The Middle East

(1) The Middle East and the Cold War

- Post WWII De-Colonization Process left a “power vacuum” in the region
- Establishment of the state of Israel marked a strategic foothold for the U.S. in the region
- In addition, the U.S. sought to counter any Soviet influence in the region by also forming alliances with Arab states
- 1955, Establishment of Baghdad Pact; an alliance pact between the U.S., Britain, Iraq and Syria
- Pact was designed to not only counter Soviet pressure, but also help Iraq protect itself from Soviet influence and also to enhance Baghdad’s prestige in the region
- Baghdad pact was opposed by Egypt (led by Gamel Abdul Nasser), due to Egypt’s forging alliance with the USSR
- Nasser stressed Pan-Arab Unity against the West and Israel
- This took bigger priority among Arab states than did security from the Soviets
- Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon, despite U.S. and U.K. pressure, all were persuaded by Egypt against joining the pact
- Much of the drive towards pan-Arab nationalism was rooted in anti-colonial sentiments; feelings the Soviets could easily take advantage of
- The Soviets formed alliances with Egypt, Syria and other Arab states, by way of Economic assistance, military aid and arms deals
- During this time (late 1950’s), the U.S. had deployed Polaris missiles in the Mediterranean Sea – this even more increased Soviet motivation to have friendly ties with Cairo; this way, the USSR could obtain naval facilities in Egyptian ports as a way to counter the U.S. presence of Polaris missiles

(A) Six Day War, 1967

- Conflict was orginally rooted in the Soviet goal to forge a closer relationship between Syria and Egypt in 1966
- Soviets spread false reports of an impending Israeli attack on Syria
- There was some truth; Israel was considering some type of response to Syrian border raids – but there was never a large scale attack planned
- A series of Egyptian moves – closing of the Tiran Straits and removing the UN Emergency Force from the Sinai Peninsula – were met with support from the USSR and concern from the U.S.
- The Soviets encouraged Egypt in their actions – despite the threat of war by Israel – because it was more important for a Soviet “client” state to maximize strategic gains for Moscow
- The U.S. supported Israel in the attempt to keep the Straits open
- This led to the surprise Israeli offensive on June 5. Israel made massive gains and easily defeated Egypt, Jordan and Syria
- Israel took the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank from Jordan and the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt

- Subsequent UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 337: The “Land for Peace” resolutions
- Israel would return to “pre-1967 borders” and give back occupied territories to the Arab states in exchange for the Arab states’ recognition of Israel’s right to exist
- Despite passage of resolutions, neither side abided by them, due to a number of factors: mistrust between Arab states and Israel, strategic goals, fundamentalist religious influences and domestic political pressures from both sides
- Two other wars – 1969 War of Attrition and 1973 Yom Kippur War – further entrenched both sides in their positions
- During these conflicts, the Soviets encouraged Egypt and Syria to re-arm and prepare for war so as to get territories back from Israel; Soviets sent weapons, made arms agreements and sent military advisors
- To counter this, the U.S. refused to restrain Israel and, thus, supported Tel Aviv in its military campaigns against the Arab states

- These Arab-Israeli conflicts are the basis for the current strife that has dominated the Middle East;
- Current Israeli occupation of the occupied territories had led to the formation of Arab militant terrorist organizations;
- (a) Hezbollah - a Syrian-supported Lebanese group that has called for Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon (which Israel occupied in 1982 and later withdrew from in 2002); Syria has supported this group, among other reasons, as a way to get Israel withdrawal from the Golan Heights
- (b) Hamas, Fatah, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – a Palestinian-based organization that formed as a result of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories – West Bank and Gaza Strip – from 1967 War
- The latter two organizations are factions of the original Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
- These organizations helped organize the Palestinian “Intifadah”, 1987
- The supposed goals of this movement was (1) Israeli withdrawal of the occupied territories, (2) U.S./Israeli recognition of PLO as official negotiation representative of the Palestinians and (3) creation of a sovereign Palestinian state
- Palestinian citizens felt like second-class citizens due to repressive Israeli measures that lead to censorship, crack-down on individual civil liberties, due-process, even some human rights abuses
- The Israeli point of view: Israel needs these to control these territories as a buffer against terrorist attacks and incursions, not just on Israel forces, but on mass civilian populations
- Even if Israel were to accommodate all of the Palestinians’ wishes, Israel would not be any safer from terrorism; in fact, Israel would be even more vulnerable — terrorist attacks would not cease due to the culture, socialization and education of violence and hatred toward Israel in these Palestinian areas
- In addition, Israel needs to maintain a favorable balance of power and capability against hostile Arab states that are still in technical states of war with Israel

