

Advance Praise for *A Brief History of Israel and the Jewish People*

“Jared Stone has done a remarkable job! He provides a short, punchy, powerful, and compelling introduction to Jewish history and some of the challenges of our day—it should inspire students of all ages to learn and tell and continue this extraordinary tale of a proud people, rooted in their homeland and values, forever contributing to the world...”

—Professor Gil Troy, Author of *To Resist the Academic Intifada: Letters to My Students on Defending the Zionist Dream* and *The Essential Guide to October 7th and its Aftermath*

“Jared Stone’s labor of love provides excellent summaries and fascinating details of the key moments of Jewish history. Highly recommended.”

—Yossi Klein Halevi, Senior Fellow, Shalom Hartman Institute, Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller, *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*

“Many will be very glad to have this concise, accurate, and measured take for both courses and private reading.”

—Rabbi David Wolpe,
Max Webb Emeritus Rabbi of
Sinai Temple, Los Angeles

“Reading this brief outline of Israel’s history is a humanizing experience: instead of caricatures and morality plays, we meet real men and women making real choices which have brought us to this moment—and we are reminded of the real choices and possibilities ahead.”

—Dara Horn, Bestselling
Author of *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present*

A BRIEF
HISTORY OF
ISRAEL
AND THE
JEWISH
PEOPLE

*From Abraham to October 7
—and a Nation Reawakened*

JARED STONE
Edited by **MARK COHN**
& **DAVID L. BERNSTEIN**



A WICKED SON BOOK
An Imprint of Post Hill Press
ISBN: 979-8-89565-539-9

A Brief History of Israel and the Jewish People:
From Abraham to October 7—and a Nation Reawakened
© 2025 by Jared Stone
All Rights Reserved

Cover Design by Jim Villaflores

Edited by Mark Cohn & David L. Bernstein

This book, as well as any other Wicked Son publications, may be purchased in bulk quantities at a special discounted rate. Contact orders@posthillpress.com for more information.

This is a work of nonfiction. All people, locations, events, and situations are portrayed to the best of the author's memory.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author and publisher.



Post Hill Press
New York • Nashville
wickedsonbooks.com
posthillpress.com

Published in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

For my people,
the state reborn in our name,
and the republic that has long stood by us.

“If you will it, it is no dream.”

THEODOR HERZL

“The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.”

DECLARATION OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

“Zionism finds in it, for the Jews, a reason to raise their heads, and, taking their stand upon the past, to gaze straightforwardly into the future.”

LOUIS BRANDEIS

“A people is not reborn in a single day.”

RACHEL YANAIT BEN-ZVI

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	xi
I. Judaism from Ancient Times to Early Modernity (Twentieth c. BCE–1870)	1
I.1. The formation of the Jewish tradition	3
I.2. A recurring pattern of expulsion	20
II. Zionism Amid a Darkening World (1870–1917)	24
II.1. Rising antisemitism in Europe	26
II.2. Competing visions for European Jewry	29
II.3. Opposition to Zionism in the Arab world	37
III. The State of Israel Is Born (1917–1948)	39
III.1. Persecution of European and Arab Jewry	41
III.2. Transformation and unrest inside the Yishuv	45
III.3. A pathway to Jewish sovereignty	50

IV. The Jewish State Finds Its Footing (1948–1977)...	57
IV.1. Independence confronts history and reality	59
IV.2. Conflict with Arab neighbors	64
IV.3. An evolving domestic landscape	70
V. Israel Becomes a World Power (1977–).....	75
V.1. Dashed hopes for two states	77
V.2. Integration and innovation	88
V.3. A light unto the nations.....	92
V.4. October 7, 2023.....	97
Frequently Asked Questions	105
References & Recommended Readings.....	129
About the Author.....	131

INTRODUCTION

Over the past century, thousands of social, cultural, political, and economic histories have, in great depth and detail, told the story of the Jewish people. This pocket-sized book highlights some of the Jewish story’s “greatest hits.” It is a brief, quick review with an emphasis on the modern era and Israel that is meant to give the newcomer a framework for understanding today’s Jewish reality.

The Jewish people are a funny people, full of useful contradictions. We are rooted, despite our wandering; we engage vigorously with modernity, yet consistently return to ancient texts; we are particular about our rituals and rites, yet hold universal values and aspirations for the betterment of humanity.

Any people are the stories they tell themselves. These are the stories of the leaders, places, and moments that teach us who we were, how we got here, and what we need to learn to thrive in the future.

