



CHECKPOINT

Guidebook



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The Land of Three Faiths

In the Middle Ages, maps pictured the world as a circular terrain surrounded by the great ocean. At the very center was the city of Jerusalem, which was called the “navel of the world.” Even today, the map shows the region’s centrality, lying as it does at the junction of trade routes that connect three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa. According to the Bible, the land was known as Canaan before the Jews invaded it. In Hebrew the land is known as Eretz Israel (the land of Israel); many Christians simply call it the “Holy Land;” and in Arabic the land is known as Filastin, or Palestine, after another of the ancient peoples who dwelt there, the Philistines. For Jews it is the land promised them by God; for Christians it is the land of Jesus’s birth and resurrection; for Muslims Jerusalem is where Muhammad ascended into heaven and the third holiest city in Islam.

After long struggles, the Israelites defeated both the Canaanites and the Philistines and under their great king David established a Jewish monarchy around 1000 B.C. After that, the Israelites were often invaded themselves—by Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and the forces of Alexander the Great. The Romans arrived in 63 B.C, and after the Romans suppressed Jewish rebellions in 66 A.D. and 132-135 A.D. the Jewish homeland was lost. The Romans razed the great Jewish temple, destroyed Jericho and Bethlehem, and eventually banned Jews from living in Jerusalem altogether. Thus began the “diaspora,” a Greek term meaning “dispersion” that is used to describe the scattering of the Jewish population. Jews settled in Spain, where they enjoyed a kind of Golden Age, and in Germany, and by the 11th century Jewish settlements had been established throughout northern and western Europe. Jews also migrated to Eastern Europe and Russia; Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, became known as the Jerusalem of the North.

Meanwhile, a new force was gathering in the Middle East—of a vigorous and expansionist new religion, Islam. Muslim Arab armies invaded Palestine and captured Jerusalem in AD 638. Although the conquerors did not force their religion on the inhabitants, within a century most of the Palestinians accepted the new faith and the Arabic language. At the end of the 11th century, a movement arose in Europe to recapture the Holy Land and the result was the Crusades, a series of military operations conducted by Western European Christians between 1095 and 1270. The Crusaders captured Jerusalem on July 15, 1099, killing nearly everyone in the city. Under their great leader Saladin, the Muslims regained the city in 1187. The Crusaders recaptured it in 1228, but the Muslims eventually took it for good 16 years later. The Ottoman Turks made Jerusalem part of their empire in 1517, which is where it remained for exactly 400 years, until, as part of the operations of World War I, the British captured Jerusalem from the Turks in 1917.

The Birth of Israel

By the time the British arrived in Jerusalem, however, the city's population already had a Jewish majority. All during the centuries of the Jewish diaspora, the sentiment always remained that Palestine was still the Promised Land and someday, perhaps, the Jews would regain it. This longing became tangible after the establishment of the Zionist movement in 1897 by Theodor Herzl, who believed that Europe's anti-Semitism meant that Jews could never be at home there and should establish their own national state. After World War I, the British, who had already expressed support for a Jewish state in the Mideast, took control of Palestine. In the 1920s and 1930s, Jewish settlers, mostly from Poland and Russia, flocked to the area. During World War II, the Nazis systematically endeavored to destroy Europe's Jews, murdering some six million in what became known as the Holocaust. After the war many surviving Jews wished to emigrate to Palestine. The British at first tried to restrict their numbers but then turned the problem over to the United Nations, which voted in 1947 to separate Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. The British withdrew in 1948, Israel proclaimed its independence, many Palestinian Arabs fled from Israel, and a union of Arab states attacked the new Jewish nation. Israel held off the invaders and a shaky truce was established in 1949, after which Israel joined the United Nations.

A Land Divided

The Israeli-Arab war of 1948-1949 did not end hostilities by any means. That conflict created 780,000 Palestinian refugees; although many left of their own accord, at least half were forced out—to other countries or to refugee camps. In a sense, the Palestinians were now experiencing their own diaspora, and, like the Jews, began to entertain dreams of recapturing their homeland. In May 1964 a coalition of various Palestinian groups, including refugee groups, founded the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), an entity dedicated to helping the Palestinians "recover their usurped homes." Shortly after the end of the war of 1948-1949, Arab commandos began attacking Israel from bases in the Gaza Strip (then part of Egypt) and the West Bank (then part of Jordan). In 1956, Israel invaded the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula but withdrew under pressure from the United Nations and the United States. Full-scale hostilities broke out in June 1967, when, in the so-called Six-Day War, Israel captured the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, took the West Bank from Jordan, and seized the Golan Heights from Syria. Egypt and Syria attacked Israel in October 1973 (the Yom Kippur War), but, despite heavy losses, Israel repulsed the attacks. Eventually, Israel returned the Sinai to Egypt; the other territories they control to this day, and they remain one of the major dilemmas of the Mideast, especially now that Jewish settlers have moved into the areas.

