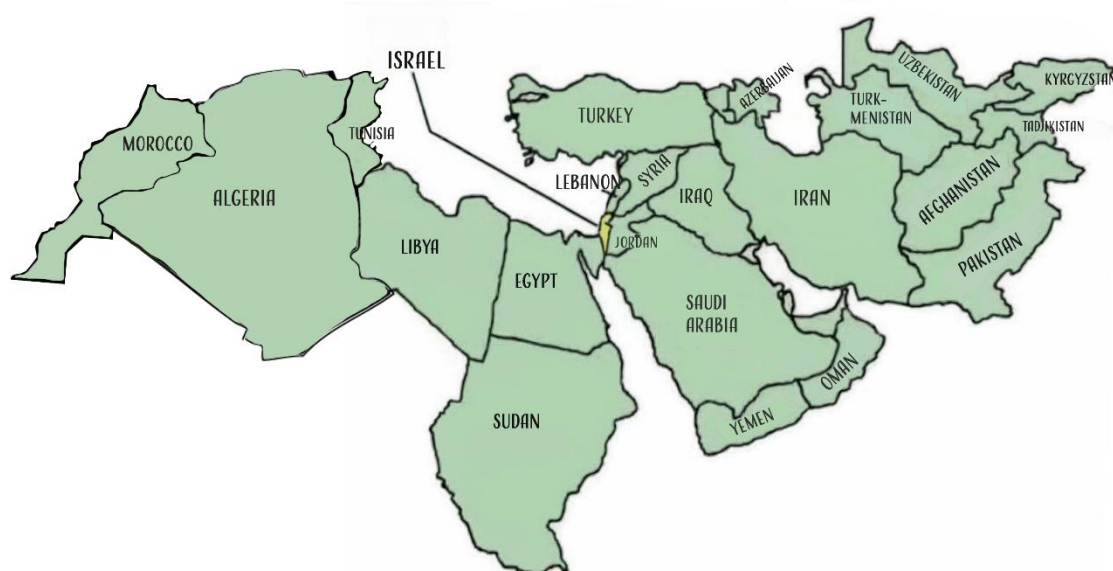




Factsheets - The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Association of Former Jewish Students of Belgium and
Supporters

(Association des Anciens Etudiants Juifs de Belgique et
Sympathisants - AAEJBS)



Following the tragic events of October 7, 2023, and their international repercussions, Belgian society has witnessed a worrying rise in antisemitism, often fueled by confusion of terms and by the emotional importation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this context, teachers, educators, and journalists find themselves on the front line, often unprepared to face the complexity of the issues involved.

This document offers clear, factual, and contextualized information sheets, written by a citizen collective, to provide historical, political, and semantic reference points. Aiming to avoid any partisan intent, it aims to equip those who wish to understand, teach, and sustain an informed debate within a democratic framework.

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PREFACE

The terrorist attack and massacres carried out on October 7, 2023, by Hamas and other militant groups in Israel, followed by the Israeli military response in Gaza, sent shockwaves around the world. In Belgium, as elsewhere, these events have acted as a catalyst or trigger for a troubling phenomenon: the emotional importation of the conflict, accompanied by an explosion of antisemitic acts and statements, often concealed within systematic criticism of Israel.

This toxic climate has spared neither schools nor universities nor the media. The latter face an overwhelming flow of information, often uncontrolled or even uncontrollable. Teachers, as well as students, are confronted with growing polarization. They are implicitly or explicitly asked to take a position on a conflict that goes far beyond them, one whose origins and dynamics they often do not fully understand, and whose very terms, Zionism, anti-Zionism, apartheid, colonization, genocide, famine, etc., are used vaguely, are often distorted, creating a mix of confusion, emotion, and misinformation.

Faced with this situation, our approach is to offer a tool for understanding: a series of informative sheets based on facts and organized around what might be termed ‘frequently asked questions’. Their aim is to place the issues within their historical, geopolitical, and semantic contexts, without ignoring the complexity of the conflict or falling into ideological simplification.

These sheets are primarily intended to provide informational support for those - teachers, educators, and even journalists - who wish to understand and transmit knowledge, guided by intellectual rigor and democratic responsibility.

To prepare them, we consulted extensive documentation (see bibliography in the annex), developed a glossary of key terms, and included historical maps illustrating the territorial evolution of the region. The sheets were reviewed by independent historians concerned with accuracy and balance.

We believe that education and access to nuanced, reliable information are essential tools for defusing tensions, avoiding conflation, and restoring calm and reasoned discourse in the public sphere, particularly in schools and the media, two areas that play a central democratic role as spaces for transmission, questioning, and the cultivation of critical thinking.

Who are we?

We are a collective of citizens, members of the Association of Former Jewish Students of Belgium and Supporters (AAEJBS).

Our association was formed in the days following October 7, 2023, in response to manifestations of hatred directed against Jews. The fact that such demonstrations appeared as early as the day after the Hamas attacks, before any Israeli military reaction, convinced us that a preexisting hostility, rooted in antisemitism, was being expressed through virulent anti-Zionism.

But we do not believe that everything stems from hatred alone: ignorance, confusion of terms, and raw emotion also play a major role in fueling tensions. That is why we wanted to offer accessible, well-documented intellectual tools that respect the complexity of the conflict and contribute, modestly, to a better understanding of the issues underlying this long-standing, still-sensitive conflict that deeply affects Belgian society.

We hope these sheets will serve as a useful resource for teachers, trainers, educators, journalists, and all those with the responsibility to inform, explain, or simply understand in a tense climate. To understand does not mean to justify: it means to use the right words, to place facts in their context, and to resist the temptation of simplification or propaganda.

AAEJBS

April 2025

ADDENDUM

We are, of course, aware of and sensitive to the various events that have taken place in the Near and Middle East since the completion of these sheets. Contradictory and unverifiable information circulates about these developments. Including such information would go against the guiding principle we adopted from the start: to limit the content of the sheets to verifiable and well-documented historical facts.

October 2025



1. What happened on October 7, 2023, and afterwards?

On October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, brutally massacring about 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages. Israel responded with a large-scale and destructive military offensive in Gaza, targeting Hamas infrastructure. Hamas used Gazan civilians as human shields, worsening the humanitarian crisis and causing thousands of deaths. The conflict spread regionally, involving Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran. Internationally, the events triggered both condemnation of Israel and pro-Hamas demonstrations, accompanied by a sharp rise in antisemitism.

On that day, Hamas carried out a major, long-planned assault against Israel. The systems meant to secure the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip, watchtowers, cameras, smart fences, were completely neutralized. Over 3,000 Hamas fighters, supported by other armed groups (around 6,000 combatants in total), crossed the border and invaded southern Israel.

The attackers targeted nearby towns, villages (including kibbutzim), and military bases. There, they carried out extremely brutal massacres: civilians, men, women, and children, were murdered, burned alive, raped, sometimes in front of their relatives. These acts were filmed with body cameras, the footage instantly shared on social networks and sometimes sent directly to victims' families using the victims' own phones. A similar massacre took place at the Nova music festival. In total, about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed, and 251 hostages, including men, women, and children, were abducted, mistreated, and taken to Gaza.

Hamas's success, military, psychological, and political, was made possible by several factors. Israeli authorities had considered such a large-scale attack unlikely, despite prior warnings. The government's attention was elsewhere: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, leading an ultranationalist and religious coalition, was facing massive weekly demonstrations against his judicial reform project, which aimed to weaken the Supreme Court, Israel's only institutional check on executive power. Meanwhile, much of the Israeli army was deployed in the West Bank to protect Israeli settlements. On October 7, the religious festival of *Simchat Torah* was being celebrated, and many soldiers were on leave, delaying the military response and rescue efforts.

In the wake of the massacres, Israel's retaliation was intensive. Hamas, entrenched in a vast network of tunnels running throughout Gaza, nicknamed the "Gaza Metro" and estimated at 500–700 km long, used these tunnels to move, store weapons, and plan attacks. Some tunnels were located under schools or hospitals. According to some

estimates, up to 40% of international aid intended for Gaza's civilians was diverted to build or supply this network.

The Israeli army first conducted airstrikes targeting rocket launch sites, then launched a ground offensive involving tens of thousands of soldiers. Gazan civilians, used as human shields, were not allowed by Hamas to take shelter in the tunnels. Displaced according to combat zones announced by the Israeli army, and with Hamas controlling fuel, food and travel, they faced extremely harsh living conditions. Human losses in Gaza have been very high: tens of thousands of dead and wounded, according to Gaza's Hamas-run Ministry of Health, while humanitarian aid entering Gaza has reached the population with great difficulty.

To this unprecedentedly violent war was added a prolonged hostage crisis. Hamas had abducted 251 people, including Israeli civilians (Jews, Arabs, and Bedouins), soldiers, and foreign workers. Some were already dead when captured; others died or were murdered in captivity, from lack of medical care, mistreatment, torture, or sexual violence. Through several exchange operations, hostages were released in return for Palestinian prisoners (each time in much greater numbers), bringing the total number of hostages released or returned, alive or dead, to 192. As of April 2025, 59 people remain in captivity, about thirty of whom are believed to be dead.

Testimonies from hostages freed in early 2025 reveal extremely harsh detention conditions. Some reported having seen, in Gaza's streets, food supplies that contradicted the famine narrative broadcast by Hamas, suggesting that part of the humanitarian aid had been diverted by armed groups.

Since October 8, 2023, the conflict has spread throughout the region. Israel has faced attacks from Hezbollah in Lebanon and from the Houthis in Yemen, both allies of Hamas supported by Iran, which itself launched a direct attack on Israel in April 2024. In northern Israel, areas targeted by Hezbollah were evacuated, displacing 80,000 people before the Israeli army intervened in Lebanon to stop the group's rocket fire.

The war has also had major international repercussions. While images of the atrocities committed on October 7 circulated worldwide, demonstrations in support of Hamas erupted in several countries. Under the guise of anti-Zionism, some statements supporting the "Palestinian cause" denied or downplayed the crimes committed by Hamas and its allies, conflating Israelis, Zionists, and Jews. This led to a wave of antisemitic acts targeting Jewish individuals and sites across the world.

Maps: C17, C18, C19

2. Is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict political or religious?

In the early 19th century, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was originally political, linked to the arrival of Jewish immigrants and the fear among Arabs of being dispossessed. The distinction between political and religious authority was blurred, and the conflict later took on a religious dimension under the influence of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. The creation of Israel in 1948, based on the principle of equality, struggled to fully integrate all minorities. Today, in both Israel and the Palestinian territories, identity-based claims and religious extremism complicate peace efforts between the two sides.

For Westerners, “political power” generally means the authority to enact laws or rules that apply to all citizens within a given territory, while “religious power” refers to rules established for the followers of a specific faith.

In the early 19th century, Palestine (a name given by the Romans) was part of a larger region known as *Bilad al-Sham* (present-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan) under the Ottoman Empire. In the West, Palestine was commonly referred to as “southern Syria” or the “Holy Land”, and by Jews as *Eretz Israel* (“Land of Israel” in Hebrew). Political organization in the region was clan-based and determined mainly by economic power and religion.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was at first largely political. The Arab inhabitants of Palestine perceived, from the late 19th century onward, the arrival of Jewish immigrants as a threat. The first uprisings against Jewish settlements were incited by educated Arab Christian elites. The lands sold to Jews belonged to large Turkish and Arab landowners, but the Arab tenant farmers who worked them felt dispossessed of “their lands” when Jews began cultivating them directly.

Traditionally, Muslims did not distinguish between political and religious authority. Jews lived under the *dhimma* system, which assigned them a lower civic status. The abolition of the *dhimma* by the Ottoman authorities in the mid-19th century, suddenly granting Jews a more equal status, was poorly received by Muslims in many Ottoman-ruled territories.

The Zionist Jews who emigrated from Europe to Palestine at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries were quite different from those already living in the region (mainly in Jerusalem). The Zionist Jews were generally less religious and sought national emancipation, as confirmed by the *Balfour Declaration* obtained from the British

government by the Zionist movement, statement that mentions “viewing favourably the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”.

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, representing the Arabs to the British Mandate authorities, sought to bring the conflict onto a religious level by presenting himself as the defender of Muslim holy sites (gathered on the Esplanade of the Mosques/Temple Mount) against Jews asserting their right to access the Western Wall. This led to riots and the massacre of Jews in Hebron in 1929. Before and during the Second World War, the Grand Mufti aligned himself with Nazi Germany and lived in Berlin.

As Britain failed to restore peace between the Jewish and Arab communities in Mandatory Palestine, the United Nations adopted, on November 27, 1947, a plan to partition Palestine into two states. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was established. In its Declaration of Independence, it is stated that Israel “will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex”, an ideal that has been difficult to fully achieve in practice. Legal equality among all citizens does exist, but this principle was recently challenged by the passage of a 2018 law declaring Israel the nation-state of the Jewish people.

It is important to note that members of religious minorities, while accepting life in a Jewish state, mainly seek recognition of their cultural, religious, and linguistic specificities. At the same time, socio-economic inequalities and elements of discrimination persist toward non-Jewish Israeli citizens, who nonetheless make up nearly 20% of the total population. However, their situation has improved significantly since 1948, notably in higher education and public-sector employment.

In recent years, radical religious groups, both Jewish (religious parties within Israel’s government) and Muslim (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, etc.), have become increasingly involved in the conflict. Combined with nationalism, this growing religious influence makes any peace agreement ever more difficult to achieve, at least for now.

3. What does “importing the conflict” mean, as mentioned in the media?

Since October 7, 2023, the Israel-Hamas conflict has had a strong impact on Belgium, triggering intense media and political reactions. The conflict has been instrumentalized, overshadowing domestic issues. It has divided society, particularly on social media and within schools and universities, where tensions and pressure have multiplied. Freedom of expression has been invoked to justify demonstrations and petitions, sometimes at the expense of the academic climate. One of the most serious consequences has been a surge in antisemitism, creating a growing sense of insecurity among the majority of Belgian Jews.

“Importing a conflict” refers to the emergence of unrest in a given country in reaction to a conflict occurring elsewhere, even though the local situation is not directly related. This phenomenon can be intensified by the amplification provided by audiovisual media, the press, and social networks.

For the purposes of this document, it refers, since October 7, 2023, to the importation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (or, more precisely, the Israel-Hamas conflict, now often referred to as the “war in Gaza”) into many Western countries, and particularly into Belgium. The amount of information related to the fighting zones has increased to an exceptional degree. Day after day, hour after hour, we have been exposed, through multiple channels, to a continuous flow of reports on this topic, not always verified and sometimes false.

During the 2024 election period in Belgium, most political parties made this conflict a disproportionate campaign theme, ignoring the main concerns of voters and overshadowing crucial national issues, such as Belgium’s own social challenges, the consequences of climate change, or other global conflicts that cause as much or even more human suffering (for example, the systemic persecution of the Uyghurs in China, the civil wars in Sudan and Yemen, or the war in Ukraine).

Having become a daily source of partisan debate, both in public spaces and on social networks, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to provoke strong and often irrational positions, fueling community-based activism. Demonstrations of support are held for one side, while others express solidarity with the opposite side.

In some schools, even primary ones, pupils are pressured by their peers to take a stand on a conflict they know little about. In support of the Palestinian cause, and at times of

Hamas itself, universities have been occupied, sometimes in an aggressive manner, and not only by students. Petitions initiated by students and professors have forced university leaders to negotiate with them, all in the name of freedom of expression.

The most harmful and damaging consequence has been the sharp rise in expressions of rejection and hatred toward Jews in Belgium, what can only be described as unrestrained and violent antisemitism. According to a survey published in *Le Soir* on July 8, 2024, eight out of ten Belgian Jews reported that their daily lives have been deeply affected since October 7, 2023. Jews have, in effect, been treated as collectively responsible for the war in Gaza.

Brussels and Antwerp, home to a large Jewish community, have been particularly affected by this resurgence of antisemitism since October 7, 2023. UNIA, Belgium's independent public body for combating discrimination, reported a dramatic increase in antisemitic incidents between October 7 and December 31, 2023, thirty times higher than during the same period in 2022. The organization *Antisémitisme.be* recorded a 250% increase in such incidents.

Thousands of antisemitic graffiti and slurs have appeared on public property, walls, and houses inhabited by Jews. Graves in Jewish sections of cemeteries have been desecrated, as have 'Holocaust memorial paving stones' (usually embedded in the pavement with the name of a victim of Nazism); insults have been hurled at Jewish citizens, verbal altercations have taken place, sometimes accompanied by physical violence: for example, the co-president of the Union of Jewish Students of Belgium was violently attacked in May 2024 on the campus of the Free University of Brussels, and other students are regularly targeted. During the annual Women's Rights March on March 8, 2024, in Brussels, demonstrators who sought to include all women, including Israeli women, in their denunciation of rape were labeled "Zionists", surrounded in a threatening manner, and forced to leave the procession (similar incidents occurred again in 2025).

The importation of the conflict has made Belgian Jews increasingly fearful of expressing or displaying their identity.

4. How is the notion of Genocide used in the current debate?

The term *genocide* was coined in 1943 and legally recognized in 1948. It refers to the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Historical examples include the massacres of the Armenians, the European Jews, and the Tutsis of Rwanda. Concerning the war in Gaza, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), has not upheld the accusation of genocide against Israel but has called on Israel to prevent any such acts and to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid. The war waged by Israel is directed against Hamas, not against civilians, despite the heavy human toll and international criticism.

The term was created in 1943 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-born Jewish jurist whose family was largely murdered during the Holocaust. It was first used in an official document in 1945, in the indictment of Nazi war criminals at Nuremberg, though the tribunal ultimately preferred to prosecute under other charges, such as “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity”. It was not until 1948 that the term entered the vocabulary of international law. On December 9, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.

A genocide is a deliberate, premeditated, and systematic criminal act whose intention is to “destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.” The word combines the Greek root *genos* (race or people) with the Latin suffix *-cide* (from *caedere*, to kill), meaning the planned or systematically organized extermination of a people, killing human beings because they belong to a specific ethnic or religious group.

What defines a genocide is the deliberate intent and decision to physically exterminate a substantial portion of a targeted group, without any intention of negotiation or possibility of truce. A genocide is less a matter of numbers than of proportion. In 1904, in Namibia, then a German colony, the Germans killed 65,000 Herero people, about 80% of their entire population. Similarly, in 1915, 80% of the Armenians were murdered by the Young Turks. Today only about 60,000 Armenians remain in Turkey, compared to two million in 1914. During the Second World War, 85% of Jews living under Nazi occupation were exterminated. In 1994, 84% of the Tutsi population was wiped out in Rwanda.

What about Gaza? Following the massacres carried out by Hamas in southern Israel on October 7, 2023, Israel entered the Gaza Strip. The ICJ, petitioned by South Africa on charges of genocide in Gaza, issued its ruling in January 2024. At no point did the Court accuse Israel of genocide. Instead, it called on Israel to prevent any potential “acts of genocide” and to “take immediate measures” to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to

the civilian population. This decision was aimed at protecting Gazan civilians affected by continuous Israeli bombardments, particularly before the entry of ground troops.

This is an armed conflict between the Israeli army and Hamas, not between Israel and the Palestinian civilian population. The primary responsibility for this conflict lies with the heavily armed terrorist militia that committed the massacres of October 7. Despite the intensity of its strikes, Israel has tried to limit civilian casualties in one of the most densely populated regions in the world.

In most cases, the Israeli army warned civilians ahead of planned attacks, while Hamas militants prevented them from fleeing or taking refuge in the tunnels used by fighters themselves. The network of tunnels built by Hamas cover some 500 km. There would be 1,300 underground passages with thousands of entrances or access wells.

When humanitarian aid managed to reach the area, a large part of it was diverted (and continues to be) by Hamas militants.

During a ceasefire Israel facilitated a vaccination campaign for Gazan children during a polio outbreak. This does not suggest that Israel had intention to commit genocide.

5. Is Israel a Colonial State? What do the facts show?

The State of Israel is viewed as illegitimate by much of the Muslim world, which considers Palestine to be a sacred land of Islam.

Israel's creation was a political project aiming to establish a national home for the Jewish people, a goal that had raised legitimate concern among Arabs. After 1948 and the 1967 war, Israel occupied new territories. The Oslo Accords recognized the Palestinian Authority, yet Israeli settlements in the West Bank have continued to expand. This ongoing colonization jeopardizes the creation of a Palestinian state, although a withdrawal remains possible.