Recent Developments

- 1990, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat recognized Israel’s right to exist, renounced all terrorism against Israel and began to publicly embrace moderate policies
- 1991, United States, along with Israel, USSR and European Union called for Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid; PLO would be recognized as official representative of Palestinian people
- 1993, U.S. brokers Oslo Accords between Israel and Palestinians;
- Call for Israel to withdraw from up to 40% of occupied territories;
- Recognize Palestinian autonomy and creation of new Palestinian Federation (a quasi-independent Palestinian govt. consisting of presidency, legislature, police, military forces, etc.)
- Palestinians would recognize Israel’s right to exist and make all efforts to crack down on terrorism and terrorist organizations
- 1998, U.S. brokers Wye River Accords, which reiterate agreements made during Oslo, along with the freezing and dismantling of many Jewish housing settlements within occupied territories
- Neither side has lived up to these agreements
- 2000, Attempted Camp David Accords; Clinton plan to create a sovereign Palestinian state, right-of return to Israel for Palestinian refugees displaced in 1967 war, Israel withdrawal from most of West Bank and Gaza Strip and different parts of Jerusalem controlled by both sides (Israel would control Jewish Holy sites, Palestine would control Muslim holy sites)
- Both the U.S. and Israel accepted these accords, the Palestinians rejected them
- 2001, This Camp David diplomatic failure helped lead to the electoral defeat of Israel Prime Minister Ehud Barak by the more conservative, hawkish Ariel Sharon
- 2001-2002, Israeli crackdown on Palestinian cities of Ramullah, Bethlehem in an effort to retaliate against the increases in terrorist attacks; Arafat became confined to his compound, most Palestinian military and police installations, govt. offices and many homes were occupied, raided or destroyed by Israeli forces
- 2002, Bush-led “Roadmap to Peace”;
- Israel would remove Jewish housing settlements;
- Palestinians would not just crack down on all terrorist suspects and activities, but also dismantle and eliminate all terrorist organizations;
- Israel would withdraw gradually from occupied territories;
- Timetable would be set to create Palestinian sovereignty and hold democratic elections
- Very little evidence exists to suggest that this will be achieved
- Palestinian appointed Prime Minister (Mahmoud Abbas – a moderate supported by both the U.S. and Israel) eventually resigned due to lack of support and legitimacy for him and his support of “roadmap” proposals from Palestinian public opinion
- There exists mistrust between both sides
- There exists a culture of hatred within Palestinian schools – entrenched for generations by Palestinians
- This is, in part, fueled by Palestinian militant political base that has supported and given legitimacy to Arafat; Arafat is either unwilling or unable to crack down and abolish terror organizations
- Many of these terror organizations, especially Hamas, have widespread political support and legitimacy with the Palestinian population, due to the political and social role Hamas plays within society
- Israeli cabinet govt. of Ariel Sharon has also been limited due to dismantle Jewish settlements due to political pressure from conservative/orthodox religious parties within Sharon’s coalition govt.
- Sharon called for dismantling of settlements in the Gaza Strip – after all the Gaza Strip does not hold as much security value for Israelis as West Bank does
- Still in a national party referendum, 60% of Likud Party voters rejected proposal
- Sharon then modified the proposal, calling for a more modest, scaled down withdrawal (needs to have it approved by cabinet and the Knesset)
- Likud Party convention also earlier rejected a party resolution calling for a Palestinian state
- What is to be done???
The First Gulf War, 1990-1991

- Implications

  (1) Realignment and new alliances emerged
  - Increased close ties and mutual benefits with Saudi Arabia
  - These close ties prompted the increase in militant extremism toward the U.S.
  - The shift of Iraq from ally to foe
  - The shift in Iraqi capability and the balance of power
  - Short-term hope that warmer U.S. relations with Arab states might emerge

- (2) New and Old Policy in the Soviet Union

  - Established new cooperation between U.S. and USSR against a long-standing Soviet ally

  - Saw the short-term effectiveness of the United Nations and mutual US-Soviet cooperation within the UN

  - However, domestic conservative forces within the Soviet military and Communist party structure remained influential

  - Continuation of favorable Soviet ties with traditional Arab allies