon War, and ways in which the siege on Beirut, along with the Sabra and Shatilla massacre, became turning points in terms of domestic Israeli attitudes toward the dispute, and worldwide perceptions of it. The two intifadas will be discussed in detail, with a view toward ways in which they reflected transitions in Palestinian politics and society, continuing debates about Israeli policy in territories occupied after the 1967 war, and peace initiatives starting with the Madrid conference and then the 1990s Oslo peace Process.

What were the Oslo Process' intents? How did it change political and social realities on the ground? What were its inherent weaknesses, and how have its setbacks been interpreted over the past decade? Was the collapse of the Oslo peace process during the second intifada, at the start of the new millennium, a harbinger of yet another century of Israeli-Arab conflict? The course will conclude by discussing various pessimistic and optimistic scenarios and interpretations regarding the present and future of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the Middle East.

### **Course Units and Readings:**

Week 1: The origins of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism

David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (pages to be announced)

Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, pp. 119-177

Baruch Kimmerling, Joel Migdal, *Palestinians: The Making of a People*, 36-64

Week 2: Roots of Conflict: Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine  
Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete* (pages to be announced)  
Kimmerling and Migdal, pp. 96-126

Week 3: the 1948 War  
Benny Morris: *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (pages to be announced)

Weeks 4 and 5: Implications and Interpretations of the 1948 War: Independence War versus Naqba  
Benny Morris: *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (pages to be announced)  
Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine*, pp. 56-114  
Readings from: Leon Uris, *Exodus*; Elias Khoury, *Gate of the Sun*

Week Six: Fedayeen Border Crossings, the 1956 Sinai Campaign and its International Context, Israel and Palestinians before the Six Day War  
Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-1999*, pp. 259-302  
Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955-1957* (pages to be announced)

Week Seven: The 1967 Six Day War and its Aftermath  
Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (pages to be announced)  
Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (pages to be announced)

Week Eight: Disputes about the 1967 territories, the Yom Kippur War, the first Lebanon War  
Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 387-444, 494-561

Weeks Nine and Ten: Peacemaking efforts: Achievements and Limits  
(for Week Nine: Egypt-Israel Camp David Summit): Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 444-494  
(for Week Ten: Oslo Peace Process)  
Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace* 88-137, 650-712, 759-780  
Robert Malley, Hussein Agha, "Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors, *New York Review of Books*, August 9 2001