Israel is often perceived as illegitimate by most Muslims and by part of international public opinion. It is even described as colonial and is compared to the invasions of the Crusades. For many Muslims around the world, the idea of a non-Muslim, specifically Jewish, state exercising sovereignty over a *land of Islam*, and over Jerusalem (*Al-Quds* in Arabic), the third holiest site in Islam, is unacceptable.

However, no colonial intent preceded the creation of the State of Israel. Every colony implies the existence of a “metropole”, and the Jews had none. Those who settled in Palestine in the 19th and 20th centuries did not come to exploit local labor or natural resources. Nevertheless, the political project that motivated these new arrivals, the establishment of a Jewish homeland, understandably worried the local Arab population (see “Who Lived in Palestine Until the End of the First World War?” - Q7).

Clashes soon broke out between Jews and Arabs, intensifying during the British Mandate and culminating in Israel's birth in 1948. That event was immediately followed by a war declared by five Arab states and local Arab militias. Their defeat led to the annexation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem by Transjordan, while the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian administration until the Six-Day War in 1967, initiated by Egypt with the support of Syria and Jordan. After that war, these territories were occupied by Israel, and Jerusalem was reunified and annexed. A religious ultranationalist movement then began to dream of a “Greater Israel”, an Israel as described in the Bible, while the desire of the majority of Israelis at that time was to exchange “the land for peace”.

The 1993 Oslo Accords led Israel to recognize the Palestinian Authority, headed by Yasser Arafat, in the West Bank and Gaza. In 2005, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, forcibly evacuating some 8,000 Jewish residents who had settled there since the 1967 war. Gaza has not been formally occupied since then but remains under Israeli military control, as Israel, together with Egypt, imposed a blockade after Hamas seized power in 2007.

In the West Bank, however, especially since the advent of Israeli governments hostile to the Oslo Accords, the territory allocated to the Palestinians has been eroded by an ever-increasing number of Israeli settlements, denoted by some as colonies. Most Israelis who settled there did so for economic reasons, with government approval, in towns built near the “Green Line” (the 1949 armistice line between Israel and the West Bank). These areas were considered candidates for future land swaps with the Palestinians. However, other settlements, founded by religious nationalist communities, spread deeper into the West Bank, often illegally according to some. Once established, these settlements were later recognized by successive Israeli governments and are now even encouraged by the current one. For ultra-religious nationalists, settling in these areas is seen as reclaiming land they regard as sacred. This situation can indeed be described as a form of colonialism.

The Jewish population in the West Bank, still a minority, benefits from military protection and government support, while the Palestinian majority faces restrictions on movement due to numerous checkpoints intended to protect settlers and Israel. New roads have been built to facilitate travel for settlers, especially those commuting to Jerusalem, and are reserved exclusively for them. A security barrier was erected along the Green Line, to prevent suicide attacks and incursions following the second intifada, with certain deviations into the occupied territory to include Jewish settlements within Israel. This reduces the potential size of a future Palestinian state, although equivalent land within Israel was meant to be exchanged in compensation.

However, the spread of settlements breaks the territorial continuity of Palestinian lands, turning them into isolated enclaves and making the creation of an independent Palestinian state increasingly unfeasible. Among Palestinians, the feeling of gradual and daily encroachment has grown stronger. Furthermore, settlers in the West Bank are now represented in Israel’s government and advocate for full annexation of what they call Judea and Samaria, an approach entirely at odds with the two-state solution.

That said, since the majority of Jewish settlements in the West Bank are located near Israel’s borders (the Green Line), their evacuation, along with the dismantling of isolated settlements deeper inside, would remain entirely possible, as envisioned in the Taba negotiations.

(See also: “What Do the Oslo Accords Represent?” - Q11, and “What Attempts and Prospects Exist for a Two-State Solution?” - Q12)

6. The notion of Apartheid applied to Israel: debate and implications

South African apartheid (1948–1991) was a system of racial segregation recognized by the United Nations as a crime. Israel is sometimes accused of apartheid, particularly since the 2001 Durban Conference, because of the situation of the Palestinians. However, Arab citizens of Israel have full civil rights: they can vote, hold public office, and work in all professions. Yet the 2018 Nation-State Law, which reserves the right of self-determination to Jews alone, has been criticized within Israel and poses a potential threat to its democracy. In the occupied West Bank, differences in rights and the separation of populations resemble some aspects of apartheid, though these do not apply within Israel itself.

The term *apartheid* refers to the policy of racial segregation enforced in South Africa by the white minority against the Black majority. Only white citizens enjoyed the protections of a democratic system.

Apartheid is presented as a policy of “separate development”, dividing populations along racial or ethnic lines within specific geographic areas.

The purpose of such a system was to allow a minority (10% of the population in South Africa) to control the majority (about 90% Black, mixed-race, Indian, or Asian) by depriving them of basic rights, most notably, the right to vote. Israel has no reason to establish such a system, as its Jewish citizens already constitute a large majority (around 80%).

Under apartheid in South Africa, every aspect of daily life was governed by racial discrimination enshrined in law. Black South Africans could not vote. Skin color determined where people could live, work, study, receive medical treatment, and which means of transport they could use. Parks, beaches, theaters, and other public spaces were segregated.

On November 30, 1973, the UN General Assembly designated apartheid as a crime by adopting the *International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid*. Implemented in South Africa in 1948, the system was abolished in 1991.

Why, then, is Israel accused of apartheid?

On November 10, 1975, UN Resolution 3379 equated Zionism with “a form of racial discrimination”. Although controversial, it was ratified by 75 states. On December 16, 1991, through Resolution 46/86, the General Assembly revoked that

conclusion, declaring that Zionism should not be equated with racism or racial discrimination.

From August 31 to September 8, 2001, UNESCO organized the *Third World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance*, held in Durban, South Africa. The official Durban Declaration and Programme of Action called on states to combat all forms of racism and recognized slavery and the slave trade as crimes against humanity that had contributed to racism.

Alongside this conference, a forum of 6,000 NGOs met in Durban. In the final version of their document, Israel was accused of “war crimes and acts of genocide”, labeled a “racist state”, and a call was made to apply to it “all the measures used against the apartheid regime of South Africa”. Young demonstrators carried signs reading “Apartheid is real” and distributed a booklet titled *Israel: An Apartheid State*.

However, the apartheid of South Africa bears no real comparison with the situation in Israel. Arab citizens of Israel are full citizens of the state, protected equally under the law, with the same rights as Jewish citizens. They identify themselves as “Palestinian citizens of Israel” or “Arab Israelis”. They have the right to vote and to stand for election.

That said, the *Nation-State Law* passed by the Knesset on July 19, 2018, under a Netanyahu government, has weakened this equality. The law defines Israel as “the nation-state of the Jewish people” and states that “the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people”. It also declares Hebrew the sole official language of the state. However, Arabic remains mandated for use in government documents, the Knesset (where speeches can be in Arabic), courts, and public signage in areas with significant Arab populations, per pre-2018 laws and Supreme Court precedents.

During the March 2015 elections, the Arab Joint List (uniting the Jewish-Arab communist party Hadash, the nationalist party Balad, and an Islamist faction) became the third-largest political force in the Knesset, winning 13 seats. During that term, the budget allocated to Arab municipalities and neighborhoods, representing about 21% of the population, increased from 7% to 13% of the national budget. The Arab community has strengthened its intellectual and professional presence across many sectors of economic and public life (see Q33, “Under What Conditions Do Israeli Arabs Live?”).

In 2005, an “intersectoral teaching program” was launched, placing Jewish teachers in Arab schools and Arab teachers in Jewish schools. It began with six teachers and now includes 2,500: about 2,000 Arab teachers in Jewish schools and 500 Jewish teachers in

Arab schools. Roughly 20% of Jewish schools now employ Arab teachers, and 20% of Arab schools employ Jewish teachers.

An Arab Israeli judge has served on the country's highest court since 1999, and since 2004 another has held a permanent seat on the Supreme Court. The chief surgeon of Hadassah Hospital is Arab Israeli, and many Arab doctors work there. A Druze officer commanded an Israeli army brigade until his death in Gaza during the Israel-Hamas war; during Ramadan, the army adjusts its schedules for Bedouin soldiers. Arabs also head university departments, and in 2021, an Arab minister served in Israel's government.

In Israel, Arab citizens are also singers, writers, actors, and football players on the national team. Arab and Jewish babies are born in the same maternity wards and treated by the same doctors and nurses. Jews and Arabs share the same trains, buses, taxis, universities, theaters, beaches, and restaurants.

However, the situation is different in the West Bank. Occupied by Israel since 1967, it is divided into three types of zones: areas fully or partially administered by the Palestinian Authority (areas A and B), and a third area covering Israeli settlements, administered and protected by the Israeli army (area C). This last zone is fragmented, as Israeli settlements are scattered throughout the West Bank. The result is a physical and legal separation of populations with different rights and living conditions.

There is no apartheid within Israel, but certain features reminiscent of apartheid can be observed in the West Bank.

(See also: Q10, "Is Palestine a State?" and Q5, "Is Israel a Colonial State?")

7. Who lived in and governed Palestine until the end of the First World War?

The region encompassing present-day Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza has been inhabited since antiquity by various peoples, including the Hebrews and the Philistines. After the Roman conquest, it was renamed *Syria Palaestina* in 135 CE to erase its Jewish identity, and all its inhabitants were henceforth referred to as Palestinians. Under the Ottoman Empire, Palestine was not a distinct administrative entity, and Jews lived there as a minority, subject to discrimination, much like Christians. Beginning in 1881, waves of Zionist Jewish immigration provoked tensions with local Arabs. By 1914, the population reached about 720,000, including 80,000 Jews. After the First World War, the region came under British mandate.

The area that today includes Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip was inhabited in antiquity by several ethnic groups, among them the Hebrews and the Philistines. The Philistines, of Aegean origin, settled along the Mediterranean coast, from the north of today's Gaza Strip to the south of present-day Tel Aviv. The Hebrews, initially organized in tribes, later formed two kingdoms: Samaria (the Kingdom of Israel) and Judea (whose inhabitants, the *Judahites*, gave rise to the term *Jew*). Around the 9th century BCE, the two kingdoms were united under the name of Judea.

The Romans conquered the region in 63 BCE. In 135 CE, Emperor Hadrian renamed the Kingdom of Judea *Syria Palaestina* in order to erase the Jewish connection to the territory. From that point on, all inhabitants of the region were referred to as Palestinians, regardless of ethnicity or religion. Before Israel's independence, Jews were also called Palestinians, the main daily newspaper, now *The Jerusalem Post*, was then known as *The Palestine Post*, and the "Palestine football team" was composed entirely of Jewish players.

After the Roman period, Jews continued to face repression under Byzantine rule (395-630). Arab conquests began in 630, followed by those of the Crusaders (1099-1291), during which Jews again suffered persecution and massacres. The Mamluks succeeded the Crusaders in 1291, and the Ottomans took control of the region in 1516. Although some periods of prosperity occurred, massacres did take place, not by Ottoman authorities, but by local Arab populations.

Under the Ottoman Empire, this region was not recognized as a distinct province called Palestine. Jewish and Christian inhabitants, non-Muslims belonging to monotheistic faiths, known as "People of the Book", lived under the *dhimma*, a status that granted them protection in exchange for submission to various obligations, especially heavy taxation

(including a special poll tax) and clothing restrictions. Numerous other discriminatory practices reinforced their inferior social status, reflecting the difficulty of accepting Jews and Christians in Islamic lands.

As for the Muslim population of Palestine, some families had ancient local roots, while many others descended from migrants. Population movements within the empire—sometimes organized or forced by Ottoman authorities for repopulation purposes—were common. The region thus received migrants from Egypt, Syria, Bosnia, nomadic and semi-nomadic Bedouin groups, and Circassians from the Caucasus.

By 1881, the region had roughly 470,000 inhabitants, a majority of them Muslim and rural, and about 25,000 Jews concentrated mainly in four cities: Jerusalem, Tiberias, Safed, and Hebron. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, waves of Jewish immigration from Russia followed devastating pogroms. The Jewish population in the region was largely poor, living on donations from Jewish communities in the diaspora. This local, deeply religious Jewish community was opposed to Zionism, which was secular and nationalist. The Arab population, meanwhile, opposed these waves of Jewish immigration. In rural areas, disputes arose between Arab and Jewish neighbors—tensions worsened when new Jewish settlers, guided by collectivist ideals, insisted on cultivating the land themselves, thereby depriving local tenant farmers of income.

By 1914, the region's population had reached about 720,000, including around 80,000 Jews.

After the First World War, the Ottoman Empire (an ally of Germany) was dismantled. The League of Nations (the forerunner of the United Nations) granted mandates to France and Great Britain to govern much of the Middle East (the Sykes-Picot Agreement). From 1922 to 1948, Great Britain administered the region of Palestine, which corresponded roughly to today's territories of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip.

Maps: C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6

8. What does it mean to be Palestinian?

A Palestinian is an inhabitant of Palestine. Today, being Palestinian refers to a national identity, belonging to an Arab people who lived, or whose descendants still live, in the territory of the former British Mandate of Palestine.

During the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent British Mandate, the territory known since Roman times as Palestine was home to Muslim Arabs, Christian Arabs, Jews, Druze, Bedouins, and other minorities, all of whom were referred to as Palestinians.

Following the 1947 United Nations plan to partition Mandatory Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, the state intended for the Jewish people was established in 1948 under the name Israel. The state intended for the Arab Palestinians was not created, due to Arab rejection of the plan and the ensuing war against the new Jewish state, a war they ultimately lost.

About 750,000 Arab Palestinians fled or were expelled from their homes. Half took refuge in what remained of Palestine, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, while the other half fled to neighboring Arab countries, which gathered them into refugee camps (except in Jordan) and denied them citizenship or basic rights (notably in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq).

(See also Q15: “What is the Nakba?”)

Through successive wars between Israel and its neighbors, particularly after 1967, a distinct Palestinian national consciousness formed, centered on the right of this people to self-determination and on the goal of establishing a sovereign State of Palestine on the whole territory of the former Mandate. To this day, no agreement has settled the borders of such a state, though several countries have officially recognized a State of Palestine covering the territories of Gaza and the West Bank.

9. How did Palestinian nationalism emerge?

Since the 7th century, when Islam was born, Arab expansion brought new territories under Muslim rule, and the population of Palestine gradually became culturally Arab and predominantly Muslim. Over time, Islam became the majority faith, though Christian communities, sometimes dominant in certain regions until the 20th century, and a continuous Jewish presence remained.

Until the eve of the First World War, the Middle East was part of the Ottoman Empire but was beginning to aspire to independence. Early nationalist sentiment in Palestine was initially directed toward the idea of a “Greater Syria,” which would include Palestine.

Within more educated urban circles, however, some began to feel a distinct sense of Palestinian identity. The arrival of Jewish immigrants from Russia in 1881 prompted the first formal protest, mainly for economic reasons: Arab notables in Jerusalem petitioned the Ottoman Grand Vizier in Istanbul to ban Jewish immigration and the sale of land to Jewish buyers.

All the land acquired by Jews was purchased legally from legitimate owners, Turkish or Arab, and paid for at the agreed price. In the earliest years, about 72% of these purchases involved state-owned land or property belonging to the Orthodox Church, foreign companies, or wealthy absentee landlords. However, the transfer of ownership displaced Arab tenant farmers who depended on that land for their livelihood. The new Jewish immigrants, many of them Russian and guided by collectivist ideals, wished to cultivate the land themselves, leaving the Arab sharecroppers unemployed.

After the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, which sought to move away from the unity of the Muslim world, a wave of Arab Palestinian unrest spread through the local press, fostering a growing sense of nationalism, though still largely oriented toward Syria. Tensions between Jewish agricultural workers and Arab peasants deepened, and violent intercommunal riots broke out.

The first explicit expressions of Palestinian nationalism appeared in 1920. During the Second Syrian General Congress in Damascus, Palestine was no longer referred to as “Southern Syria”. That same year, Amin al-Husseini, a member of a prominent Palestinian Arab family, helped establish the *General Palestinian Arab Association*, which defended Arab Palestinian interests and opposed Zionism.

Shortly afterward, the British authorities appointed Amin al-Husseini as Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, the highest religious office in Mandatory Palestine, a title created specifically for him by the British. Under his influence, the Palestinian nationalist cause took on an

increasingly religious dimension. In 1936, he led the Great Arab Revolt against the British authorities, accused of favoring Zionist interests. The uprising was eventually crushed by the British.

Al-Husseini then turned toward Nazi Germany, with which he shared a virulent antisemitism. A guest of Hitler, whom he met in 1941, he spent the war years in Berlin, broadcasting radio appeals for a global jihad against the Jews. After Germany's defeat, sought by international justice, he took refuge in Cairo with the support of the Muslim Brotherhood. During the 1948 war, he led a short-lived Palestinian government established in Gaza under Egyptian supervision.

10. Is Palestine a State?

The State of Palestine has never existed as a sovereign state. After the Arab rejection of the UN partition plan in 1947, the creation of Israel in 1948 triggered war and the Palestinian exodus. The PLO, led by Yasser Arafat, gradually shifted from armed struggle to diplomatic strategy, symbolically proclaiming the State of Palestine in 1988. The Oslo Accords (1993) established a Palestinian Authority, but without true sovereignty. Despite international recognition, Palestine has neither defined borders, nor an army, nor full autonomy, preventing it from functioning as a sovereign state.

Even though several countries have recognized the State of Palestine, it has never existed, and still does not exist, as a sovereign state.

On April 25, 1920, following the First World War and the defeat of Germany and its allies, including the Ottoman Empire, the San Remo Conference granted the United Kingdom a mandate over Palestine, which it would administer until 1948. Faced with growing violence between Arab and Jewish Palestinians, the British Peel Commission proposed in 1937 a first plan to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Arabs rejected the plan, while the Zionists reluctantly accepted it. The proposed Jewish state would have covered only 20% of Mandatory Palestine.

From 1945 onward, the Zionist movement launched an armed struggle against British forces in Palestine to pressure Britain to fulfill its promise to create a Jewish national home (as set out in the Balfour Declaration). Confronted with mounting violence, Britain decided to hand the issue over to the United Nations. On November 29, 1947, UN Resolution 181 voted for the partition of Mandatory Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state (not yet “Palestinian” in the modern sense). The Arab side again rejected the plan. In line with the UN decision, the United Kingdom announced its withdrawal for May 15, 1948.

Palestinian militias, supported by five Arab armies, attacked the territories assigned to the Jews, but were defeated. This event, known as *the Nakba* (“the catastrophe”), led to the 1949 armistice agreements.

In 1959, Yasser Arafat and his supporters founded *Fatah*, aiming to “liberate all Palestinian territory from the Zionist entity” through armed struggle. In 1964, the Arab League created the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

After the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel occupied, among other territories, the West Bank and Gaza. On September 1, 1967, the defeated Arab states – Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Kuwait, and Sudan – adopted the *Khartoum Resolution*,

known for its “three no’s”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel.

Taking advantage of the Arab military defeat, Arafat assumed leadership of the PLO in 1969, making Fatah its principal faction. The PLO adopted a guerrilla strategy aimed at destroying the State of Israel, carrying out terrorist attacks both within Israel and internationally: hijackings, hostage-takings, and assassinations of Israeli civilians, targeting Jews in particular.

At the same time, the PLO achieved diplomatic progress. In 1974, the UN recognized it as the representative of the Palestinian people, granting it observer status. In 1975, UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 declared that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination”, a resolution later revoked in 1991.

In 1987, the first *Intifada* (meaning “uprising”), known as the “stone uprising”, broke out in Gaza and lasted until the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. This spontaneous revolt took both Israel and the PLO by surprise. During this period, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, spiritual leader of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded the armed group Hamas (“Islamic Resistance Movement”). Until then, Israel had tolerated the charitable and religious activities of the Brotherhood to counterbalance the PLO and Fatah’s militant influence.

These developments led the PLO to make a strategic shift. In 1988, it proclaimed the State of Palestine, and the Palestinian National Council elected Yasser Arafat as its president. The PLO recognized UN Resolution 181 (the 1947 partition plan) and, for the first time, acknowledged Israel’s existence, though not as a Jewish state. It renounced terrorism, and Arafat called before the UN for a peaceful resolution to the Arab–Israeli conflict based on UN Resolutions 181, 242, and 338, reaffirming his rejection of all forms of terrorism.

This shift opened the way to secret negotiations between Israeli and PLO representatives in Oslo. On September 13, 1993, a Declaration of Principles, known as the “Oslo Accords”, was signed at the White House by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, under the auspices of U.S. President Bill Clinton.

