

# The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: In A Nutshell

It's a family squabble that goes all the way back to Abraham. The Jews are descendants of Abraham's son Isaac. The Arabs are descendants of Abraham's son Ishmael.

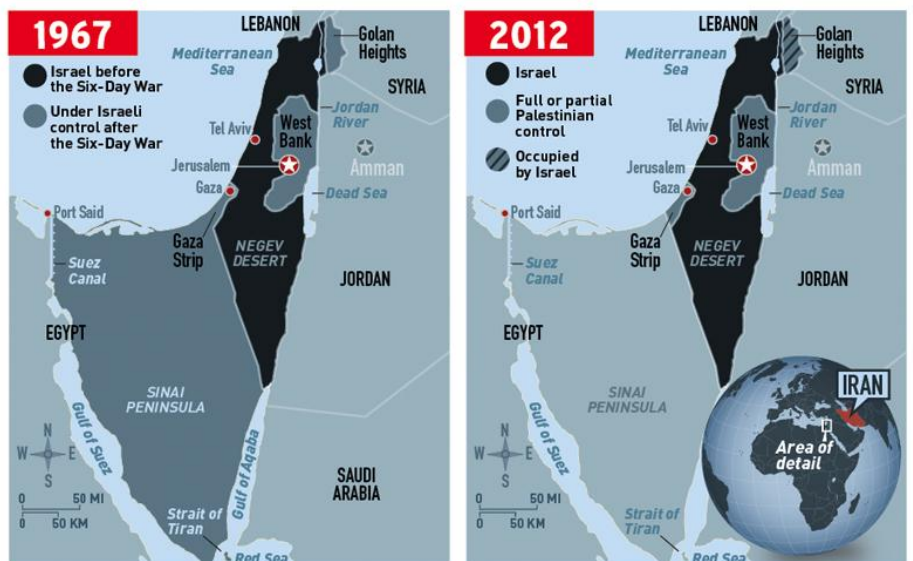
Jews believe Isaac was the promised son who would inherit the blessings of Abraham. The Qur'an teaches that it was Ishmael whom Abraham almost sacrificed, not Isaac. This debate over who was the son of promise contributes to the hostility today.

However, the ancient root of bitterness between Isaac and Ishmael does not explain all of the hostility between Jews and Arabs today. In fact, for thousands of years of Middle Eastern history, Jews and Arabs lived in relative peace and indifference towards each other. The primary cause of the hostility has a modern origin. It's complicated, of course, but the fact is that many of the current conflicts can be traced to decisions made after World War I by the victorious Allies (largely Britain and France) who divided up the territory of what had been the Ottoman Empire.

**WWI - The British promised the same land to two groups:** Palestine is the name given by Arabs to an area in the Middle East. Palestine was absorbed into the Ottoman Empire in 1517 and remained under the rule of the Turks until World War One. Towards the end of this war, the Turks were defeated by British forces. The British had made a number of conflicting commitments during the war: They had promised Arabs independence in return for taking up arms against their Turkish Ottoman rulers (*McMahon-Hussein Agreement* of October 1915). In November of 1917, in what became known as the *Balfour Declaration*, Britain announced its support for a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine (of course, the land was already populated and promised to native Arabs). After the war, the British decided to maintain control of Palestine.

**WWII – The British do it again – then ask the UN for help:** After the war, in which 6 million Jews were killed in Europe (during the Holocaust in which Adolf Hitler attempted to wipe out the Jews), many nations, including the United States, embraced the idea of creating a Jewish state in British-ruled Palestine. There was a slight problem. Some other people were already living there. In 1947, the United Nations voted to divide the area into an Arab state and a Jewish state. The Jews accepted the partition plan; but the Arabs, who outnumbered Jews in much of Palestine, rejected it. When the British left and Israel declared independence in 1948, five Arab states attacked. Israel defeated the Arab forces and took all of the Arab territory designated by the UN. 750,000 Palestinians fled Palestine to other Arab states.

**1967 – Six Day War:** Israel preemptively strikes Egypt after Egypt, Syria, and Jordan plan an attack on Israel. The Six-Day War in 1967 left Israel in control of the Sinai Peninsula (later returned to Egypt), along with the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and all of Jerusalem (home to many sites sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims). The Jews had redrawn the map of the Middle East, demonstrating its military superiority but settling little.



**PLO** - In response, Palestinians began to call for a homeland of their own, with support from the rest of the Arab world. In 1967 the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed. The PLO's basic principles and goals included the right to an independent state, and the destruction of the state of Israel. Hundreds of people were killed in years of attacks on Israel. Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader, was branded a terrorist by Israel and the US but he was considered a freedom fighter by Palestinians and their allies around the world.

**1973 – Yom Kippur War:** Egypt and Syria attack Israeli forces in Sinai and the Golan Heights. Israel repels both armies and a cease-fire is declared.

**1979 – Israel / Egypt Peace:** US President Jimmy Carter brokers peace between Egypt and Israel. Israel withdraws from Sinai.

**1987-1990 – First Intifada:** Angered by Israel's ongoing occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians begin an uprising. It progresses from Palestinian youths throwing stones at Israeli soldiers to suicide bombers targeting Israeli civilians.

**1993-1994 – Oslo Accords:** Under the 1993 Oslo Accords, brokered in Norway, Israel turns over parts of the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinians as a step toward statehood. Israel and Jordan sign a peace treaty.

**2000-2005 – Second Intifada:** After negotiations on a final Israeli-Palestinian peace deal fail, a second uprising begins. Dozens of suicide bombings in Israel and an Israeli crackdown in the West Bank and Gaza kill more than 1,000 Israelis and 4,000 Palestinians.

**2005-2006 – Israel Leaves Gaza:** Israel evacuates its settlements in Gaza and withdraws troops from there.

**20011-2012 – Arab Spring/Iran:** Whether post-Arab Spring governments will have friendly relations with Israel remains to be seen; Israel is threatening to attack Iran over its nuclear weapons program.

### **UNRESOLVED ISSUES – Other than the obvious:**

**Settlements** – Palestinians want Israeli withdrawal to pre-1967 borders and establishment of independent Palestinian state in West Bank and Gaza. 300,000 Jewish settlers now live in West Bank and continue to build. Palestinians insist that Israel halt expansion of all settlements before they'll return to peace talks.

**Refugees' right to return** – There are four million displaced Palestinians today living in refugee camps in occupied territories and neighboring Arab states. Palestinians want refugees or their descendants to be able to return to homes they lost in 1948. Israel has rejected this idea.

**Jerusalem** – Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of their future states. Israel has vowed it will never give it up.

**Rise of terrorist (according to Israelis) / freedom fighting groups (according to Palestinians):** Fatah, Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), al-Qaida