A Struggle for Peace

Since 1993, Israeli and Palestinian diplomats have held "land for peace" discussions with the goal of establishing a Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The West Bank has been divided into three zones: one controlled by the Palestinian National Authority, one controlled by Israel, and one jointly administered. In 1988 the PLO, now headed by Yasser Arafat, recognized Israel and renounced terrorism; however, several Palestinian factions have rejected that pledge and continue to attack Israel. Many attempts at negotiating a "land for peace" agreement have been made, but none have settled the issue, in great measure because various Palestinian and Israeli groups stubbornly oppose it. When Israel took control of Gaza and the West Bank, over one million Arabs but practically no Jews were living there. Since 1967, however, Jewish settlements have been established, making a resolution of the conflict all that more difficult. When Palestinian terrorists attack Israel, Israel often responds by imposing economic sanctions and border controls, prohibiting Palestinians from leaving the regions. Many Palestinians who work outside the territories are thus prevented from reaching their jobs, or, as the film shows, from carrying out other activities, such as visiting hospitals and attending family functions. Although the film illustrates the grinding day-to-day process of controlling the tense border, it does not show

how violent it can be. On January 14, 2005, for example, Palestinians set off a truck bomb and fired mortars and automatic weapons at Israeli soldiers at the Karni checkpoint. Six Israeli civilians and three Palestinian militants were killed. It is this sort of ongoing violence that makes the region so volatile and so resistant to a peace accord.

The Israeli Checkpoints

An Israeli checkpoint is basically a roadblock that is guarded by soldiers of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) or Border Police in order to limit the movement of Palestinians. Although many checkpoints are located along Israel's border with the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (known as the "Green Line"), many others are situated within the occupied territories themselves. Israelis and foreigners usually pass through the checkpoints without being stopped, but Palestinians often experience long delays. Critics of the checkpoints charge that they bar Palestinian access to jobs and to essential services, such as education and medical care, and that they have a devastating impact in terms of travel time. It has been calculated for example, that the trip from Ramallah to Bethlehem, which used to take 45 minutes, can now take from 2 to 5 hours.¹ The Israelis counter that roadblocks are essential in the struggle to prevent the numerous terrorist attacks mounted against Israel from inside the 1 occupied territories. The number of checkpoints fluctuates, as some are added and some removed, but as of mid-January 2005, there were 144. The nature of a checkpoint can range from an unguarded earth-and-concrete barrier to a military complex where people and vehicles are searched. A military checkpoint is usually manned by about 20 regular troops and about half a dozen reservists; the reservists serve one month out of every year. The soldiers, who are responsible for security, patrol the crossing, direct traffic, and search vehicles, while the reservists examine the permits and IDs of the people who are crossing. In Israel military service is compulsory for both Jewish men and women over the age of 18 Israel is the only country that currently includes women in the military draft. A special combat unit of the Israeli Police known as the MAGAV is composed of men who choose to serve there instead of in the IDF. These units are specially trained in counter-terrorism and are spread mostly across Israel's borders with the West Bank. The day-to-day operation of a checkpoint can be tedious and frustrating, but it can also be lethal, as was terribly evident on January 13, 2005, when Palestinian terrorists struck the Karni Crossing between Israel and central Gaza late at night and killed six Israeli security guards and wounded five others.

Timeline

70 A.D.: After putting down a rebellion, the Romans destroy the Temple in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religious life.

132-135: The Romans suppress another Jewish rebellion and ban Jews from living in Jerusalem; the beginning of the diaspora.

622: The prophet Muhammad flees from his native Mecca, the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

638: Muslims conquer Jerusalem.

900-1100: Golden Age of Spanish Jewry.

1099: European Crusaders capture Jerusalem.

1187: Muslim forces under Saladin reconquer Jerusalem from the Crusaders.

1492: The Jews are expelled from Spain and settle throughout the Mediterranean world.

1500s: The Jewish Lithuanian community becomes a major center of Jewish scholarship.

1517: The Ottoman Turks make Jerusalem part of their empire.

1897: Theodor Herzl organizes the first Zionist World Congress.

1917: Great Britain captures Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks. Britain issues the Balfour Declaration, which supports a Jewish state in Palestine.

1922: The League of Nations approves a British mandate over Palestine.

1939-1945: World War II; some six million Jews perish in the Holocaust.

1947: Under a United Nations partition plan, the British mandated territory of Palestine is divided into two separate entities, one for Jews and one for Palestinians.

1948-1949: Israel is founded, the Arab-Israeli War breaks out, a cease-fire is reached, and thousand of Palestinian refugees are left homeless.

1950: Jordan assumes control of the West Bank and Egypt takes over the Gaza Strip.

1964: Founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

1967: In the Six-Day War, Israel occupies the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem.

1969: Yasser Arafat becomes chairman of the PLO.

1973: In the Yom Kippur War, Israel fights off an invasion from Egypt and Syria. The Arab League recognizes the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians.

1978: In the Camp David Accords, Israel and Egypt reach a peace agreement.

1982: Israel completes its withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula.

1987: Palestinian groups in the West Bank and Gaza launch the “intifada”—an uprising against Israeli occupation.

1993: Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat sign the “Oslo Accords,” a declaration of principles on interim self-government for the Palestinians.

1994: Israel forges a peace treaty with Jordan.