The Oslo Accords divided the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza) into three zones:

- Zone A (2%) - under full Palestinian control;
- Zone B (26%) - under Palestinian civil control and Israeli military control;
- Zone C (72%) - under full Israeli control.

The process was meant to be completed within five years, but it was never brought to fruition.

From this emerged an interim Palestinian National Authority. It was given a basic law, a presidency, a parliament (a legislative council of 132 members elected by universal suffrage), a judiciary, and a police force (but no army). The Palestinian Authority represents the State of Palestine. The territories were divided into sixteen governorates (five in Gaza and eleven in the West Bank). Ministries, prefectures, and municipalities manage areas such as security, agriculture, commerce, health, education, and tourism.

Palestine became a member of UNESCO in 2011 and obtained non-member observer state status at the United Nations in 2012. As of May 2024, 147 countries recognized the State of Palestine.

However, neither the borders nor the capital of Palestine have been defined. Ramallah serves only as the administrative center. The Palestinian Authority does not issue its own currency; the Israeli shekel is in circulation, alongside the Egyptian pound in Gaza and the Jordanian dinar in the West Bank. In addition to collecting taxes from residents, the Authority's finances depend heavily on foreign aid (from the European Union, the United States, Arab countries, Norway, Japan, etc.). Meanwhile, UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) provides education, healthcare, humanitarian aid, and social services to Palestinians with refugee status. Israel collects customs duties and VAT on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and transfers them to it.

All of this means that Palestine does not meet the criteria of a sovereign state.

Maps: C6, C7, C16

11. What were the Oslo Accords?

Signed in 1993, the Oslo Accords established mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO and aimed at a gradual resolution of the conflict. They provided for partial Palestinian autonomy, a transfer of powers, elections and economic cooperation. Sensitive issues (Jerusalem, refugees, borders) were postponed to future negotiations. Oslo II (1995) reinforced this framework, but the process was quickly undermined by a resurgence of violence, including attacks and the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Despite the initial momentum, the agreements did not lead to lasting peace.

Signed in September 1993, the Oslo Accords represented the beginning of a process of mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). These accords envisioned the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in stages. Limited in time (five years) and in scope (the occupied territories), this process was intended to become a “laboratory of peace” creating a new reality: the end of occupation for the Palestinians and greater security for Israel.

Although resolving the conflict in the Middle East is still an urgent matter today, this conflict had already found the beginning of a solution at Oslo, on 13 September 1993. The “Declaration of Principles” of Oslo I contained a set of general principles mutually agreed upon, relating to this interim period.

These provisions included the early establishment of an independent government in Gaza and Jericho and a withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories. The transfer of governmental powers concerned education and culture, health, social affairs, and tourism. The agreement provided for the election of a Palestinian Council, a police force responsible for maintaining public order and internal security, and significant economic cooperation. Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians in the peace negotiations.

The PLO, in turn, recognized Israel’s right to exist in peace and security, renounced the use of terrorism and any other act of violence, and affirmed that the clauses of the PLO Charter denying Israel’s right to exist were no longer valid; these amendments were to be submitted to the Palestinian National Council for final approval.

The Declaration of Principles also stipulated that the questions relating to permanent status - Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, and borders - were to be excluded from the interim provisions and settled before the year 2000. The text also addressed the issue of water sharing: Israel recognized the Palestinians’ rights to the water of the West Bank.

No later than three years after the interim period, an agreement on permanent status was to be negotiated, based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

The first stages of the process therefore allowed for the establishment of Palestinian institutions and the territorial and legal framework of the new State.

Finally, the Interim Agreement of 28 September 1995 (Oslo II) gave rise to Palestinian autonomy and opened the second stage of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. It provided for the election, for a five-year term, of a Palestinian Legislative Council and a President of the Palestinian Authority, and defined the conditions for the transfer of power from the civil and military administrations.

Oslo broke stereotypes and simplistic views, bringing nuance that made understanding possible.

Although Israel implemented most of the clauses, not all of them were respected by either side. Among these clauses, some were conditional upon a decrease in violence. However, since the agreements, violence has only increased. In February 1994, a Jewish religious supremacist militant massacred 29 Palestinians at prayer in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Palestinian terrorist groups, opposed to the Oslo agreements, carried out several suicide attacks in Israel which caused hundreds of victims. During that single year 1994, three hundred civilians were killed in Israel.

In November of the same year, Yitzhak Rabin, then Prime Minister, received the Nobel Peace Prize (together with Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat). One year later, he was assassinated by a Jewish extremist, on 4 November 1995, during a peace rally in support of the Oslo Accords, of which he was, with Shimon Peres, one of the main architects.

The following years were marked by an escalation in the hardening of the positions of both parties (including the outbreak of the second intifada, very deadly, in 2000).

The governments that succeeded Yitzhak Rabin failed to carry out the rest of the process of the Oslo agreements or, as is currently the case, opposed it.

Map: C16

12. What attempts and prospects exist for a two-state solution?

For nearly 90 years, the conflict between Jewish and Arab nationalism has led to the idea of a two-state solution, which has been difficult to accept due to religious and territorial tensions. The first partition plans (1937, 1947) were rejected by the Arabs, leading to the 1948 war and the creation of Israel. In 1988, the PLO finally recognised the 1947 partition, paving the way for the Oslo Accords, which failed. Several attempts at peace followed, without success. Today, some actors still advocate the two-state solution, with land swaps and broad popular support.

The antagonisms between Arab and Jewish nationalisms have, for nearly ninety years, led to the idea of partitioning the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River into two states, one Arab, the other Jewish. This idea has formed the basis of international consensus. The opposing parties struggle to accept it, since each considers itself the legitimate custodian of the entire territory. This conviction is reinforced by a religious dimension that is difficult to negotiate.

On July 7, 1937, the Peel Commission, established by the British Mandate authorities, proposed the first partition plan. It allocated 4800 km² of the territory to the Jewish state and 21000 km² to the Arab state. The Zionists accepted the plan, but the Arab Higher Committee rejected it.

On November 29, 1947, after Britain announced its withdrawal from Palestine, the UN General Assembly voted on a new partition plan. The Zionists accepted it. The Arab side rejected it and immediately launched hostilities. On May 14, 1948, Israel proclaimed its independence. The following day, the armies of Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq invaded Israel. These countries were defeated in 1949. Bilateral armistice treaties were signed, and their lines defined the borders of the State of Israel as internationally recognized. Transjordan annexed the West Bank, and Egypt administered the Gaza Strip without annexing it. In 1967, Israel occupied these territories during the Six-Day War, a situation that continues to this day.

It would take until 1988, forty years later and the first Intifada, for Palestinian nationalists (but not Islamists), under the leadership of Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), to renounce terrorism and recognize the 1947 partition plan. This strategic shift allowed for the opening of secret negotiations with Israel. These led, in 1993, to the Oslo Accords. The proto-state that emerged from these accords, governed by the Palestinian Authority, remains the most advanced form of a Palestinian state to date. The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and the rise of Palestinian Islamist terrorism

(Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad), which oppose a Palestinian state alongside Israel, dealt a fatal blow to the Oslo process.

However, achieving an effective separation between Israelis and Palestinians, between the Mediterranean and the Jordan is a necessary condition for reducing the level of violence between the two peoples and perhaps leading to peace. It implies the creation, alongside Israel, of a sovereign Palestinian state with recognized borders, a recognized capital, and territorial continuity, an essential condition for its viability. To ensure that this state would not pose a threat to Israel's security, it would have to be demilitarized and have only a police force. Realistic proposals along these lines have been discussed for over twenty years. What is lacking are the political conditions to make them possible.

In July 2000, Bill Clinton brought together Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat at Camp David. After fifteen days of negotiations, the summit failed. Despite the offer of a Palestinian state with a capital in East Jerusalem, 96% of the West Bank and 4% of Israeli territory to compensate for the 4% of the West Bank to be annexed for Israeli settlements, a "permanent protected corridor" linking the Gaza Strip to the West Bank, and guaranteed territorial continuity within the Palestinian state, Yasser Arafat rejected the proposal: claiming that this was too far, in his view, from what Palestinian public opinion was ready to accept. However, during this summit (Camp David II), some progress was made that allowed later discussions to resume.

Official negotiations took place between Israel and the Palestinian Authority at the Taba Summit in Egypt (January 21–27, 2001) and at the Annapolis Conference (2007–2008). Following the failure at Taba, two negotiators, former Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin and the Secretary-General of the PLO Executive Committee, Yasser Abed Rabbo, launched, on a personal basis, the *Geneva Initiative* (December 1, 2003). This 400-page technical document, with maps, demonstrated the feasibility of separation and the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

All these meetings - Taba, Annapolis, Geneva - addressed the same key issues as Camp David II: borders, security, the status of Jerusalem, and the fate of Palestinian refugees. They particularly envisaged incorporating into Israel the largest Jewish settlements in the West Bank (Modiin Illit, Ma'ale Adumim, etc.) and having Israel transfer equivalent territorial areas in return. They also provided for a land corridor between the West Bank and Gaza. The Annapolis Conference, held during the term of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, resulted in an almost final agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, but the political context of the time prevented it from being implemented.

In 2020, the United States proposed a new and very detailed peace plan (the "Trump Plan"), but it was rejected by the Palestinian Authority as being too favorable to Israel.

Among the groups proposing solutions to the conflict is "Commanders for Israel's Security". Founded in 2014, this nonpartisan association brings together 650 retired

members of Israel's security establishment, senior officers from the Israel Defense Forces, the Shin Bet, the Mossad, and the police. The association advocates separation from the Palestinians through a two-state solution involving territorial exchanges within a regional framework.

Most recently, in October 2024, Ehud Olmert and Nasser Al-Qidwa (former minister of the Palestinian Authority) announced to the press their collaboration on a new Israeli-Palestinian peace plan presenting a shared vision. Based on a two-state solution with territorial exchanges, this plan is extremely detailed, and the two former leaders have committed themselves to obtaining as broad public support as possible.

13. In what context was the State of Israel created?

After the Second World War, the Western Allies and the USSR emerged victorious, while Nazi Germany was defeated. The post-war period was marked by the Cold War and decolonization, and the United Nations was created to regulate international conflicts. In Palestine, then under British mandate, both Jews and Arabs claimed the right to self-determination. In 1947, the UN proposed a plan for partition, accepted by the Jews but rejected by the Arab countries. A structured Jewish society already existed, which made it possible to proclaim the independence of Israel in May 1948, just before the British withdrawal.

The victors of the Second World War (1940–1945) were the Western Allies (Great Britain, the United States, Canada, etc.) and the USSR. On the other side, the defeated powers were Nazi Germany and its allies.

The international context of the time was marked by the Cold War between the free world (the United States) and the communist world (the USSR), as well as by the emancipation of peoples in the Third World. Although the victors competed for spheres of influence, they sought to regulate international relations and conflicts. To this end, they replaced the League of Nations (LON) with the United Nations (UN). Palestine remained under British mandate, but both Jews and Arabs aspired to the self-determination that had been promised to them on the same land, which brought them into confrontation with each other and with the British.

The UN's arbitration resulted, in 1947, in a vote largely in favor of partitioning the territory into two states: one Jewish, the other Arab.

Since 1945, an Arab League had been created in Cairo under British auspices, bringing together Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen to resist the interference of colonial powers in the region. By extension, Israel was depicted by the Arab world as a foreign and colonial presence.

It should be noted that, before the UN Partition Plan proposed in 1947, the Jewish population in Palestine had gradually formed a viable proto-state (also called the *Yishuv*), numbering already 400,000 inhabitants by 1936. It was a modern and complete Jewish society, with its own national consciousness, language (Hebrew), culture, and institutions: the first Hebrew public libraries (1880s-1890s), the first Hebrew teacher training school (1892), the first Hebrew kindergarten (1898), the Hadassah infirmary, later the main hospital in Jerusalem (1905), the new city of Tel Aviv (1909), the daily newspaper *Haaretz* (1919), the Histadrut trade union federation (1920), the Haganah, the nucleus of

the future Israeli army (1920), the Technion in Haifa (scientific institute) (1924), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1925), the Egged cooperative bus company (1933), the radio broadcasting institute (1934), and a pavilion at the Paris World's Fair (1937), titled *"Israel in Palestine"*, etc.

Thus, the migratory and political process that led to the foundation of the Jewish state began well before the Second World War and the Shoah. The Holocaust, however, deprived the future state of a significant demographic reservoir.

All these facts established its legitimacy as a nation, and it was confirmed in international law by UN General Assembly Resolution 181 on November 29, 1947. David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the independence of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, the eve of the British withdrawal.

Map : C9

14. Why was there no Palestinian State in 1947?

After the First World War, Great Britain administered the territories that today correspond to Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. Growing Jewish immigration led to tensions with the Arab population and to revolts. The British responded by restricting this immigration. In 1947, the United Nations proposed a partition plan that was accepted by the Jews but rejected by the Arabs. Arab countries then launched a war against the newly created State of Israel, on May 15, 1948, the day after Israel's declaration of independence as a state. Around 750,000 Palestinians fled to neighboring countries, while 150,000 remained in Israel. The 1949 ceasefire established borders that are still internationally recognized today.

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, Great Britain was entrusted in 1920 by the League of Nations with a mandate (which began in 1922) over a territory called "Palestine". This included the areas of present-day Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank (bounded to the east by the Jordan River). Great Britain was also granted a mandate over the territory of present-day Jordan (then called Transjordan). Tensions in Palestine grew rapidly as two competing national movements (Jewish and Arab) asserted themselves, and Jewish immigration increased.

The Arab revolts of 1936 and 1938 led the British to reconsider their support for the Zionist movement. While Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia desperately sought to flee Europe, the British government banned Jewish immigration to Palestine. On May 17, 1939, it issued a White Paper authorizing only 75,000 Jews to immigrate to Palestine over a five-year period (1939-1944). After that, any further immigration would require the consent of the Palestinian Arabs. This decision was rightly perceived as a betrayal by the Zionist movement.

The situation worsened after the Second World War: on one hand, the international context was now favorable to decolonization, on the other, the Holocaust made the creation of a refuge state for the Jews and the realization of the Zionist dream an urgent necessity. The British faced a violent uprising from the Jewish population, especially as they prevented many Jews, most of them Holocaust survivors, from reaching Palestine, instead placing them in detention camps, notably in Cyprus. Clashes between Arabs and Jews became increasingly frequent and intense.

Overwhelmed, the British, after granting independence to Transjordan in 1946, announced in February 1947 their decision to withdraw from Palestine and handed the issue over to the newly created United Nations. On November 29, 1947, the UN, through

Resolution 181, proposed the partition of the territory of Palestine into two states: one Jewish and one Arab.

- The Jewish state would cover 14,000 km², with 558,000 Jews and 405,000 Arabs.
- The Arab state would cover 11,500 km², with 804,000 Arabs and 10,000 Jews.
- As for Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the surrounding holy sites, they were to form an international zone under UN control, the *Corpus Separatum*, with 106,000 Arabs and 100,000 Jews.

The Jewish state would thus represent 56% of Mandatory Palestine, but most of this territory was made up of the Negev Desert, which was unsuitable for agriculture or urban development. The two states were to coexist side by side, with a joint monetary and customs union.

Resolution 181 was adopted by the UN with 33 votes in favor (including the United States and the USSR), 13 against, and 10 abstentions. It was never implemented: while accepted by most Zionist organizations, it was rejected by the Arabs. Violent clashes immediately broke out between Palestinian Jews and Palestinian Arabs, the latter supported by armed volunteers supplied by the Arab League, created in 1945.

On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was officially proclaimed by David Ben-Gurion, the very day the British Mandate ended. Immediately afterward, five Arab countries, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, and Egypt, declared war on Israel and invaded the new state. Although the Arab forces advanced at first, the newly formed Israeli army eventually prevailed. Israel expanded its territory by about 40% compared to what had been allocated in the UN partition plan, while 750,000 Palestinians were forced or chose to flee.

(See “*What is the Nakba?*” - Q15)

The ceasefire was signed in January 1949. The new borders of Israel, accepted by the international community, remain those established by this ceasefire.

15. What is the Nakba?

The Arabic term *nakba*, meaning “catastrophe”, refers to the Arab defeat and the exodus of about 750,000 Palestinians during the 1948-1949 war between Israel and the Arab countries that launched it. The Palestinians who fled to neighboring host countries were not granted citizenship there, and Israel refused their return for security reasons. In 1949, the UN created UNRWA to assist these refugees, while the Palestinian question remained unresolved.

The Arabic word *nakba* means “catastrophe”. It refers to the defeat of the Arab states and the exodus of the Arab inhabitants of Mandatory Palestine as a result of the first Arab-Israeli war (1948-1949). The term has become deeply rooted in the collective memory of Palestinians and of the Arab world.

The establishment in Palestine of a “national home for the Jewish people”, which was the mission of the British Mandate, proved extremely difficult due to the prevailing hostility. The leaders of the Arab countries, and in particular the Palestinian Arab leadership, were determined not to allow Jews to settle in the region. As Jewish immigration increased, clashes between the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine grew increasingly violent (strikes, demonstrations, riots, including the Arab Revolt of 1936). In response, the British suspended immigration on the eve of the Holocaust (the White Paper), prompting strong opposition from the Zionist movement in Palestine, which sought by all means to circumvent the restriction (through clandestine immigration and attacks). Political solutions proposed by the British were immediately rejected by the Arabs.

During the Second World War, the Palestinian Arabs, under the influence of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, expressed sympathy for Nazi Germany, the enemy of their enemy, Britain.

By the end of the war, the Jewish population in Palestine numbered about 700,000, while the Arab population was around 1,400,000 (including Christians and Druze). The British continued their policy of restricting Jewish immigration. In response, the Zionists launched attacks against the British. The Arab Higher Committee (founded in 1936 during the Great Arab Revolt to represent the Arab communities of Palestine) focused its efforts on fighting the Jews. The situation deteriorated further: Zionists fought Arabs, Zionists fought the British, and Arabs fought the British.

From 1947 onward, Palestine descended into a full-scale civil war between Jews and Arabs, with the latter supported by armed volunteers from neighboring Arab countries. The fighting was bloody and caused heavy losses on both sides. The British were overwhelmed by events. The UN voted for the partition of the territory into two states at

the end of that same year. The Zionists' acceptance of this plan meant that they also accepted the creation of a Palestinian state alongside their own.

Throughout the British Mandate, the Zionists had organized themselves to build their future state. On the Arab side, no such preparations had been made, as the rejection of a Jewish state was total. Palestinian Arab society was gripped by fear and insecurity, made worse by the lack of effective leadership (tensions within the Arab Higher Committee). Between December 1947 and March 1948, around 100,000 Palestinian Arabs, mainly from the urban middle and upper classes, left, hoping to return once the Arab armies had taken control of the country.

The day after Israel's declaration of independence, on May 14, 1948, five Arab states, Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, all members of the Arab League, simultaneously declared war on the new Israeli state. The war lasted several months and, against all expectations, ended in an Israeli victory.

The fierce fighting that preceded Israel's independence, as well as this first Arab-Israeli war, contributed to the flight or expulsion of the majority of Palestinian Arabs who had lived in the region. Those who fled did so out of fear, some fearing massacre by the Zionists (as at the village of Deir Yassin), others responding to calls from Arab leaders to leave temporarily and return after the expected victory. By May 15, 1948, 350,000 had already fled, and by the end of the war, their number had more than doubled, reaching about 750,000. Half of them sought refuge in the territory designated for the Arab state, the Gaza Strip, controlled by Egypt, and the West Bank, controlled by Jordan. Around 400 Arab villages, emptied of their inhabitants, were destroyed.

Confident of victory over the young state, neighboring Arab countries promised Palestinian refugees, whom they confined to camps, that they would be able to return home after the war.

In December 1948, the UN adopted Resolution 194 affirming the right of return for these Palestinian Arab refugees. However, as early as August 1948, Israel declared that such a return was unrealistic, given that the Arab League and the Arab Higher Committee still sought to continue the war, bringing back a hostile population into the new state would endanger its survival. After the war, Israel maintained that its security would not be guaranteed and refused to allow the refugees to return.

During 1949, bilateral armistice agreements were signed between Israel and the various Arab states that had participated in the war. These states chose to keep the Palestinian Arabs in refugee status. Citizenship of the host country was not granted to them (except in Jordan). In Lebanon, they were even denied access to public services, including health care and education, and laws prohibited them from working in about thirty professions.

In December 1949, the UN created the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East* (UNRWA) to provide aid to original Palestinian Arab refugees, (who now number about 5.9 million, along with their descendants, who may retain refugee status).

Following the 1949 armistice agreements, the “Palestinian question” ceased to be a matter of concern for the State of Israel. It would take the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its later strategic shift for a political solution to begin to be considered.

(See “*Is Palestine a State?*” - Q10, and “*What Do the Oslo Accords Represent?*” - Q11)

16. Why and how many Jews were expelled from Arab countries after 1948?

Between 1948 and 1967, nearly one million Jews lived in Arab and Muslim countries, but most fled due to violence, discrimination, or hostile policies. In Iraq, Yemen, and Libya, mass expulsions took place; in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, arrests and expropriations drove Jews to leave. In North Africa, especially Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, Jewish emigration occurred gradually, often to France or Israel. In Iran, the exodus mainly followed the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Although different from the Holocaust, this exile is sometimes referred to as the “Jewish Nakba.”

The exodus of Jews from Arab and Muslim countries mainly occurred between 1948 and 1967. At the end of the Second World War, nearly one million Jews lived between the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria) and the Mashreq (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine). Since then, these and other Muslim-majority countries have seen their Jewish populations virtually disappear.

	1948		
Algeria	140,000	-> 200	(2022)
Egypt	63,600	-> 3	(2022)
Gaza	8,000	-> 0	(2006)
Iran	100,000	-> 8,500	(2022)
Iraq	150,000	-> 4	(2024)
Lebanon	20,000	-> 29	(2018)
Libya	38,000	-> 0	(2010)
Morocco	265,000	-> 5,000	(2023)
Syria	40,000	-> 0	(2019)
Tunisia	105,000	-> 1,000	(2019)
Yemen	55,000	-> 1	(2023)

Today, fewer than 30,000 Jews remain across all these countries combined.

Each of these “Eastern” Jewish communities has its own story of disappearance. Most Jews in Arab countries had not originally planned to leave.

However, many either sensed that they would have to or were forced to do so, one way or another. What is striking is the simultaneity of their departures from nearly all countries and not all of them went to Israel.

In Iraq and Yemen, the authorities themselves wanted to rid their countries of nearly all Jews, about 55,000 Yemeni Jews were evacuated between December 1948 and September 1950 in *Operation Magic Carpet*; and nearly 125,000 Iraqi Jews between May 1950 and April 1951 in *Operation Ezra and Nehemiah*. These transfers were facilitated by British authorities, who provided the aircraft needed to fly them to Israel.

The departure of Jews from Syria and Lebanon was massive during the 1948 War of Independence. In Syria, the 4,000 Jews who remained were held hostage until President Hafez al-Assad finally allowed them to leave in 1993.

In Egypt, it was President Nasser’s regime that ordered the expulsion of Jews. Arrests and intimidation had already multiplied since 1948, but the Suez Crisis in 1956, launched by Israel, Britain, and France, marked the final blow. Jewish properties were confiscated by the authorities.

The Jews of Algeria were not formally expelled, but individual murders and sporadic massacres, notably in Oran on July 5, 1962, convinced almost all Algerian Jews to leave for France, following the mass exodus of the “pieds-noirs”.

The Jews of Tunisia left in three main waves: first, after Tunisian independence in 1956, as the first signs of discrimination appeared; then in 1961, when tensions worsened; and finally in 1967, after the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War sparked violent anti-Jewish attacks.

Libya also saw the departure of its 30,000 Jews in several stages, in 1949, 1953, and again in 1967, toward Israel and also Italy.

Morocco had the largest Jewish community in the Arab world (about 300,000 Jews in 1945). Emigration to Israel occurred gradually, beginning after Moroccan independence. It was illegal under Mohammed V but later became legal (though taxed) under Hassan II. Jews were accused of forming a “fifth column”. Today, about 3,000 Jews remain in Morocco, mostly in Casablanca.

The exodus of Jews from Iran came much later: partially in 1950, but mainly after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, when the community of 80,000 fell to fewer than 20,000 today.

It is only in the past two decades that historians have begun to study the causes of these mass displacements. There were massacres and pogroms in these countries, though

none comparable in scale to the Holocaust. Unlike Polish Jews, Jews from the East live with nostalgia for their lost past.

There was, therefore, a *Jewish Nakba*, a parallel tragedy, for all these Jews from the Arab and Muslim world.

17. Which wars opposed the State of Israel and its Arab neighbors?

After Israel declared independence in 1948, several Arab countries attacked it, but Israel won the war and expanded its territory. In 1967, the Six-Day War enabled Israel to occupy several neighbouring territories. Despite peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, tensions persist, particularly with Hamas in Gaza. Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005 but faced repeated attacks from Hamas. In October 2023, a major attack by Hamas triggered an asymmetrical war that also involved Hezbollah and other groups supported by Iran.

After David Ben-Gurion declared the independence of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, the “War of Independence” began with a simultaneous attack by five Arab states, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Transjordan, and Egypt, together with Palestinian militias. Israel, heavily outnumbered by the Arab coalition but strongly armed by the West, launched a counteroffensive that led to the 1949 armistice. Israel expanded its territory but lost access to Jerusalem’s Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall. The geopolitical situation remained unstable, with Israel surrounded by hostile neighbors. Around 750,000 Palestinian Arabs, displaced by the war, became refugees in neighboring Arab countries, where they were kept in camps near Israel’s borders.

Between 1949 and 1956, Israel faced constant attacks from *fedayeen* (Palestinian commandos) based in the Gaza Strip. Despite the 1949 armistice, Egypt also banned Israeli-flagged ships from passing through the Suez Canal. In 1956, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser decided to nationalize the Suez Canal, in which France and Great Britain were shareholders. To prevent this nationalization, the two powers formed a military alliance with Israel and declared war on Egypt. Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula and, with Anglo-French support, captured the canal. This was the “Suez War”.

Under pressure from both the Soviet Union and the United States, Israel was forced to withdraw from Sinai, and UN peacekeeping forces (Blue Helmets) were deployed on the Egyptian side of the Israeli-Egyptian border.

In 1967, President Nasser, leading a coalition of Arab armies, closed the Strait of Tiran and again threatened to attack Israel. Clear warning signs left little doubt about what was coming. The Israeli army launched a preemptive strike, this is the beginning of the “Six-Day War”. Israel won, capturing the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Several hundred thousand Palestinian Arabs thus came under Israeli control in the West Bank and Gaza.

In 1973, perhaps overconfident in their military superiority, the Israelis ignored warnings from intelligence services and were caught by surprise on the holy day of Yom Kippur by a coordinated attack from Egypt and Syria. Both Arab armies were well trained and

equipped with modern Soviet weapons. Israel ultimately prevailed, aided by an American airlift, but this “Yom Kippur War” rekindled the feeling that in every war, Israel was fighting for its survival.

During the 1980s, Israel faced repeated attacks and rocket fire from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yasser Arafat, based in Lebanon.

(See “Is Palestine a State?” - Q10)

Israel responded with targeted assassinations, rapid military operations, and finally, in 1982, a full-scale invasion of Lebanon called *Operation Peace for Galilee*. The goal was to eliminate the PLO, which resulted in Israel occupying southern Lebanon from 1983 to 2000. The PLO relocated to Tunis, but attacks on northern Israel continued. The Hezbollah, a newly formed Lebanese Shiite Islamist militia, took over from the PLO, leading to a second Lebanon war in 2006. This conflict caused heavy military and civilian losses on both sides, particularly in Lebanon. UN peacekeepers (UNIFIL) were deployed along the ceasefire line that was eventually agreed upon.

After decades of war, some Arab countries decided to sign peace treaties with Israel: Egypt in 1979, and Jordan in 1994. Later, in 2020, the Abraham Accords normalized relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco.

However, these agreements were reached without addressing the situation of the Palestinians, their aspiration for self-determination, and thus, their own state.

In 2005, Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip (captured from Egypt in 1967 during the Six-Day War). The following year, Hamas came to power, organizing suicide attacks that killed Israeli civilians and continuing daily rocket fire against southern Israel. This led to several wars between Hamas and Israel, in 2008–2009, 2012, and 2014, all centered in Gaza. Other clashes followed...

Then came the bloody massacres of October 7, 2023, carried out by Hamas in southern Israel, including mass killings and hostage-taking, with captives taken into Gaza. Israel’s response was intense, facing an asymmetric war involving Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, which intervened to support Hamas, and the Houthis in Yemen, all three armed groups backed and supported by Iran. During direct attacks from Iran, Israel was able to rely on assistance from the United States, its European allies, and Jordan.

Maps: C10, C11, C12, C13, C14, C15, C8

18. What have been the various statuses of Gaza since the 20th century?

Between 1948 and 1967, the Gaza Strip was occupied by Egypt. Israel occupied it starting in 1967 and established settlements there. The 1993 Oslo Accords allowed the Palestinian Authority (under Israeli control) to administer Gaza's civil affairs. In 2005, Israel withdrew but retained control of Gaza's borders. In 2007, Hamas expelled the Palestinian Authority, seized power, imposed Sharia law, and built up its military arsenal at the expense of economic development. Since 2007, Israel and Egypt have maintained a strict blockade. Hamas's governance and the blockade have led the Gazan population to live in extremely harsh conditions.

In 1949, at the end of the War of Independence between Israel and several Arab countries, the Gaza Strip was occupied by Egypt. This small coastal territory became densely populated, mostly by Palestinian refugees who had fled the war; they were confined to camps and used by the Egyptian authorities as a reservoir of *fedayeen* (commandos) to attack Israel.

In 1967, after the Six-Day War, Israel occupied both the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. About twenty Israeli settlements were built there, and the Israeli army maintained troops in the area. In 1979, Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt and withdrew from Sinai, but not from Gaza, which was intended to become part of a future Palestinian state. In 1993, following the Oslo Accords, the territory came under the administration of the Palestinian Authority, led by Fatah.

In 2005, after much debate, the Israeli parliament voted for a full withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered the evacuation of the Israeli settlements, emptied of their 8,000 residents by August of that year, sometimes with army assistance. Ariel Sharon was later criticized for not coordinating this withdrawal with the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas, leader of Fatah (in charge of Gaza's civil administration), nor attempting to establish a peace plan. Israel continued to control Gaza's maritime, air, and land borders for security reasons. Hamas presented the withdrawal as a victory for armed struggle.

In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections (74 seats to Fatah's 45 out of 132), leading to the appointment of Ismail Haniyeh as Prime Minister. The rivalry between Hamas and Fatah stems mainly from their fundamental ideological difference: Hamas is an Islamist movement, while Fatah is nationalist.

In Gaza, deadly clashes between the two factions began in June 2007 and ended with the victory of Hamas, which carried out countless acts of violence and summary executions,

numbering in the hundreds, of its opponents from Fatah. Since then, Hamas has had sole control of the Gaza Strip. It created its own police force and judicial system, declared an end to “secularism and heresy,” instituted Sharia law, imposed the wearing of the hijab, closed leisure establishments, and restructured education around the “cult of martyrdom” and hatred of Jews.

Most of Hamas’s investments have been military, building tunnels, rocket launch sites, and acquiring a massive arsenal, consuming nearly 40% of the international aid sent to Gaza. Its goal is to take over the territory of Israel, which it considers sacred Muslim land, and expel the Jews. This objective prevents any possibility of economic development.

Deeming Hamas a terrorist organization and a “hostile entity”, Egypt and Israel imposed, starting in 2007, a blockade on Gaza, enforcing strict restrictions on the movement of people and goods by land, sea, and air.

Israel built a barrier and observation posts around Gaza for security reasons: to limit the import of weapons and materials for military infrastructure and to monitor movement in order to prevent the infiltration of militants who could carry out attacks in Israel. The blockade also aimed to pressure the Gazan population to turn against Hamas.

Exports are now tightly monitored, fishing zones have been reduced (to prevent arms smuggling by sea), and crossings through the Erez checkpoint are limited to humanitarian cases, for example, patients seeking treatment in Israeli hospitals. Until October 7, 2023, nearly 20,000 Gazans were authorized to work in Israel, particularly in kibbutzim near Gaza.

For its part, Egypt closed the Rafah crossing and a 12-kilometer border segment to prevent Islamist infiltration into Sinai and to avoid an influx of refugees that could provoke political and social tensions in Egypt. However, the Egyptian closure was circumvented through tunnels used for smuggling weapons, fuel, and construction materials into a vast underground network of military infrastructure.

The population of Gaza suffers from Hamas’s war-driven policy: the blockade has caused major humanitarian consequences, including severe restrictions on access to water. As for electricity and construction materials, Hamas diverts them for military use, to the detriment of civilians.

Maps: C9, C13

19. What is a terrorist organization?

When people want to change something in society, they can act through a political party. They can also create a movement of opinion by bringing together others who share that desire for change. They can carry out actions to attract public and media attention. Public figures, athletes, artists, or others, may help spread the message. They can organize marches, demonstrations, conferences, or media campaigns... All these methods aim to convince others of the necessity and benefits of the desired change, to persuade decision-makers and the public, and sometimes to lessen potential resistance.

Another possibility is to try to impose change through violence. Violence directed at authorities (political leaders, police, the army) is typical of revolutionary movements, such as the French, Soviet, or Cuban revolutions.

Violence can also be directed not against the authorities but against the population, targeting civilians, ordinary citizens, in order to provoke fear and terror. On the one hand, this is intended to undermine the population's confidence in the authorities as guarantors of security. On the other hand, by provoking a feeling of fear and stress among the population, the aim is to put pressure on the authorities to give in and introduce the desired change, or to resign: this is the objective of terrorist groups (e.g. the Basque ETA in Spain or the IRA in Ireland).

Paradoxically, a government (an authoritarian one), can also use terrorist methods against its own population; this is called state terrorism (as in Argentina during the 1980s or in Cambodia under Pol Pot). Terrorism can also be used by one state against another.

A group or organization may be defined as terrorist either by a country targeted by its actions (for example, ETA in Spain) or more broadly by international institutions.

This is the case for Hamas and Hezbollah, both designated as terrorist organizations by several countries and international entities (including the European Union), as well as for Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, and the Wagner Group, due to their methods and actions, including attacks against civilians, kidnappings, the use of human shields, rocket fire, and suicide bombings.

Hamas and Hezbollah have first imposed aggressive and dictatorial policies on their own populations to force them to adhere to their radical Islamist ideologies (Sunni and Shia respectively), using extreme violence. Both have carried out deadly attacks against Israel primarily targeting civilians. (Hezbollah has also been responsible for attacks against civilians in both the West and the Middle East). These acts clearly define them as terrorist organizations.

20. What is Hamas?

Hamas, founded in 1987 and originating from the Muslim Brotherhood, is an armed Islamist organization that practices terrorism. Unlike Fatah, it does not seek the recognition of a Palestinian state alongside Israel but rather the establishment of an Islamic caliphate “from the river to the sea”. Its charter rejects any recognition of Israel and claims a total religious mission encompassing every aspect of society.

Originating from the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, an armed organization practicing terrorism, claims to have been founded in 1987 during the First Intifada by the Brotherhood’s leader and spiritual guide, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Its roots predate that name: the Muslim Brotherhood had already formed the first Palestinian armed group fighting British occupation in the 1930s (under different names, including the “Islamic Liberation Party”).

Unlike the nationalists of Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Hamas does not aspire to create a Palestinian state. For Hamas, the only legitimate nation is the nation of Islam. A totalitarian and globalist Islamist movement, it seeks to destroy the State of Israel and replace it with a caliphate “from the river to the sea”, as a step toward a global caliphate, the ultimate goal of the Muslim Brotherhood. Recognition of Israel, or peace negotiations with it, are entirely excluded.

In its charter (published in 1988 and amended in 2017), Hamas calls itself the “Islamic Resistance Movement – Hamas” and defines itself as “one of the wings of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine”. According to the charter, Palestine is an inalienable Islamic asset (‘waqf’). All lands conquered by Islam must be dedicated solely to Muslims.

“While other nationalist movements are based on material, human and territorial considerations, Hamas' nationalism encompasses all these elements and also the most essential one, namely the divine factor that gives soul and life. Hamas' nationalism is linked to “the source of the Spirit and the One who grants life, raising the heavenly banner that unites heaven and earth with firm bonds towards the heavens of the nation” (Art. 12).

To achieve this goal, Hamas has developed a comprehensive strategy. To play their “role in the battle for liberation”, Muslim women are assigned the duty of motherhood; girls are educated accordingly. Scholars, teachers, educators, the media, journalists, and the educated masses must all be mobilized. Artistic expression must follow “rules” consistent with the “characteristics of Islamic art”, serving the purpose of ideological mobilization. For Hamas, “jihad is not limited to combat and armed confrontation”.

Hamas proclaims that Jews and Christians may “coexist peacefully under the banner of Islam”, effectively reinstating the dhimmi status (second-class non-Muslim subjects), abolished by the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century.

The charter declares that “secularism is in total contradiction with religious ideology”. As for Jews, it calls for their killing — “The stones and the trees will say: ‘O Muslim, O servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him’” (Article 7). Hamas repeats classic antisemitic tropes: Jewish financial power, a “Judeo-Masonic conspiracy”, media control, and responsibility for wars, revolutions, colonialism, and imperialism. It even refers to the fabricated antisemitic text *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (published by Tsarist secret police in 1903) as proof of a “Zionist plan”.

Although Hamas finds sympathy in some Western circles, it is largely distrusted in the Arab world, where many governments remain wary of the Muslim Brotherhood.

21. Where do Palestinians live today?

In the absence of accurate census data (due in particular to the war situation), it is difficult to establish figures with any certainty.

There are approximately 14.3 million Palestinians worldwide.

Nearly 5 million live in the occupied territories and another 5 million live in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Two million Arabs live in Israel, most of whom are Muslims. They most often identify themselves as Palestinians with Israeli nationality. Approximately one million Palestinians live in the Gulf countries and other Arab countries in the region. Finally, nearly one million live in South America, Europe and North America.

It should be noted that nearly 6 million Palestinians have 'refugee' status under the auspices of UNRWA.

22. What is the role of UNRWA?

The 1948-1949 war caused the exodus of many Palestinians toward Arab countries, where they often lived in camps. Only Jordan granted them citizenship; other countries refused their integration. In 1949, the United Nations created UNRWA, the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, an agency exclusively dedicated to Palestinian refugees and their descendants. Its mandate, regularly renewed, now covers nearly six million people. This unique system perpetuates refugee status across generations, maintaining the hope of return to the lands where they lived before 1948.

The 1948-1949 war, declared by several Arab countries against Israel, caused many Palestinians to flee to neighboring countries (Syria, Transjordan, Egypt, Lebanon), most of whom were placed in camps. However, the Arab states (except Jordan) refused to integrate these refugees, arguing that they had a “right of return” to the places where they had previously lived.

(See “What is the Nakba?” – Q.15)

In December 1949, UNRWA (*United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*) was created to assist them. Its mission includes providing education, health care, and social services for Palestinian refugees living in camps.

Since then, in the absence of a political solution for these refugees, the United Nations General Assembly has periodically renewed UNRWA’s mandate, most recently extending it to June 2026. Refugee status continues to be granted “to male descendants and their legally adopted male children”. Some of these refugees no longer live in camps, they work, travel, hold passports, yet they retain refugee status in a country they have never lived in.

In 1950, the agency served around 750,000 Palestinian refugees. Today, 5.9 million people are eligible for UNRWA services.

Throughout history, wars and conflicts have caused massive population displacements and waves of refugees. In the 20th century, with the fall of empires and the creation of nation-states, along with two world wars, tens of millions became refugees: Hindus, Muslims, Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Turks, Greeks, Jews, and others. After World War II, the fate of refugees became a priority for the United Nations General Assembly. The creation of UNRWA for Palestinian refugees was followed one year later by the establishment of the UNHCR (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*), designed to provide emergency assistance to all refugees worldwide. When return to their

country of origin proved impossible, the UNHCR was tasked with supporting their resettlement and integration elsewhere. This assistance is, in principle, limited to 18 months (according to the International Refugee Convention). Each UNHCR mission concludes with the end of refugee status for the affected populations and their descendants.

While UNHCR operates globally for all refugees, UNRWA is dedicated exclusively to Palestinians and is therefore unique in its kind.

It is well documented that UNRWA schools foster among Palestinian children the hope of returning to their ancestors' land and the hatred of Israel.