1996: The PLO removes from its charter passages calling for an armed struggle to replace Israel with a Palestinian state.

2000: Renewed violence breaks out in the occupied territories and in Jerusalem.

2001: In response to mounting terrorist attacks, Israel occupies cities in the Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank.

January 2004: Israeli-Palestinian violence in the occupied territories reaches new heights. Four Israeli soldiers and a Jewish settler are killed in Palestinian attacks; Israeli soldiers kill three Palestinians, wound six others, detain at least 85, and demolish eleven houses. In another incident, a woman suicide bomber kills four Israeli soldiers at Gaza Strip’s main crossing. On January 21, Israeli troops demolish a mosque and at least 30 Palestinian houses.

November 11, 2004: Yasser Arafat dies. After an election, he is succeeded by Mahmoud Abbas, who is sworn in as Palestinian president on January 15, 2005.

January 14, 2005: Palestinians set off a truck bomb and fire mortars and automatic weapons at Israeli soldiers at the Karni checkpoint.

Books

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- Shipler, David, K. *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*, Penguin Books, 2002.
- Shlaim, Avi. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, W. W. Norton and Company, 1999.
- Smith, Charles. *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, St. Martin's Press, 1992.

Web Resources

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/w_bank_checkpoints/html/default.stm—From Britain's BBC, a detailed interactive "Guide to a West Bank Checkpoint." Includes a map showing crossings, checkpoints, settlements, and Palestinian cities.

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/>--Official Web site of the Israeli government.

<http://www.pna.gov.ps>—Official Web site of the Palestinian National Authority.

<http://www.jpost.com>--English site of the Jerusalem Post, Israel's leading newspaper.

<http://web.israelinsider.com/home.htm>—The Web site (in English) of the Israel Insider, "Israel's daily newsmagazine." A good source of daily news from the region.

<http://electronicintifada.net/new.shtml>—The Web site of the Electronic Intifada, which "publishes news, commentary, analysis, and reference materials about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from a Palestinian perspective."

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/conflict/--From the PBS television new program, "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," an outstanding survey of the "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict."

<http://www.is-pal.net/>--From a Web site that "aims to provide authoritative information on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without polemics," a page called "Understanding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," with many links to articles, maps and other materials that are organized by subject and annotated.

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/mideast/>--From CNN, a detailed site called "Mideast: Land of Conflict."

<http://www.csmonitor.com/lib/backgrounders/mideast101.html>—From the *Christian Science Monitor*, a survey called "Middle East 101," with sections entitled "The Road Map," "Timeline," "Key Terms," and "Sticking Points," the last of which is especially good in presenting the arguments of both sides.

<http://www.terrorismanswers.org/policy/israel.html>—From the Council on Foreign Relations, an informative essay called "Flashpoint: Israeli- Palestinian Conflict."

<http://www.mideastweb.org/nutshell.htm>—"The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in a Nutshell," a fairly even-handed view of the situation, with statistics, hyperlinks, commentary, and documents.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gz.html>—From the World Factbook published by the CIA, the section on the "Gaza Strip." The Factbook also contains entries on Israel and the West Bank, as well as all the world's nations.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/gaza/b003.html#top>—From *National Geographic*, an excellent illustrated article on the Gaza Strip, with maps.

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1064.html—From the U.S. Department of State, a Consular Information Sheet on "Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza," with a detailed explanation of the situation in the region.

http://www.palestinercs.org/reference_maps.htm—From the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, excellent reference maps of the area.

<http://www.fmep.org/>--The Web site of the Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP), a nonprofit organization "dedicated to informing Americans about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and assisting in a peaceful solution that brings security for both peoples."

<http://www.bitterlemons.org/>--An interesting Web site, jointly edited by an Israeli and a Palestinian, called "Bitter Lemons," which endeavors to give a platform for viewpoints on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Education Standards

The material used here and in “Checkpoint” can be used in connection with the following education standards.

From the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles (see <http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards/worldera9.html>):

Standard 2A: The student understands the emergence of Islam and how it spread in Southwest Asia, North Africa, and Europe.

Standard 2D; Grades 5-12: The student understands major sources of tension and conflict in the contemporary world and efforts that have been made to address them, specifically, “Assess the progress that has been made since the 1970s in resolving conflict between Israel and neighboring states.”

From the National Standards for Civics and Government (see <http://www.civiced.org/912erica.htm#14>):

Part IV. What is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs?
Specifically: C, 2: Political developments. Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about the effects of significant international political developments on the United States and other nations.

To achieve this standard, students should be able to explain the effects on the United States of significant world political developments, e.g., the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions; rise of nationalism; World Wars I and II; decline of colonialism; terrorism; multiplication of nationstates and the proliferation of conflict within them; the emergence of regional organizations such as the European Union; explain the effects on other nations of significant American political developments, e.g., immigration policies; opposition to communism; promotion of human rights; foreign trade; economic, military, and humanitarian aid; explain why allegiance to some nation-states is being challenged by competing loyalties, such as those to ethnic, religious, tribal, or linguistic groups; explain why transnational loyalties sometimes supersede loyalty to a nation-state, e.g., Communist International, Islam, Christianity.