23. What do Palestinians think of Hamas?

The Palestinians aspire to an independent state, based on the borders established in 1947, a project that remained unfinished due to Arab opposition. Gaza has been controlled by Hamas since 2007, while the West Bank is partly controlled by the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian population, caught between Israeli occupation and Hamas authoritarianism, is suffering a sharp deterioration in its living conditions. A majority supports a diplomatic two-state solution and criticises Hamas for its corruption and mismanagement. Despite repression, support for Hamas is declining, and voices are calling for political change or international aid.

All Palestinians aspire to have an independent and sovereign state. The borders for such a state were drawn by the 1947 UN partition plan, but the Arab state never came into existence because Arab countries refused to accept the plan proposed by the international community, and they also refused to create a Palestinian state in 1948 on the territories of Gaza and the West Bank. These territories were only occupied by Israel in 1967, following the Six-Day War. Since then, the West Bank has been administered, very partially, by the Palestinian Authority (Fatah) under Israeli military control, while the Gaza Strip has been governed in a totalitarian manner by Hamas.

(See the question “Is Palestine a State?”)

When Hamas won a majority in the 2007 elections in Gaza and seized power by expelling Fatah representatives, living conditions for residents worsened, and their freedoms were drastically reduced under the strict application of Sharia law.

A public opinion poll conducted a few weeks before the October 7, 2023 attacks, in the Palestinian territories (West Bank and Gaza), by Princeton University (USA), found that Palestinians feel they are suffering both from the “occupation” by Israel and from the “dictatorship” of their own political movements. Although Gazan civilians have lived under an Israeli blockade (supported by Egypt) since 2007, two-thirds of them do not trust Hamas’s Islamist government. 80% of Palestinians surveyed said they favor a diplomatic resolution with Israel, with a majority supporting a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.

The Washington Institute reported in July 2023 that 84% of Gazans prioritized internal political and economic reforms over foreign policy issues.

In 2022, the American organization *Center for Peace Communications* (CPC), seeking to highlight the suffering of Gazans under Hamas rule, interviewed residents of Gaza (results published in January 2023). They reported arbitrary arrests, extortion of small

business owners, and violence by Hamas authorities. The frustrations expressed were intense, revealing Hamas's economic and social mismanagement and corruption, with large international funds failing to improve the population's well-being. These conditions led to protests demanding better living standards, which were swiftly repressed: demonstrators beaten, homes raided, and arrests carried out.

Criticism also targeted Gaza's education system, which has been transformed into a mechanism of ideological indoctrination and military recruitment, promoting the culture of jihad and martyrdom, along with antisemitic indoctrination. Those who oppose this worldview say they are forbidden to speak openly.

Residents interviewed by the CPC also expressed disapproval of Arab media outlets that portray Hamas as a heroic movement.

In September 2024, the *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research* (PSR), based in Ramallah, conducted polls among Gaza's population (via phone and tablet), showing that support for Hamas is declining among Gazans: only 39% expressed support for the group, down from 64% in June. When Hamas launches rockets, only teenagers are reported to cheer in the streets.

While 39% of Gazans said they support Hamas, 24% favor Fatah, and 15% would prefer an international authority to govern; the rest had no opinion.

A separate survey conducted by AWRAD (*Arab World Research and Development Group*) in May 2024 showed that 80% of respondents (out of a sample of 1,500 people from both the West Bank and Gaza) want a Palestinian-led government for "the day after" in Gaza (after the war), with marked differences between West Bank Palestinians and Gazans. In the West Bank, 35% of respondents supported a joint UN-Hamas administration for Gaza (with 21% favoring Hamas alone), while Gazans themselves opposed the idea of Hamas returning to power after the war.

Given the situation in Gaza, peace activists who dare to speak out are often branded as traitors to the Gazan cause which remains dominated by Hamas.

24. What does the slogan “From the river to the sea” mean? Who says it?

The slogan “From the river to the sea” calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state over the entire territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, encompassing Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank. This area is home to around 15 million people, included Jews and Arabs in Israel, and a majority of Arabs in the occupied territories. Hamas uses this slogan to demand an Islamic Palestine and to reject the existence of Israel. Meanwhile, the current Israeli government opposes the creation of a Palestinian state and seeks to annex part of the territories. These two opposing visions - a “Greater Palestine” versus a “Greater Israel” - make the conflict even more intractable.

The slogan, “From the river to the sea”, has been widely used since October 7, 2023. What does it actually mean? It calls for the creation of a country, Palestine, in a region of the Middle East.

The river refers to the *Jordan River* in the east; the sea is the *Mediterranean* in the west, separated by about 65 kilometers (roughly the distance between London and Cambridge or Amsterdam – Rotterdam). The land between them, historically called Canaan, then Judea, later Israel, then Palestine, then Southern Syria, and once again Palestine, covers just under 30,000 square kilometers, making it almost the size of Belgium.

Within this area today lies one country, Israel, and two territories, the West Bank and Gaza. Around 15 million people live there: 10 million in Israel, 3 million in the West Bank, and 2 million in Gaza.

All residents of Israel (Jews and Arabs alike) are Israeli citizens and therefore hold Israeli nationality. The country has a population of just over 7 million Jews and 2 million Arabs (mostly Muslims), with a Christian minority. In the occupied territories, about 93% of the Arab population is Muslim, with the rest Christian. In addition, the West Bank is home to about 500,000 Israeli settlers, mostly living near the Green Line (1967 borders).

In recent years, religion, on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, has come to play an increasingly central role. Tensions and conflicts between the two sides have deepened over the decades, with both becoming more uncompromising and extremist, each invoking texts it considers sacred.

On one hand, the slogan “From the river to the sea”, promoted by Hamas and its supporters, expresses the determination to establish a free, sovereign, and Islamic Palestine across the entire area that now includes Israel and the Palestinian territories, while rejecting Israel’s existence (as stated in the Hamas charter). Implicit in this vision

is either the departure of the 8 million Jews living there, or if they remain, their submission to Islamic law.

(See the question “What is Hamas?” - Q20)

On the other hand, the current Israeli government rejects the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, primarily due to security concerns, but also because religious extremists now in power in Israel wish to reclaim what they see as the lands of their ancestors, thereby expelling the Palestinian population.

Their aim is thus the exact opposite of what is implied by the Palestinian slogan and that of their supporters:

“From the river to the sea” ... this time, for a “Greater Israel.”

Map: C10

25. What does it mean to be Jewish?

Jewish identity goes beyond simple religion: one can be Jewish through faith, culture, history, or ancestry. Traditional Jewish law recognizes maternal descent, while modern movements also accept paternal lineage. Judaism includes various branches (Orthodox, Reform, atheist) and ethnic groups (Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Mizrahim). Key values such as *tikkun olam* and *tsedaka* emphasize moral and social commitment. The concept of the “chosen people” implies ethical responsibility, not superiority.

It is difficult to answer this question “because there are as many answers as there are Jews”.

Jewishness goes beyond the religious framework: one can be “Jewish” and completely atheist. This is why we speak of the “Jewish people” and why the word “Jewish/Jew” is sometimes written with a lowercase letter (religion) and sometimes with a capital letter (people).

From a personal point of view: being Jewish means recognizing oneself in the religious belonging to Judaism or to the Jewish people. The first definition is quite simple: there are rules, beliefs, and rituals to which one adheres and that one practices. The second involves sharing a history, a philosophy of life, family traditions, etc.

According to traditional Jewish law, “a person is Jewish if their mother is Jewish or if they have converted to Judaism”, but Reform Judaism also recognizes as Jewish a child born to a Jewish father.

The broadest definition was proposed by David Ben-Gurion, the first head of government of the State of Israel: “A Jew is someone who feels Jewish”.

It should be noted that the Nazis adopted a more rigid definition: anyone with at least three Jewish grandparents was considered Jewish, regardless of their identity or religious practice. Conversions to Christianity were declared null up to two generations back.

There are many forms of Judaism: numerous Orthodox, traditional, liberal, and Reform branches exist, and even an atheist form of Judaism.

There are three main branches of the Jewish people: the Ashkenazim, originally from Eastern Europe; the Sephardim, expelled from Spain and Portugal and largely dispersed around the Mediterranean basin and within the Ottoman Empire; and the Eastern Jews, or Mizrahim, originally from the Arab world.

Here are some important Jewish values. *Tikkun olam* (“repairing the world”) speaks equally to religious and atheist Jews because it carries a symbolic sense of social justice.

Tsedaka is the practice of social justice (donations to help those in need). A third important Jewish value is the transmission of Enlightenment ideals: a long and gradual improvement of humankind, a kind of introspective work that is both individual and collective, aiming to bring humanity toward greater wisdom, understanding, in short, toward humanity itself.

As for the expression “chosen people”, it comes from Deuteronomy (the fifth book of the Torah, Jewish law) and, according to many interpretations, it assigns to the Jewish people duties and responsibilities toward other human beings, not superiority or privilege.

26. What is Zionism?

Zionism is a movement that emerged in the late 19th century with the aim of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, seen as a response to anti-Semitic persecution. It is part of an ancient Jewish tradition of aspiring to return to Zion. Theodor Herzl was its political founder, particularly after the Dreyfus Affair. Zionism presents itself as a national liberation movement, which has nothing to do with the concept of colonialism. It brings together various tendencies, united around the idea of a refuge for Jews in their historic homeland.

Zionism is a political and cultural movement that arose in Europe at the end of the 19th century. The word itself appeared then, inspired by Mount Zion, the name of a hill near Jerusalem that came to represent the entire city. The term evokes the Jewish people's aspiration, dispersed among the nations, to achieve self-determination and to exist as a nation once again on the land of Israel, located in Palestine.

A national liberation movement of the Jewish people, Zionism is often today mischaracterized as “colonialist”, whereas it is in fact the opposite: Jews from both Western and Eastern lands, persecuted in the very countries of their birth, sought refuge in Palestine (99% of the Jews from Arab countries were forced to leave them).

Although Zionism was born at the end of the 19th century, the idea itself is ancient. The Jewish longing to return to the Land of Israel is age-old, the phrase “Next year in Jerusalem” appears in many Jewish prayers. Jerusalem is home to the holiest sites in Judaism: the Temple Mount, where two successive temples once stood. From the Second Temple, destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, remains the Western Wall (Wailing Wall), the remnant of its outer wall, (it is on this same site that, in the 7th century CE, two mosques were built, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque).

Jews have never ceased living in Palestine. In 1099, during the Crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem, all the city's Jews were massacred. Yet Jewish communities remained in Hebron, Jaffa, Tiberias, Safed, and elsewhere.

The leading figure of the modern political Zionist movement was Theodor Herzl. In 1896, he published *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution to the Jewish Question*. His theory emerged in the context of the great nationalist movements of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where many ethnic groups sought independence. Herzl proposed a solution for the Jews, victims of pogroms (often encouraged by authorities) in Eastern Europe and of a devastating wave of antisemitism in France following the Dreyfus Affair, in which a Jewish army captain was falsely accused of treason solely because of his religion.

Zionism is not a monolithic movement. It encompasses a wide range of political and religious beliefs, from the far left to the far right, from atheism to strict religious orthodoxy. Yet all strands of Zionism agree on one essential point: the call for the existence of a national refuge and homeland for the Jewish people.

27. What does it mean to be a Zionist today?

Being a Zionist today means supporting the right of Israel to exist as a legitimate state. Zionism brings together very diverse people and should not be confused with the Jewish religion or Israeli nationality. Some Zionists support coexistence with a Palestinian state, while others do not. Despite Israel's recognition by the UN in 1947, the conflict with the Arab world continues. The word "Zionist" is sometimes distorted to label an enemy, fueling hostile discourse.

A short answer: a Zionist is anyone who believes that the State of Israel has the right to exist like any other state.

Sometimes, "Zionist", "Israeli", and "Jew" are confused, but these three terms refer to very different concepts. There are all kinds of Zionists with a wide range of opinions, though all agree that Israel has the right to exist. There are left-wing and right-wing Zionists, Jewish and non-Jewish Zionists, including evangelical Christians, some Anglicans, and even Muslims, religious and non-religious Zionists, Israelis and non-Israelis alike. Some wish to live peacefully with their neighbors; others are more militant. Some Zionists reject the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel; others support the idea. To understand the complexity of the issue, one must also know that there are non-Zionist Jews and even anti-Zionist Jews (both in and outside Israel), although the vast majority of Jews are Zionists.

Before 1948, Zionists were those who wanted the creation of a State of Israel in the region, which they called *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel). In 1947, the United Nations voted to create both a Jewish and an Arab state. The Zionists accepted this proposal; the Arabs rejected it.

Some countries, such as Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, have since recognized Israel and signed peace agreements with it. Today, another tragic episode of this long war, punctuated by periods of truce, is unfolding. More than ever, Zionists are divided over this war. Many wish for it to end now; others hope it will be the last one and that it will conclude with the proclamation of a Palestinian state living in peace with Israel; still others oppose the idea of a Palestinian state, believing it would pose a danger to Israel.

One might wonder why so many call for the disappearance of Israel when the existence of other states, where equally, if not more, horrific tragedies occur (such as Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Azerbaijan, the Congo, Yemen, or Libya) is not questioned.

For those who want Israel to disappear, the word “Zionist” has taken on a new meaning. It has become an insult, synonymous with “enemy”, “evil”, “hateful”, “demonic”, or even “Nazi”.

28. [What is the Shoah?](#)

In Hebrew, the term 'Shoah' means 'catastrophe'. It refers to the genocide of the Jews by the National Socialist regime. It refers to the systematic extermination by Nazi Germany, from 1941 to 1945, of six million Jews – 85% of the Jews in the territories conquered by the Nazis – including one and a half million children. They were killed in various ways: starved to death in ghettos, underfed and subjected to forced labour in concentration camps, sent to the gas chambers of extermination centres, or killed in mass shootings, referred to as the 'Shoah by bullets'.

The uniqueness of the Shoah, whose scope is universal, lies in its planned, methodical, organised and bureaucratic extermination, which was made possible by the assistance of collaborators – governments and individuals – throughout Europe.

29. [What is Antisemitism?](#)

Antisemitism, defined by the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) as hatred toward Jews, dates back to the 19th century but has roots in far older religious rivalries. It differs from ordinary racism by its conspiratorial nature, namely the idea that Jews are responsible for the world's evils, a notion popularized notably by *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This hatred led to the Shoah, during which Jews were perceived as enemies to be eliminated. Today, antisemitism often manifests as hatred toward Israel, which has intensified following the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023. This form of hatred has seen a troubling resurgence.

A modern definition of antisemitism was proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward them. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions, and places of worship”.

The term itself dates from the 19th century, but hatred of Jews is much older originating with the rise of Christianity and Islam on both shores of the Mediterranean, two religions born from Judaism and in rivalry with it. In this sense, antisemitism is distinct from both racism and xenophobia.

Historically, it was a German journalist, Wilhelm Marr, who first coined the term “*antisemitismus*” in 1879 when he founded an “antisemitic league”. The creation of this new word marked a turning point in the history of Jew-hatred. Marr advocated the expulsion of Jews to Palestine, a call that gained popularity among antisemitic circles of the time. The word “antisemitic” has nothing to do with Arabs or Ethiopians, who also speak Semitic languages; it referred exclusively to the exclusion of Jews from German society (indeed, there is no “Semitic people”, only populations speaking Semitic languages).

Antisemitism is rooted in conspiracy thinking, the belief that Jews are responsible for the world's misfortunes. In 1903, agents of the Tsarist secret police fabricated an entirely false document, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, purporting to reveal a Jewish plot to undermine Christianity and dominate the world. The Jew was thus portrayed as powerful, greedy, expansionist, and domineering. This forged document, which later inspired Hitler, continues to circulate widely, including within parts of the Arab world.

What distinguishes antisemitism from ordinary racism is that the Jew is portrayed not merely as an inferior being, but as a dangerous, demonic, and powerful threat. He or she is less a 'subhuman' to be exploited (slavery) like the Black or the Slav, and more a pest to be eliminated, by force if necessary, which is what the Nazis will do.

The measures taken against Jews have evolved over time, at least in Europe. Ghettos, numerus clausus, prohibitions and sanctions of all kinds have gradually fallen into disuse. Hatred of Jews has become 'modernised'. Today, it manifests itself mainly through hatred of the only Jewish state on the planet. Like the Jews of yesteryear, Israel is held responsible for the world's misfortunes; in short, it is a harmful state whose disappearance would save humanity.

Since the Holocaust, the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis, antisemitism has been punishable by law in a dozen Western countries, including Belgium for instance.

In the decades following the Holocaust, a deceptive silence gave rise to the hope that 'it would never happen again'. Racism and antisemitism had never been fought so hard, through educational programmes and civic campaigns aimed at preventing its resurgence.

However, in recent years, the Holocaust has been increasingly trivialised, minimised and even denied. At the same time, an unqualified importation of the Israeli-Palestinian problem has attempted to blame all Jews for the real or supposed faults of the Israeli government.

The massacres of Israelis on 7 October 2023, perpetrated by thousands of terrorists led by Hamas, and the Israeli response in Gaza have led to an international wave of antisemitism of unexpected violence, unprecedented since the Holocaust.

30. What does “anti-Zionist” mean today? Is an anti-Zionist an antisemite?

Criticizing Israeli policy is not necessarily antisemitic, but denying Israel’s right to exist often amounts to antisemitism disguised as anti-Zionism. Criticism of Israel is frequently disproportionate compared to other conflicts, revealing a strong informational bias. For instance, in Belgium, antisemitic acts have sharply increased following the Hamas massacres of October 7, 2023, a worrying sign of rising anti-Jewish violence.

Today, anyone who calls themselves a Zionist believes that Israel has the right to exist like any other country. Many Jews around the world do not necessarily support the policies of Israel, but that does not mean they wish for its disappearance. For them, the creation of Israel was a vital necessity, both for the Jews of the East (subjected to *dhimmitude*) and those of the West (marked by pogroms and the Shoah).

For some, anti-Zionism simply means criticizing the decisions of the Israeli government, especially regarding the Palestinian issue. This stance is entirely legitimate and not a sign of antisemitic hatred. Others, however, believe that the State of Israel should not exist because it violates human rights. Yet, among all the peoples that make up humanity, would Jews alone have no right to a homeland? As Israeli historian Elie Barnavi, a supporter of the two-state solution, says: the State of Israel, recognized by the United Nations, is now part of the international community. To deny this status, or to wish for its disappearance, is nothing less than disguised antisemitism. “Anti-Zionism” has no rational justification.

Like any country, Israel’s policies can and should be criticized. Being a democracy does not make a state immune to wrongdoing. However, the level of global criticism aimed at Israel has reached such disproportionate levels that it bears no comparison to the scrutiny faced by other countries involved in severe conflicts or human rights violations. China persecutes its Uyghur and Tibetan minorities. Russia invades and attacks Ukraine. Syria’s civil war has caused nearly 600,000 civilian deaths. Turkey oppresses the Kurds. Yet none of these nations is singled out so relentlessly, nor has any specific term, like “anti-Zionism”, been invented to insultingly stigmatize one of their governments.

Through this intense criticism of Israel and its conduct in ongoing conflicts, antisemitism often reemerges under the guise of anti-Zionism. While claiming to defend human rights, certain discourses against Israel revive age-old anti-Jewish prejudices and antisemitic stereotypes.

In Belgium today, one does not openly declare oneself antisemitic, just as overt expressions of racism are punishable by law. Yet most anti-Zionists conflate Jews, all

Jews, with Israelis, accusing them of being Zionists and of supporting the Israeli government unconditionally.

Since the Hamas massacres in Israel on 7 October 2023, some 5,000 km from Belgium, antisemitic acts have exploded exponentially around the world – some even before Israel's response. Insults, threats, physical attacks and vandalism of Jewish sites are countless.

(See also “What attempts and prospects exist for a two-State solution?” - Q12)

31. Do Jews in the diaspora vote in Israel?

To vote in Israel, you must have Israeli citizenship, whether you are Jewish or Arab, and be present in Israel on election day. Voting from abroad is not permitted, except for civil servants and military personnel residing abroad. There is also no proxy voting.

Jews in the diaspora cannot vote in Israel unless they are Israeli citizens (i.e. have dual nationality).

Voting is not compulsory. You must be 18 years of age to vote.

In the last elections, on 1 November 2022, the turnout was 70.6% of registered voters: out of nearly 6.8 million Israelis over the age of 18 who were registered, nearly 4.8 million Israelis took part in the vote.

32. Where do Jews live today?

As of May 9, 2024, Israel's population numbered 9.9 million inhabitants, including 7.4 million Jews, representing 73.2% of the total. By the end of 2022, nearly 45% of all Jews lived in Israel, while the diaspora numbered around 9 million. Today, the global Jewish population, recorded across 102 countries, exceeds 16 million people.

As of January 1, 2021, the world's Jewish population was estimated at 15 million, according to a study by the *Jewish Data Bank*. This estimate was based on data from 102 countries and territories with at least 100 Jews.

Gathering these statistics is complex, as there are no uniform criteria for defining Jewish identity, and data quality varies. Moreover, Jews live in vastly different institutional, cultural, and socio-economic contexts around the world, complicating comparisons. For analytical purposes, it is important to avoid using differing definitions from one country to another, even if such differences exist in the day-to-day operation of Jewish communities.

This study includes both those who identify through religion and those who recognize themselves as members of the Jewish people or community.

According to the 2021 data, the global distribution of the Jewish population was as follows:

Country		Jewish Population			
Israel	6,870,000	Brazil	91,500	Uruguay	16,400
United States	6,000,000	South Africa	52,000	Chile	15,900
France	446,000	Hungary	46,800	Other countries	193,000
Canada	393,500	Ukraine	43,000		
United Kingdom	292,000	Mexico	40,000		
Argentina	175,000	Netherlands	29,700		
Russia	150,000	Belgium	28,900		
Germany	118,000	Italy	27,200		
Australia	118,000	Switzerland	18,400		

More recent data are also available.

On 9 May 2024, the publication of annual national statistics on the Israeli population showed that the State of Israel had 9,900,000 citizens, including 7,427,000 Jews (73.2%), 2,089,000 Arabs (Muslims, Christians and Druze, or 21.1%) and 564,000 others (or 5.7%).

Eighty per cent of Israeli Jews were born in Israel (they are called Sabras). According to sources, half or more of Israeli Jews today are Mizrahim, descendants of Jews who had to flee Arab countries in the Middle East (Mashreq) and Iran, especially since Israel's independence in 1948. The other Israeli Jews are of Ashkenazi origin (from Eastern Europe and Germany) and Sephardic origin (descendants of Jews from Spain and Portugal who fled those countries in the 16th century to the Ottoman Empire).

At the end of 2022, approximately 45% of the world's Jewish population lived in Israel. If this proportion is still accurate today, the Jewish population in the diaspora can be estimated at approximately 9,077,000 people, while the world's Jewish population can be estimated at 16,504,000 people.

33. What are the living conditions of Israeli Arabs?

After 1948, the Arabs who remained in Israel lived under a military regime before their situation gradually improved. Today, more than 2 million Arabs live there, the majority of them Muslims. They enjoy the same social rights as Jews, may volunteer for military service, and participate in political life. In 2021-2022, for the first time, an Arab party took part in the Israeli government. The presence of Arabs in higher education and in the civil service has increased, despite some discrimination and concerns linked to the Nation-State Law of 2018. The Arabs of East Jerusalem have a particular status: they are residents without citizenship, with limited electoral rights.

The history of Israeli Arabs is complex. For a long time, the State was distrustful of the Arabs who remained in Israel after 1948 (around 150,000 people). They lived under a military regime and could not move freely. Progressively, their situation improved, reaching an average standard of living. Many of them today are integrated into Israeli society while preserving their Arab identity, and even though to a degree discrimination still exists, they acknowledge benefiting from all the social advantages enjoyed by other citizens.

Israeli Arabs can perform military service voluntarily, whereas for Druze and Circassian men, as for Jewish men and women, it is compulsory. They live in mixed towns or in Arab towns and villages. The majority of Israeli Arabs, a little over 2 million people, are Muslims (82.9%); according to the Israel Democracy Institute, at the end of 2022 there were 9.2% Druze and 7.9% Christians.

The Knesset (Israeli Parliament) has had Arab members since 1949, including Muslims, Druze, and Bedouins. They are elected either on Arab party lists or within Jewish parties. When Arab parties have succeeded in uniting, they have been able to influence the governing majority and improve the situation of Arab communities in many areas. In 2021-2022, for the first time in Israel's history, an Arab party (Mansour Abbas – United Arab List) joined the government.

Over the past 21 years, since 2003, the percentage of Arab students in Israeli universities has risen from 3.5% to 20%; Arabs now make up 24% of doctors, 36% of dentists, 44% of nurses, and 55% of pharmacists. The proportion of Arab employees in the central government has grown from 1.7% to 13.2%.

However, there is some concern that the current government, relying on the Nation-State Law (2018), could reverse some of these gains.

Nevertheless, despite Hamas's calls to Arab citizens and the mistrust of some Jewish Israelis, the sense of belonging among Arabs to the State of Israel has increased, according to polls conducted immediately after October 7, 2023. It rose from 70% to 84%, according to data from the Israel Democracy Institute, partly because some Arabs were also victims of the Hamas massacres of October 7.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2022), there are 5.9 million Palestinians living in the occupied territories, two-thirds in the West Bank and one-third in the Gaza Strip.

The status of the Arabs of East Jerusalem is special. On June 7, 1967, after the Israeli army captured this part of the city, its Arab inhabitants, who had been Jordanian nationals since June 1948, lost that nationality. The State of Israel granted them a special status as "residents", giving them the opportunity to become citizens of Israel, something that the vast majority of the inhabitants of the former Jordanian sector have always refused. Since 1968, they have paid taxes to the Israeli state and benefit from all social rights, including access to the Israeli health system. Having only a resident's card or a Jordanian identity document obtained before June 1967, those born before that date are not entitled to an Israeli passport. They may vote in municipal elections but not in legislative elections; consequently, they have no representatives in the Knesset. However, a very small number of Palestinians from East Jerusalem, 1,800 people in 2020, less than 1% of the 353,800 Arab inhabitants recorded that year in this territory, have applied for Israeli citizenship.

34. Do all Israelis agree with their government?

Israel is a parliamentary democracy with a parliament elected by proportional representation, where only parties exceeding 3.25% of the vote are represented. The current government is being challenged for its plans to reform anti-democratic laws. Despite the war since 7 October 2023, regular demonstrations are calling for democracy, a ceasefire and the release of hostages.

Israel is a parliamentary democracy with a single legislative assembly (the Knesset), whose members are elected through a proportional representation system. Under this system, parties that do not receive at least 3.25% of the vote are not represented in parliament.

In the most recent elections (2022), 40 parties ran, but only 11 won seats in the Knesset, and 70% of eligible Israelis participated in the vote.

In those elections, Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party received 23.41% of the vote, which corresponds to only 16.5% of Israelis of voting age. However, none of the parties from the previous governing coalition agreed to join Netanyahu, due to the criminal trials pending against him. He therefore formed a coalition government with religious and far-right parties.

This coalition holds a blocking majority in the Knesset (64 out of 120 seats), even though it represents only about one-third of the Israeli electorate.

The parties within it share a common stance: rejection of the two-state solution and support for the annexation of the West Bank, which would make the creation of a Palestinian state impossible.

A majority of Israelis oppose this government, in place since January 2023, because it seeks to pass laws that restrict democratic freedoms and undermine institutions, particularly the Supreme Court, which is the only body able to oversee the legislative and executive branches. In addition, under pressure from the ultra-Orthodox parties, an exemption from military service, even in times of war, is granted to Haredim (ultra-Orthodox Jews).

Since the government took office, hundreds of thousands of Israelis have protested every Saturday across the country. Since October 7, 2023, despite the ongoing state of war, demonstrations continue, defending democracy, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, demanding negotiations with Hamas for the return of hostages held in Gaza, and seeking security for southern Israel (the border with Gaza) as well as for the north (towns, villages, and kibbutzim near the Lebanese border, attacked daily by Hezbollah). These Israelis

believe that Netanyahu does not want to end the war. If he were to do so, far-right ministers would immediately resign, causing the collapse of the government. Benjamin Netanyahu would then face his ongoing corruption trials as an ordinary citizen, and likely a commission of inquiry into his responsibility for the events of October 7, 2023.

ANNEXES

Annex 1. A brief history of the Jewish people

The history of the Jewish people is linked to the experiences of a group of people who invented monotheism, which gave rise to Judaism, Christianity and then Islam. It is linked to a territory, first called the Land of Canaan until Joshua, Moses' successor, then the Land of Israel.

Driven by historical circumstances, this people, characterised by a common heritage, has shown remarkable mobility across much of the planet, at the heart of various nations and empires and in numerous civilisations (diaspora), while maintaining an almost continuous physical presence in the Land of Israel.

It also experienced dramatic demographic fluctuations depending on historical circumstances, whether favourable (coexistence, emancipation) or tragic (persecution, expulsion, pogroms, extermination). Here, only a very brief overview of its history in Israel and in the diaspora will be presented. Unfortunately, the history of Black Jews in Ethiopia or Jews in India, for example, is not included.

Antique Israel

The history of the Jewish people spans more than 3,000 years, from 1200 BCE to the present day. Although the Hebrew Bible (later called the Old Testament by Christians), one of the oldest textual sources, is partly mythological and theological, numerous archaeological discoveries corroborate several passages. The first mentions of their historical existence (Hebrews or Sons of Israel) outside the Bible are the stele of Pharaoh Merneptah dated 1207 BC, the campaign of Sheshonq I of the 22nd dynasty (10th century BC) which adorns the walls of Karnak (Upper Egypt), and the stele of Mesha (9th century BC), which recounts wars seen by the adversaries of the Hebrews.

Originating from the Fertile Crescent region, the Children of Israel migrated to the Land of Israel. They were descendants of the same family, divided into 12 tribes and then united into a single kingdom of Israel and Judah under Kings Saul, David and Solomon in the 11th century BC (the period when the First Temple was built).

After Solomon's reign, the kingdom was divided into two: Israel, established in Samaria, which disappeared in 722 BC after the Assyrian conquest, and Judah (hence the name 'Jews') with Jerusalem as its capital.

After the conquest by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, the kingdom of Judah, including the First Temple, was destroyed. From this period onwards, a new reality dominated the consciousness of the people in exile, with Jerusalem at its centre and a network of communities in foreign countries. The largest communities were found in the Babylonian kingdom and in Egypt.

Babylon was conquered in 539 BC by the Persian king Cyrus, who allowed the exiles from Jerusalem to return to their country and rebuild their temple. This is what they did.

In 63 BC, Pompey's campaign brought the land of Judah under Roman rule. Numerous sects emerged from Judaism, including Christianity. Various struggles ensued, some of which were recorded in Greek by the historian and eyewitness Flavius Josephus. In 70 CE, Roman legionnaires burned the Second Temple and sent many prisoners into slavery in Rome, causing a new dispersion of part of the Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire. This event was the founding element of the diaspora.

In Judea, after the Jewish nationalist revolt of Bar Kokhba (between 132 and 135 CE), Emperor Hadrian changed the name of Judea-Samaria (Judaea) to Palestine (Palaestina).

The Jews in Palestine and Babylonia: The Talmudic era - Byzantine rule

From the 1st to the 7th century, rabbinical schools appeared throughout the region, particularly around two groups of cultural academies in Palestine and Babylonia, and emerged as centres of education. The 'Sages' developed the legal system and the numerous contradictory discussions were transcribed (Talmud), while the synagogue emerged as the centre of community life. This system, which served as law, was ignored by the Samaritans and certain Jewish communities far from the centres of learning. This was the case, for example, for the Jews of China, India and Ethiopia.

Palestine (the Holy Land for Christians), where Jews were in the majority, lived under the dual Roman and Christian laws of Byzantium (4th-6th centuries). The legislature and the Church then multiplied all the coercive laws against the Jews of the Byzantine Empire to push them towards conversion.

Islam in Palestine, inferior status of Jews and Christians (8th to 19th centuries) in Islamic countries

The Arabs invaded Palestine (7th century). The Muslim theocratic state was more tolerant towards non-Muslims recognised as 'People of the Book'. Jews and Christians saw their situation improve, but under a different status from Muslims. Some even held important positions at the court of the caliphs or in local administrations.

However, their status as protected persons or dhimmis was relative and came with many humiliating obligations that continued under Ottoman Turkish rule and in the Maghreb countries. The severity of the prohibitions varied according to the rulers, the location and the period: payment of a heavy poll tax (up to three times more than for a Muslim), wearing distinctive clothing, prohibition from testifying, prohibition from riding horses, harassment, residence in closed neighbourhoods (*mellah* in Morocco). Contempt for them could lead to pogroms such as the one in Fez in 1912.

The abolition of the *dhimma* by the Ottoman Empire in 1856 did not prevent discrimination or pogroms against Jews in other regions where the *dhimma* had also been in force, such as in Fez (Morocco) in 1912 and Hebron (Palestine) in 1929.

Currently, 99% of Jews have left the Arab world, simply because all the states that emerged from decolonisation wanted to be exclusively Sunni and Arab, with the sole exception of Lebanon. Jews, like Christians, but also Kurds, Druze and Shiites, found themselves excluded from the national narrative, leading to a departure without return, mainly to Israel, where the population of Arab origin is almost in the majority.

Sephardic Jews in Spain

In Muslim Spain, al-Ándalus, a period known as the 'Golden Age' (8th-11th centuries) developed, which was relatively peaceful for Jewish communities despite the numerous abuses they suffered. Jewish thinkers, scholars and doctors contributed to the development of knowledge alongside Christians and Muslims, notably by participating in the dissemination of Aristotle's works.

Maimonides, for instance, a renowned thinker and physician in the Middle Ages, contributed to this and combined it with Jewish theology, influencing medieval Christian thought. However, he was forced to flee to the Maghreb with the arrival in Spain of the Almohads, strict Muslims from Africa who severely persecuted Jews and Christians (12th century).

After the Christian Reconquista in 1492, the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella issued the Alhambra Decree, forcing all Jews (and Muslims in 1525) to convert or leave Spain. Doubting the sincerity of the converts, the situation reached its peak with the Inquisition, which established a system of blood purity (*'limpieza de sangre'*) in the 15th century. The expelled Jews, known as Sephardim (*Sefarad* means 'Spain' in Hebrew), and the converts (*conversos*, disparagingly referred to as "*marranos*" or 'pigs'), settled mainly in the Ottoman Empire, North Africa and Europe (particularly in Italy, Antwerp and then Amsterdam).

Ashkenazi Jews in Christian Europe

During the same period, Jewish merchants (known as Syrians) appeared in Gaul in the 8th and 9th centuries, playing an active economic role and working in many professions such as glassmaking (there was a famous process called 'Jewish glass'), until the guilds introduced restrictive measures. In the 11th century, Ashkenazi Judaism, a term referring to Jews from Western and Eastern Europe, flourished, particularly in the Rhône and Rhine valleys. Jews traded across continents thanks, in part, to their contacts with fellow Jews.

Living in Troyes, France, Rashi was both a winegrower and one of the greatest biblical and Talmudic scholars. His writings, which combine Hebrew with the Old French of the time, have greatly contributed to our knowledge of Old French today.

Later, in Italy, Jews actively participated in economic activities and cultural and musical creation, such as Salomone de Rossi, a famous composer and theorist (16th-17th century).

Antisemitism from the 11th to the 18th century and migration to Eastern Europe. The Jews of 'Belgium'.

In the Middle Ages, between the First Crusade and the outbreak of the Black Death (brought by a Genoese ship), the Church invoked the status of a witness people, incapable of recognising Christianity and therefore deserving of eradication. The Crusades marked an intensification of abuses against Jews in Europe and the Holy Land. Pogroms broke out, particularly in Germany and France. Between the 13th and 15th centuries, many countries expelled their Jewish populations, notably England (1290), France (1306) and Spain (1492).

It was during this period (15th century) that Jews migrated to more tolerant countries such as Poland. This country became a recognised haven for Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, and Polish Judaism became a centre of spiritual and cultural development.

In the territories currently covered by Belgium, Jews were few in number. The first undisputed mention dates back to 1200. They were required to wear the rouelle (a badge of identification) from 1215 onwards. There is evidence of this in Leuven, Tienen, Antwerp and Brussels. In Brussels, the Jewish quarter was located in Ravenstein. Accused of sacrilege, they were all burned at the stake in 1370 in Brussels (a commemorative plaque in the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula marks the spot). In the 16th century, wealthy Jewish families active in wholesale trade, goldsmithing, engraving and other crafts were granted the right of residence.

The first Hebrew Bible and various writings in Hebrew were published by Plantin in Antwerp. Subsequently, thanks to the Edict of Tolerance issued by Joseph II of Austria (1781), a degree of religious freedom was achieved.

Western Jews recognised as citizens in 1791 – Emancipation

Jews were recognised as citizens during the French Revolution in 1791. Equal rights were confirmed by Napoleon I in the French Empire and in the conquered territories (including Belgium). The emperor created consistories to organise Jewish rites, which were subject to civil authority in all French and conquered territories. This emancipation took place gradually throughout Europe. Jews participated successfully in socio-economic, scientific and cultural development.

Belgium's independence (1830) attracted Jewish families who were well known for their role in building the young state, such as the Bischoffsheim family (finance) and the Errera family, who distinguished themselves in banking, mathematics and biology. Another notable figure was L. Hillier, composer of the *Chant des Wallons*.

The Haskalah ('education' in Hebrew): the Jewish Enlightenment (late 18th-19th century)

In the 18th century, the establishment of equal rights for Jews, which accompanied the emergence of Western nation states, the rise of a Jewish bourgeoisie and the erosion of traditional religious authorities, gave rise to the 'Enlightenment' movement, first in Germany and then in Europe, which also reached the communities of North Africa. This Haskalah movement also advocated change and economic improvement for Jews based on professional learning.

Initiated by Jewish thinkers such as the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (grandfather of the musician Felix Mendelssohn), it aimed to promote secular education, rationality and the integration of Jews into European societies while reforming religious practices considered archaic. A quote attributed to Mendelssohn sums up his philosophy: 'Be a man in public and a Jew in private'. The Haskalah played a key role in the modernisation of Jewish societies, laying the foundations for later movements such as Zionism, Reform Judaism and Conservative Judaism. However, its ideals were met with persistent antisemitism, making integration sometimes illusory.

Jews in Eastern Europe - The Bund, a 20th-century European Jewish socialist movement, born in the Russian Empire and decimated by the Holocaust

Persecuted in Western Europe in the 14th century, invited to Poland by King Kazimierz, Jews experienced peaceful periods of prosperity and great development alternating with periods of turmoil. Numerous towns developed, bringing together the majority of the Jewish people at that time, and Judaism enjoyed a special autonomy and could even bear titles of nobility. The fact that Jews were the main source of credit and financing for the Polish authorities may also explain this attitude. In the mid-17th century, the rivalry between the Cossacks and the Poles resulted in a wave of massacres of the Polish Catholic nobility and Jews by the Cossacks led by B. Khmelnitsky.

In the 19th century, the majority of the world's Jewish population (estimated at 5.5 million) lived in the Russian Empire and was assigned by the Russian authorities to the Zone of Residence, which corresponded to Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus.

The Bund, a social-democratic organisation of Jewish workers, was founded underground in 1897, the same year as Zionism, to which it was opposed. It was the first political party to seek to unite all Jewish workers in a globalist cause and fight against Tsarist autocracy. More than just a political organisation, the Bund developed a genuine cultural movement that broke with religion, whose religious texts were written in Hebrew (a sacred language that became a spoken language in the 20th century), and promoted Yiddish (a unique combination of medieval German dialects, Hebrew, Aramaic and Slavic, written with Hebrew characters), a language spoken by 97% of the Ashkenazi population at the time. Once it became legal, it created a number of cultural associations, youth movements,

schools and newspapers, and became an important player in Jewish life in Eastern Europe as well as in Paris, Brussels, New York, Israel and elsewhere.

The Bund disappeared following the Holocaust and Stalinist persecution. Some branches remain, and at its 1985 congress, the Bund affirmed its commitment to the welfare of Israel.

Modern antisemitism/anti-Judaism, the Second World War (Holocaust)

Modern antisemitism is the result of a convergence of socio-economic, cultural and political factors and is exacerbated by fantasies detached from reality targeting the Jewish minority. Animosity towards Jews, coming from both left-wing and right-wing parties, erupted freely with the Dreyfus Affair, in which a Jewish officer was falsely accused of selling military secrets to Germany solely because of his Jewishness. Witnessing his conviction, Austrian journalist Theodor Herzl believed that Jews had no choice but to emancipate themselves by creating their own state. He soon invented Zionism, which spread mainly among the Jews of Eastern Europe. In the 20th century, many Eastern European Jews, fleeing antisemitism and economic stagnation, moved to Western Europe and contributed to its growth.

The Nazi regime, established in Germany and invading Europe, planned the destruction of European Jews, either by shooting them or sending them to death camps. According to the latest research, particularly that carried out in situ by Father Desbois' Yahad in Unum organisation, more than 6 million Jews were murdered. In Belgium, nearly half of the 56,000 Jews registered before the war were murdered. Only 5% of the Jews deported survived the hell of Auschwitz.

Jews today

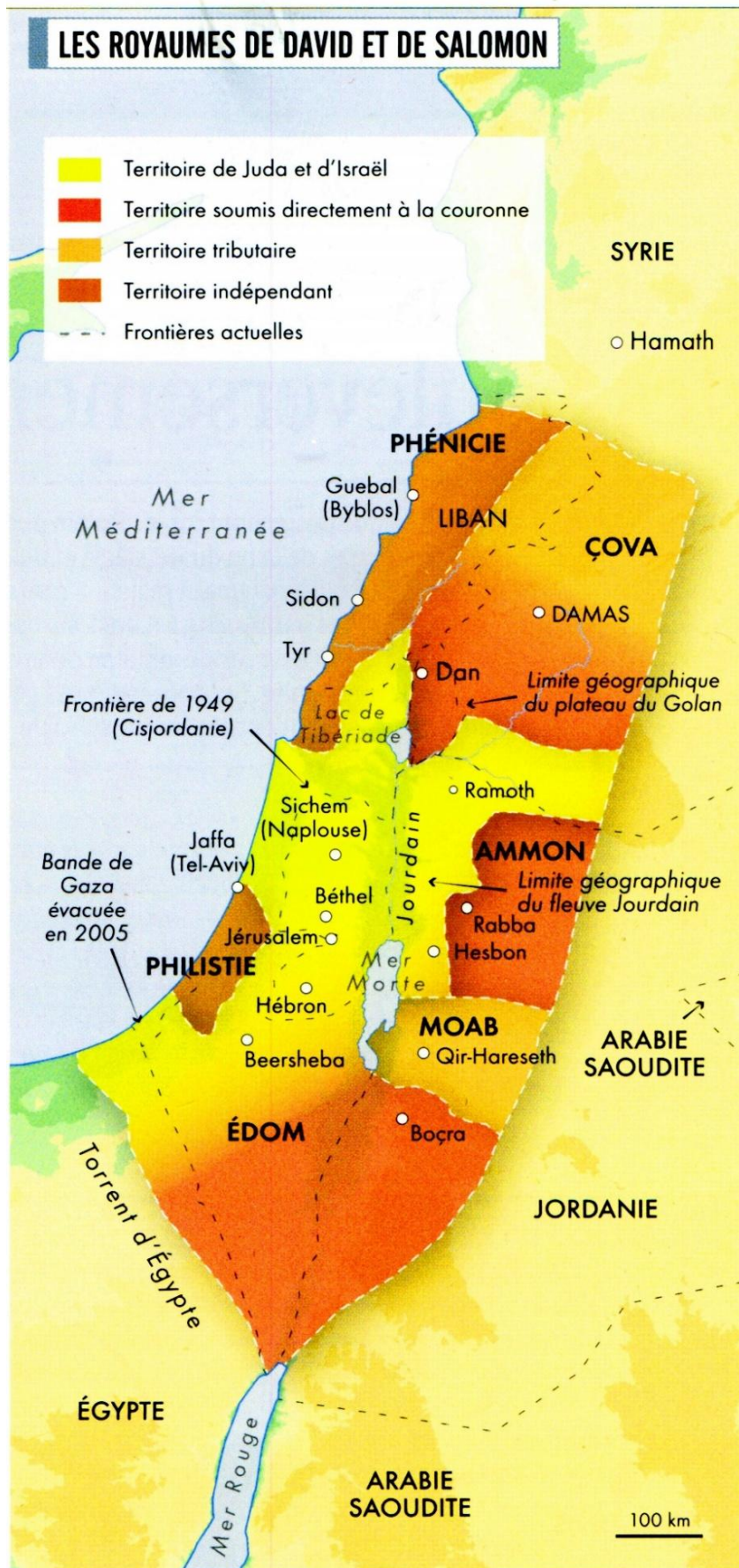
Although scarred by war and burdened by painful memories, the Jewish people have rebuilt themselves in a positive way and are present in all strata of society. Cultural heritage has become very important to the Jewish community and more significant in terms of religion, and mixed marriages are common. In Belgium, two Nobel Prize winners, Ilya Prigogine (who was interned in Malines by the Nazis) and François Englert (who survived the war as a hidden child), are examples of the resilience of the people after the Holocaust. Integration is almost complete.

However, antisemitism has resurfaced and the fear of a new wave of antisemitism imported from the East into our countries is very much present today.

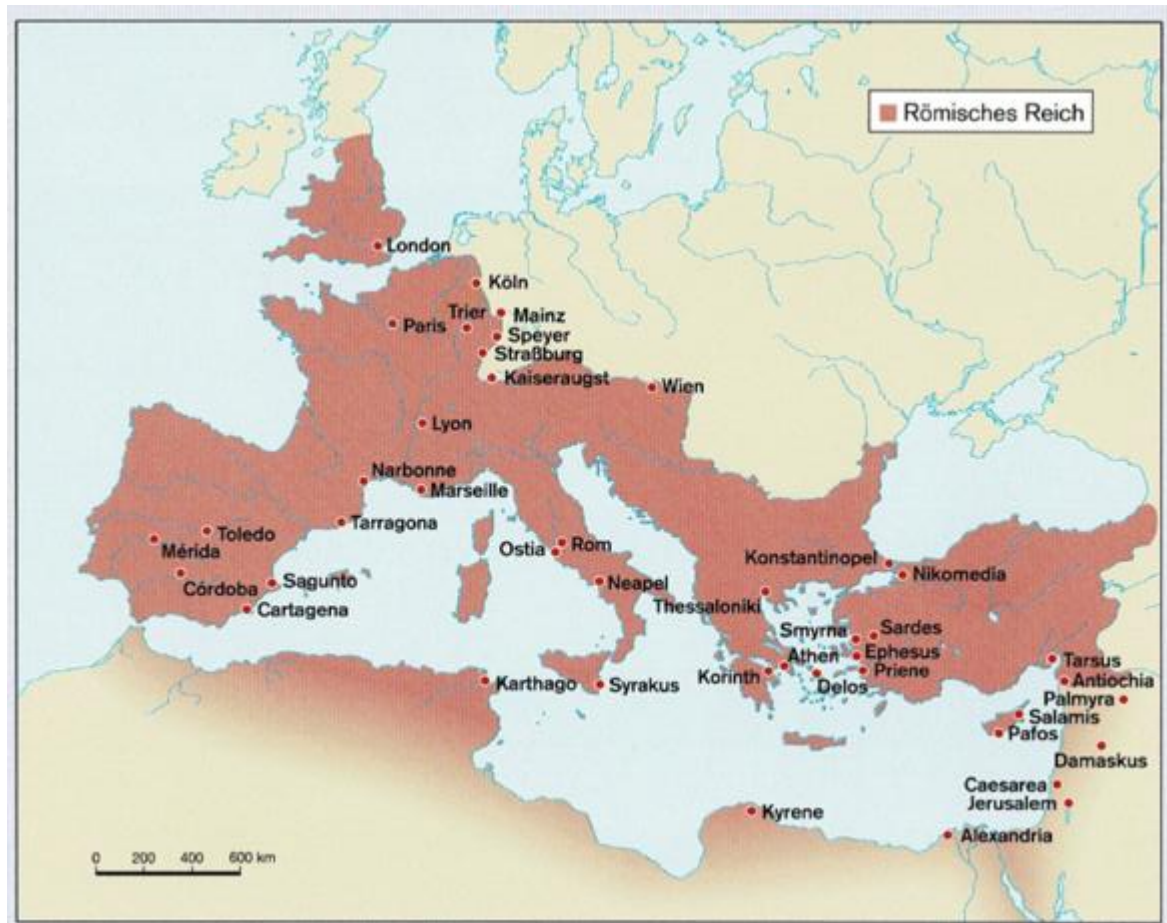
Annex 2. Maps

MAP SOURCES:

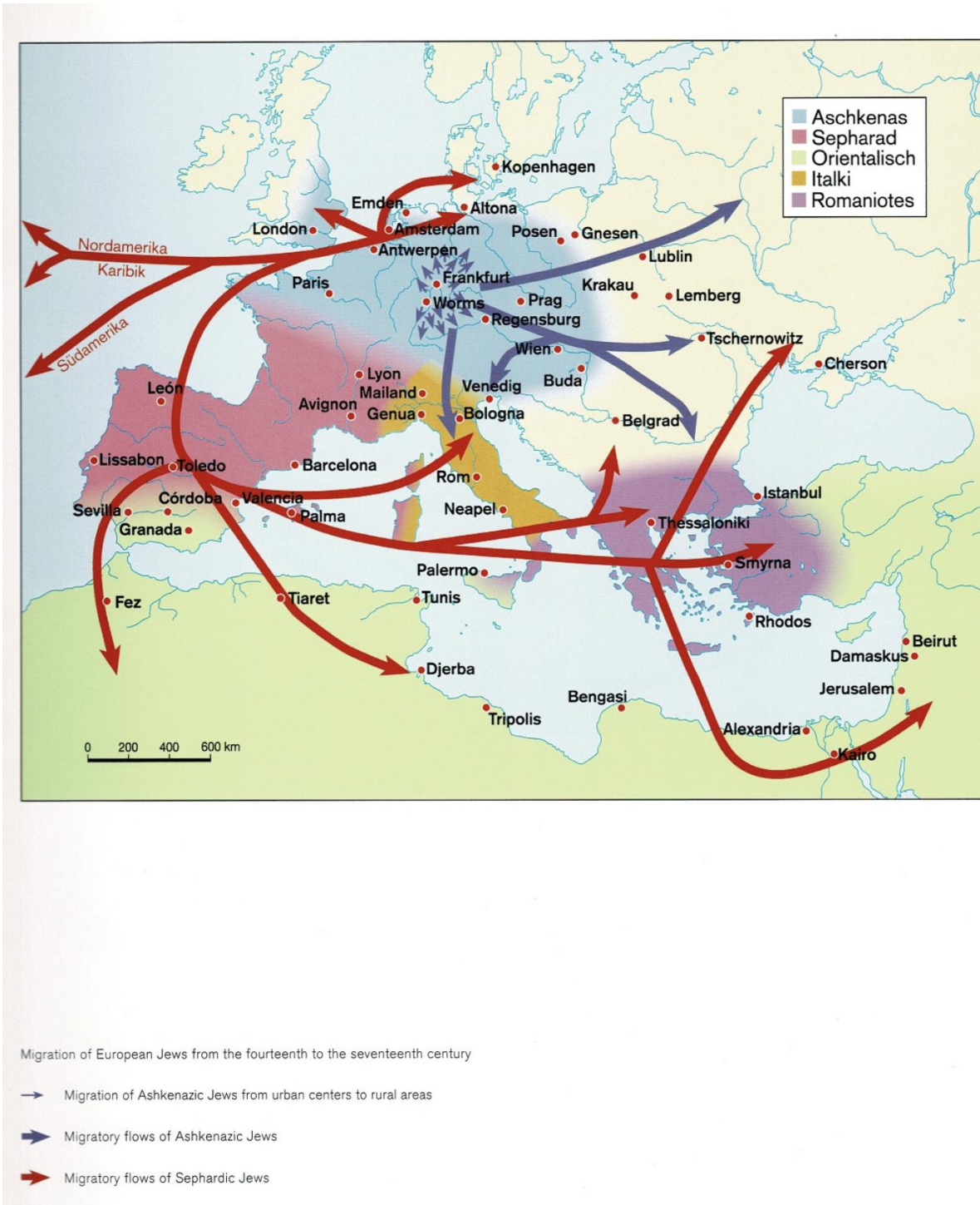
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- Visactu.com, Hamas attack on Israel, October 2023
- Oct7map.com, 7 October 2023, interactive map <https://oct7map.com>



C1. Kingdoms of Judea and Samaria – Antiquity



C2. Jewish settlements in the Roman Empire – 4th century AD



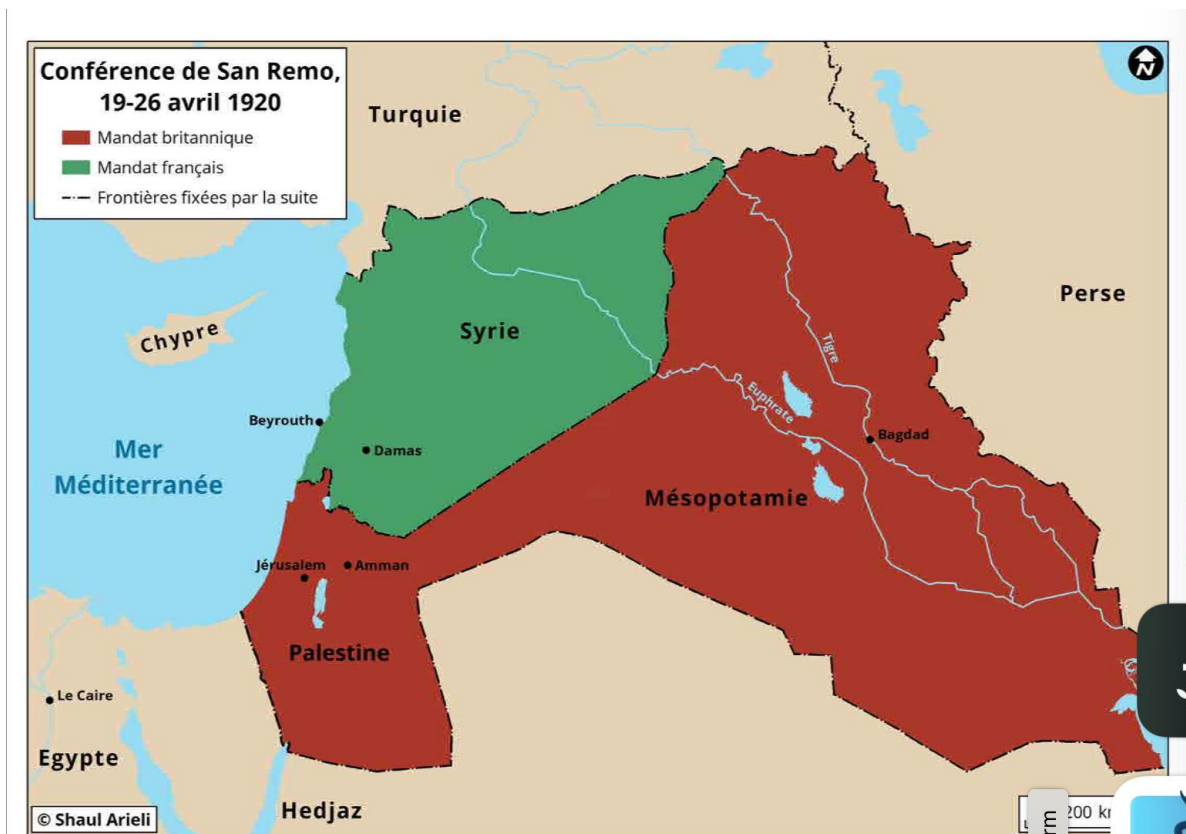
C3. Migrations of European Jews between the 14th and 17th centuries



C4. Sykes-Picot Agreement – 1916



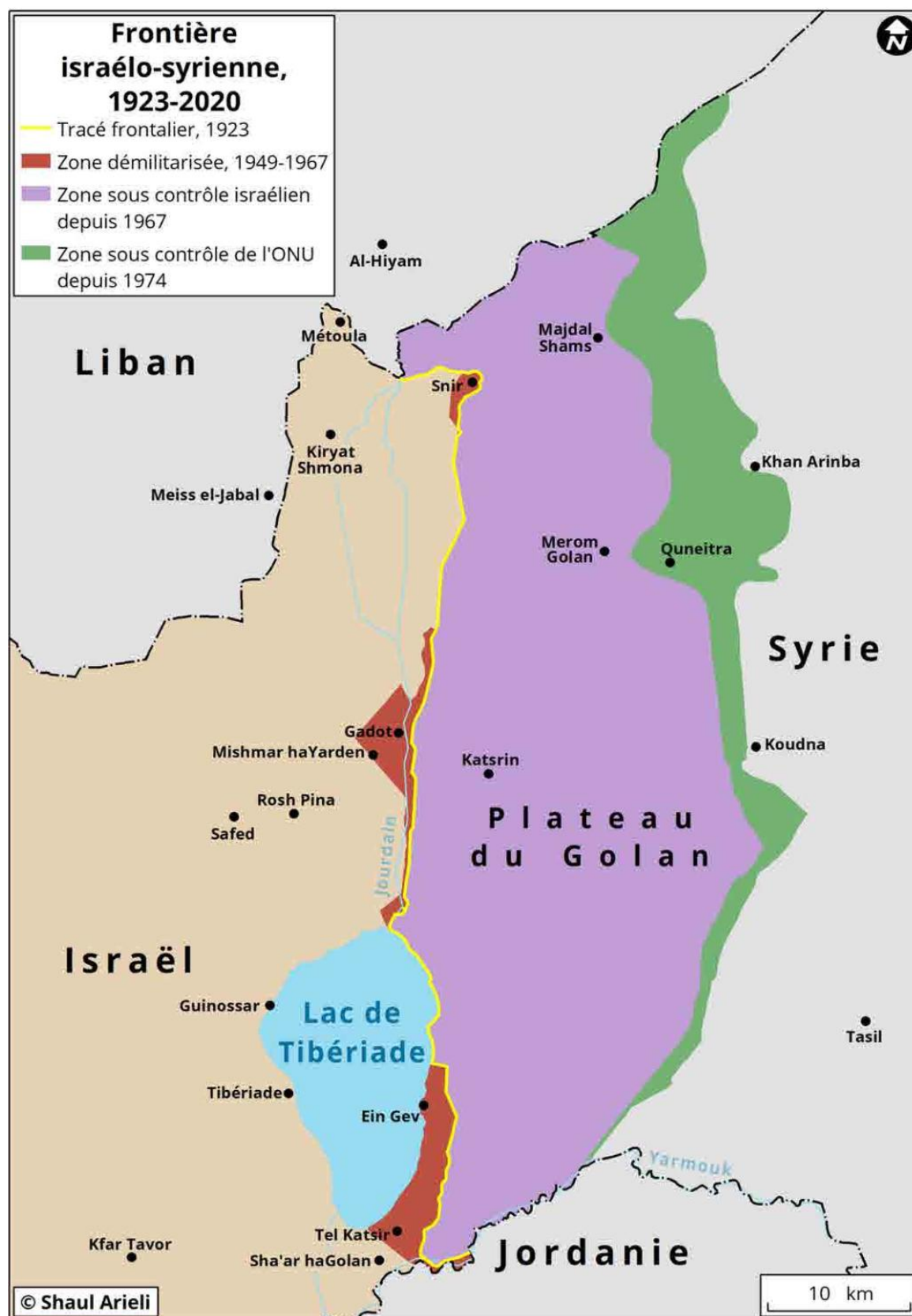
C5. Administrative division in the Ottoman Empire – 1884 -1919



C6



C7. Palestine under British Mandate – 1922-1923



C8. Israeli-Syrian controlled areas from 1923 to 2020





C10



C11



C12



C13



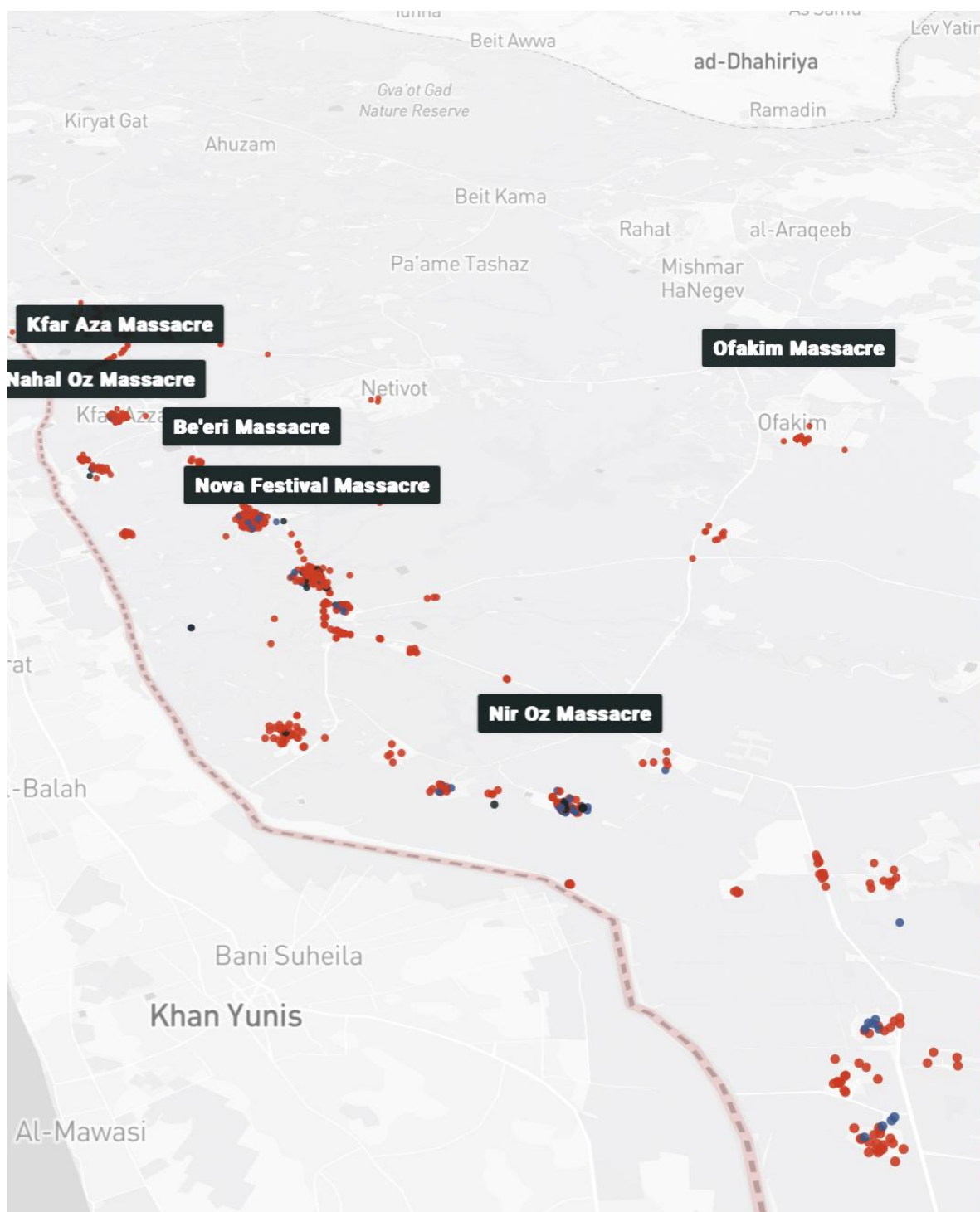




C16. Oslo Agreements



C17. Hamas invasion of southern Israel – 7 October 2023



C18. October 7, 2023

<https://oct7map.com/>

Annex 3. Chronology

Canaanite and Egyptian Period (2nd millennium BCE)

Israelite Period (First Temple Period) (1000–597 BCE)

- Kingdoms of Judah and Samaria

Babylonian Period (Exile Period) (597–539 BCE)

- Destruction of Solomon's First Temple

Persian Period (539–332 BCE)

- 539 BCE: Return from exile
- 516 BCE: Construction of the Second Temple

Greek Period (333–63 BCE)

Roman (Second Temple) and Byzantine Periods (63 BCE–632 CE)

- 70 CE: Destruction of the Second Temple by Titus

Arab / Crusader / Mamluk Periods (632–1516)

- 1492: Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, followed by Portugal

Ottoman Period (1516–1917)

- 1881–1882: First anti-Jewish pogroms in Eastern Europe and first *aliyah* (immigration) of Jews to Palestine
- **1894: The Dreyfus Affair in France**
- 1896: Publication of *The Jewish State* by Theodor Herzl
- 1897: First Zionist Congress in Basel and creation of the World Zionist Organization
- 1904: New wave of pogroms and second *aliyah* to Palestine
- 1905: Adoption of Palestine as the national objective for Jews (*Eretz Israel*, the Land of Israel in Hebrew)
- **1908: Young Turk Revolution and rise of Turkish nationalism**
- **1914–1918: First World War**
- **1915: Armenian Genocide by the Turks**

- 1916: Sykes-Picot Agreement dividing the Middle East between Britain and France
- 1917: Balfour Declaration
- **1917: Bolshevik Revolution**
- 1918: Title of “Grand Mufti of Jerusalem” created by the British military administration in Palestine
- **1920: Creation of the League of Nations**
- 1920–1921: Anti-Jewish riots in Palestine

British Mandate (1922–1948)

- 1923: Official start of the British Mandate over Palestine granted by the League of Nations
- 1929: Anti-Jewish massacre in Hebron
- 1930: First British White Paper limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine
- **1933–1939: Rise of Nazism in Germany and new wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine**
- 1936–1939: Arab Revolt against the Jews — incited by the Grand Mufti
- 1939: Second British White Paper further restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine
- **1939–1945: Second World War and the Shoah (extermination of 6 million Jews)**
- **1945: Allied victory and liberation of concentration camps**
- 1945: Creation of the Arab League
- 1945: Revolt of the Jewish underground army against Britain’s immigration ban
- **1945: Creation of the United Nations**
- 1947: UN Partition Plan for two states, one Jewish and one Arab

Post-Independence Period of the State of Israel (1948–present)

- 1948: British withdrawal from Palestine
- May 14, 1948: Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel
- 1948: Palestinian exodus (*Nakba*)

- 1948–1949: Joint attacks by five Arab countries against Israel
- 1949: Armistice agreements between Israel and its neighbors — Jerusalem divided
- 1949: Recognition of Israel by the United Nations
- December 1949: Creation of UNRWA
- 1949: Annexation of the West Bank by Transjordan and Egyptian occupation of Gaza
- 1954: Seizure of power by Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt and overthrow of the monarchy
- 1956: Suez Crisis and Sinai War
- 1959: Creation of Fatah by Yasser Arafat
- 1964: Creation of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) by the Arab League
- 1967: Six-Day War
- 1969: Yasser Arafat takes control of the PLO
- 1970: “Black September” in Jordan and creation of the terrorist group of the same name
- 1972: Plane hijackings and massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics by Black September
- 1973: Yom Kippur War
- 1977: Visit of Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat to Jerusalem
- 1978: Camp David Peace Accords between Israel and Egypt
- 1981: Assassination of Anwar El-Sadat in Cairo
- 1982: Israel’s first war in Lebanon, in coordination with the South Lebanon Army
- 1982: Massacre in the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila by Lebanese Phalangists
- 1987: First Intifada
- 1988: Creation of Hamas in Gaza
- 1993: Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO

- 1994: Creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA)
- 1995: Oslo II Accords
- **1994: Nobel Peace Prize awarded to Arafat, Rabin, and Peres**
- 1995: Assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin
- 1996: Yasser Arafat becomes President of the Palestinian Authority
- 2000: Second Intifada
- 2005: Unilateral withdrawal from Gaza by Israel (Ariel Sharon)
- 2006: Elections and unity government between Hamas and Fatah in Gaza
- 2007: Hamas coup and takeover of Gaza
- 2012: Palestine admitted to the UN as a non-member observer state
- 2018: Nation-State Law adopted by the Knesset (Israeli Parliament)
- 2020: Abraham Accords — normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, Morocco, and in 2021 with Kosovo
- 2021: Israel–Palestine clashes
- 2023: Hamas attacks and massacres on October 7 in southern Israel
- 2023: War between Israel and Hamas / Hezbollah in Lebanon / Houthis in Yemen / Iran
- 2024: European countries including Ireland, Spain, and Norway recognize the State of Palestine
- ...

Annex 4. Glossary

Balfour Declaration

Named after Lord Balfour, Foreign Secretary of the British Government. This declaration, addressed on 2 November 1917 to Lord Lionel Walter Rothschild (member of the Zionist Congress), mentions for the first time the recognition of the existence of a Jewish people and refers to the creation of a 'Jewish national home in Palestine':

'His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'

Black September

This is the name of the conflict that broke out on 12 September 1970 in Jordan, when Palestinians attempted to overthrow the Hashemite regime. This conflict claimed many civilian victims (between 10,000 and 30,000) and the Palestinians of the PLO, who were expelled, took refuge in Lebanon.

The terrorist group, created in the wake of these events, took its name from this conflict. Black September became known for the assassination of a Jordanian prime minister in Cairo, for hijackings, including that of the Sabena aircraft in 1972, and above all for the assassination of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics.

Blockade of Gaza

A blockade is a measure taken by a country or group of countries to isolate a specific region or country, restricting the movement of people and goods in order to exert economic or political pressure on the targeted region or country.

The blockade of Gaza was established in 2006. Israel and Egypt imposed restrictions to prevent Hamas from obtaining weapons and materials that could be used for military purposes. However, Israel allowed humanitarian goods, food, medicine and other essential supplies to enter Gaza. Crossing points are used to facilitate the entry of these goods.

British Mandate

In 1920, the League of Nations granted Britain a mandate (which took effect in 1923) over Palestine (including the territories of the State of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank) and another over present-day Jordan.

British numerus clausus (See 'White Papers')

British White Papers (concerning Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine)

The first White Paper on Palestine was published on 2 June 1922 by Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for the Colonies in the British government. The White Paper made Jewish immigration contingent on the country's economic absorption capacity. The system put in place amounted to a considerable restriction on Jewish immigration. A second White Paper was published by Great Britain in 1939, which also limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 people over five years and stipulated that further immigration would then be determined by the Arab majority.

Dhimma and dhimmi

The Dhimma, a convention dating back to the early centuries of Islam, concerned Jewish and Christian subjects (the 'People of the Book'). Basically, it was a pact whereby they were guaranteed protection as long as they paid a considerable tax and submitted to a set of discriminatory and humiliating rules.

Although the status of dhimmi was abolished in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century, it continued in Arab countries and Iran until the mid-20th century.

East Jerusalem

The area of Jerusalem east of the Green Line or Armistice Line of 3 April 1949. Jerusalem was under Jordanian control from 1949 to 1967. It was conquered and annexed by Israel following the Six-Day War. This part of the city includes the holy sites of the three monotheistic religions.

Fatah

Fatah is a Palestinian nationalist political party. It represents the predominant component of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation). It was created by Yasser Arafat in Kuwait in 1959.

Fedayeen

The fedayeen (plural of feda'i, meaning 'one who sacrifices himself for something or someone') are mainly small groups of commandos or 'freelance fighters'. The term refers mainly to Palestinian fedayeen, also known as 'fighters for the faith'.

Ghetto

Originally, the ghetto referred to a neighbourhood in Venice where Jews were gathered from the 16th century onwards and whose gates were closed at night. The term took on an even more sinister meaning during the Second World War. The Nazis gathered Jews in designated, walled-off neighbourhoods in certain Eastern European cities called ghettos, before deporting or exterminating them. By extension, the term is used to refer to a neighbourhood where a homogeneous ethnic minority is concentrated.

Grand Mufti

The Grand Mufti provides Islamic legal opinions, known as fatwas, on religious, social and political issues. These opinions are based on the interpretation of Islamic law (sharia). He serves as a spiritual advisor to the Muslim community, guiding the faithful on matters of faith and religious practice.

The Grand Mufti may also play a political role, representing the interests of the Muslim community to local and international authorities.

In Palestine, the title was created by the British military administration for Haj Amin El Husseini.

Grand Vizier

Title of the head of government in the Ottoman Empire (equivalent to Prime Minister).

Green Line

The armistice line of 3 April 1949, which was crossed by Israel during the Six-Day War of 1967. It currently demarcates the occupied territory of the West Bank.

Hamas Charter

The Hamas Charter sets out the ideology and goals of the Palestinian Islamist and nationalist organisation. With regard to the Middle East, the charter advocates armed struggle against the 'Zionist entity' and does not recognise the legitimacy of the State of Israel.

Hijab

The hijab refers to the garment worn by Muslim women (veil or headscarf) to cover their heads while leaving their faces visible.

Intifada

Intifada is an Arabic word meaning 'uprising'. It refers to the two revolts against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. The first broke out in 1987, the second in 2000.

Islamic jihad (or Jihad)

The term 'jihad' is an Islamic concept that literally means "effort" or 'struggle' in Arabic. It can therefore refer to the inner, personal struggle of every Muslim to live according to the principles of Islam. Jihad can also refer to an armed struggle to defend Islam or Muslim lands against aggression. Extremist groups use it to justify acts of violence that they describe as 'holy war'. Various groups bear the name jihad in several Muslim countries. Today, it is more commonly attributed to Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), a Palestinian armed organisation identified in the West as a terrorist group. It was created in the late 1970s to establish a sovereign Islamic state in Palestine and destroy Israel. It openly

claims to be Sunni. Initially, Islamic Jihad was composed of former members of the Muslim Brotherhood and a group belonging to Fatah.

Jewish diaspora

A diaspora refers to the dispersion of a people outside their territory of origin. For the Jewish people, the dispersion from the ancient kingdom of Judea began in the 6th century BC (deportation to Babylon) and has seen several waves throughout history. Today, the largest Jewish community outside Israel is in the United States.

Judea and Samaria

Judea and Samaria is the biblical name for the West Bank occupied by Israel. This name reflects the desire of ministers in the current Israeli government and their supporters to annex the West Bank.

Mandatory Palestine (see 'British Mandate' above)

Muslim Brotherhood

The ideology and practices of the Muslim Brotherhood are summarised in the first article of their 'Constitution': 'God is our goal, the Prophet is our model, the Koran is our law, jihad is our life, martyrdom is our vow'. It was the Muslim Brotherhood that created the Islamist movement that would take the name Hamas in 1987.

Nuremberg Tribunal or Trial

The Nuremberg Trial, brought by the Allies and held under the jurisdiction of the International Military Tribunal, was intended to try 24 senior Nazi officials for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the Second World War. It lasted from November 1945 to October 1946.

Palaestina

Palaestina (prima) is the name given by the Roman emperor Hadrian to the southern part of the province of Syria-Palestine (formerly the Kingdom of Judea). This restructuring and name change followed a Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire, which was defeated in 135 CE.

Palestinian diaspora

The Palestinian dispersion began with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 (750,000 left their lands). Today, the vast majority of the Palestinian diaspora is located in Arab countries (6.3 million of the 7.4 million living outside Israel and the occupied territories).

Philistines

In the 12th century BC, the Philistines, of Aegean origin, occupied a territory in the south-west of the Mediterranean Sea, along the coast (stretching from the northern half of the

current Gaza Strip to the south of the current city of Tel Aviv). They disappeared around 600 BC.

Pogrom

A term of Russian origin referring to a popular antisemitic uprising accompanied by looting and massacres. Pogroms were tolerated or encouraged by the Russian and Ukrainian authorities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although they are not referred to by this name in the Arab-Muslim world, massacres of exactly the same nature did take place in the 20th century.

By extension, some apply it to the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October 2023, although the circumstances are very different given that this attack had been planned well in advance.

Sharia

In Islam, Sharia is the canonical law governing religious, political, social and individual life. It is applied more or less strictly in Muslim countries.

Strait of Tiran

Maritime passage between Sinai (Egypt) and Tiran Island (Saudi Arabia). Located in the Gulf of Aqaba, it controls access from the Red Sea. Its closure has been the cause of various armed conflicts between Israel and Arab countries.

Suez Canal

The Suez Canal is a navigable canal located in Egypt. It was built between 1859 and 1869 by Ferdinand de Lesseps. It connects the Mediterranean Sea (Port Said) and the Red Sea (the city of Suez). Its construction significantly reduced travel times between Europe and the East.

Sykes-Picot Agreements

These agreements, signed in 1916, were named after two officials who secretly negotiated their terms over several months to divide the Near and Middle East between France and Britain. They were Colonel Sir Mark Sykes (attached to the War Office for Middle Eastern affairs) and French diplomat François-Georges-Picot.

Theodor Herzl

Hungarian journalist, lawyer, writer and political activist (1860–1904) who was at the origin of modern political Zionism and the vision of a Jewish homeland at the end of the 19th century. He helped found the World Zionist Organisation. He encouraged Jewish emigration to Palestine following the pogroms and growing antisemitism in Europe.

Young Turks

Name usually given to a revolutionary nationalist movement (the Committee of Union and Progress), which emerged in the late 19th century in the Ottoman Empire. Seeking to bring about reform, the Young Turks movement restored the constitutional rights that had been in force in 1876. In 1913, after overthrowing the government that had been in power until then, the Young Turks led the Ottoman Empire to ally itself with Germany during the First World War. It was also the Young Turks who planned and carried out the Armenian genocide.

Zones A, B and C

The Oslo Accords defined three zones in the West Bank: Zone A, controlled by the Palestinian Authority, including the major cities of the West Bank; Zone B, under the civil control of the Palestinian Authority and military control of the Israeli army; and Zone C, under the complete control of the Israeli army.

Annex 5. Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel – 1948 (excerpt)

“(…) On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution recommending the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. The General Assembly called upon the inhabitants of this country to take all necessary measures for the implementation of that resolution. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their own independent State is irrevocable.

It is the natural right of the Jewish people, as it is of all other nations, to live as a free and independent nation in its own sovereign State.

Accordingly, we, members of the National Council, representing the Jewish community of Palestine and the World Zionist Movement, assembled in solemn session today, the day of the termination of the British Mandate in Palestine, by virtue of the natural and historical right of the Jewish people and in accordance with the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, HEREBY PROCLAIM THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE JEWISH STATE IN PALESTINE, TO BE KNOWN AS THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

(…)

The State of Israel will be open to Jewish immigration and to the gathering of the exiles; it will work for the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be founded on freedom, justice, and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education, and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will remain faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The State of Israel is prepared to cooperate with the organs and representatives of the United Nations in the implementation of the resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947, and to take all necessary measures for the establishment of the economic union of the whole of Palestine.

We appeal to the United Nations to assist the Jewish people in the building of its State and to admit Israel into the family of nations.

In the midst of a cruel attack, we nevertheless call upon the Arab inhabitants of the State to preserve the ways of peace and to play their part in the development of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.

We extend our hand in peace and good neighbourliness to all the States and peoples around us, and we invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all. The State of Israel is prepared to contribute its share to the advancement of the Middle East as a whole.

We appeal to the Jewish people throughout the world to stand by us in the tasks of immigration and development and to assist us in the great struggle for the realization of the age-old dream: the redemption of Israel.

Placing our trust in the Almighty, we affix our signatures to this declaration on this session of the Provisional Council of the State, on the soil of our homeland, in the city of Tel Aviv, on this Sabbath eve, the 5th day of Iyar, 5708, the 14th of May, 1948.”

Proclaimed aloud by David Ben-Gurion on 14 May 1948. The 37 members of the Council then signed the Declaration.

People's Council (1948) "Declaration of Establishment of State of Israel." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Annex 6. Hamas Charter (excerpt)

The forces that support the enemy:

Article Twenty-Two:

For a long time now, considering the forces that influence the course of events, the enemies have drawn up plans and adopted them in order to reach the position they hold today. They have worked to accumulate vast material wealth and great financial power, which they have dedicated to the achievement of their dream.

With money, they control the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, radio stations, and so on. With money, they have stirred up revolutions in various parts of the world to serve and expand their interests. They were behind the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution, and most of the revolutions we have heard of or still hear about here and there.

With money, they created secret organizations that extend their influence to all parts of the world in order to destroy societies and advance the interests of Zionism, such as Freemasonry, the Rotary and Lions clubs, the B'nai B'rith [Abna al-'Ahd], and others. All of these are organizations devoted to espionage and sabotage. With money, they succeeded in taking control of colonialist states and pushed them to colonize many regions in order to exploit their wealth and spread their corruption there.

As for local and world wars, there is no difficulty in speaking about them: it was they who were behind the First World War, when the condemnation of the Islamic Caliphate was pronounced. They accumulated vast material profits and took control of many resources. They obtained the Balfour Declaration and laid the foundations of the League of Nations to rule the world through this organization.

It was they who were behind the Second World War, which allowed them to amass enormous profits through the trade of war materials. They prepared the ground for the establishment of their own State, and it was through their instigation that the United Nations and the Security Council were created to replace the League of Nations, in order to rule the world through them.

Whenever a war breaks out here or there, their hand is behind it.

Charter of the 'Islamic Resistance Movement' – Hamas – August 18, 1988

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