We don't pretend that this is an exhaustive account or that there are no other ways of understanding Jewish history. Rather, we hope these pages will help you connect a few dots, jog some memories you may have learned elsewhere, and invite you to dig further into the histories and commentaries of the Jewish people, the Land of Israel, and the State of Israel.

We hope that this pocket book helps you gain greater insight into our past, present, and future.

This project was made possible by a grant from the Philip and Lauren Siegel Foundation.

I

JUDAISM FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO EARLY MODERNITY (TWENTIETH C. BCE–1870)

Key People

Akiva (50–135)—Jewish sage and scholar

Asenath Barzani (1590–1670)—Kurdish-Jewish rabbinical scholar

David (ca. 1040–970 BCE)—Second king of United Kingdom of Israel

Deborah (ca. 1107–1067 BCE)—Judge, prophet, and leader over Israel

Gracia Mendes Nasi (1510–1569)—Portuguese-Jewish philanthropist and businesswoman

Josephus (ca. 37–100)—Roman-Jewish historian

Judah HaNasi (135–217)—Primary redactor and editor of Mishnah

Maimonides (1138–1204)—Sephardic philosopher and rabbi

Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786)—German-Jewish philosopher

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 10 BCE–50 CE)—Hellenistic Jewish philosopher

Rashi (ca. 1040–1105)—Medieval biblical commentator

Salome Alexandra (141–67 BCE)—Queen of Judea

Solomon (ca. 990–931 BCE)—King of United Kingdom of Israel

Vilna Gaon (1720–1797)—Lithuanian-Jewish talmudist

Yosef Caro (1488–1575)—Sephardic rabbi and compiler of *Shulchan Aruch*

Key Themes

- The formation of the Jewish tradition
- A recurring pattern of expulsion

I.1. The formation of the Jewish tradition

Biblical times began around 2000 BCE when Abraham, the son of a pagan family, was commanded by God to “go forth... to the land that I will show you” (*Genesis 12:1, adapted from JPS 1917*).

- Abraham and Sarah had a son Isaac, who married Rebecca. Isaac and Rebecca had twins, Jacob and Esau. Jacob had two wives (Rachel and Leah) and two concubines (Bilhah and Zilpah). Collectively, Jacob had twelve sons and one daughter. The twelve sons came to be known as the twelve tribes of Israel (Jacob is renamed Israel).
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the “patriarchs,” and Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah are the “matriarchs” of the Jewish people. God created a covenant with the patriarchs that included a promise to inherit the land in which they had lived—the land of Canaan, which would come to be the Land of Israel.
- The twelve tribes of Israel traveled to Egypt in approximately the seventeenth century

BCE. There, they were enslaved by the ruling Pharaoh.

- In what became the foundational narrative of the Jewish people, the Israelites were freed from Egyptian slavery (ca. 1400 BCE), marched to Mount Sinai where they received the Torah (from God to the hand of Moses, their leader), and journeyed for forty years to the Promised Land of Israel. That journey, known as the “Exodus,” comprises the majority of the Torah (Five Books of Moses) and provided the basis of ancient Israelite culture and the norms that were interpreted into rabbinic Judaism.

Following their return to the Land of Israel, the Jewish people lived through a period of military and political judges that ended in monarchical rule.

- **Deborah** served as a military ruler, governor, and prophet over ancient Israel during the eleventh century BCE.
- Saul became the first monarch of the United Kingdom of Israel. He was eventually followed by **David**, who, according to the Books

of Samuel, united the tribes, expanded the territory of Israel, and was a valiant warrior from an early age when he famously killed the Philistine Goliath with a slingshot and rock.

- **Solomon**, David's successor, oversaw the construction of the First Temple in the mid-900s BCE.
- It was during Solomon's rule that Jerusalem firmly became the spiritual and political capital of the Jewish people.

The United Monarchy of Saul, David, and Solomon split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah (ca. 930 BCE). The former was comprised of ten tribes and the latter of two.

- In 722 BCE, the northern Neo-Assyrians captured the Kingdom of Israel and their ten tribes. Twenty-one years later, they conquered much of the Kingdom of Judah.
- The Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and, in 586 BCE, broke through the walls of Jerusalem and ultimately sacked the Holy Temple, thus destroying the Jewish center of worship and exiling the majority of the Jewish

population to Babylonia. Psalm 137 says: “There we sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept” (*Psalm 137:1, adapted from JPS 1917*).

The First Temple was destroyed in 586 BCE by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, ending what historians refer to as the First Temple Period. The Jews’ exile to Babylonia thus created the first significant Jewish diaspora.

- King Cyrus of Persia permitted the Jews to return to Israel and begin to rebuild their sacred Temple. The Second Temple was consecrated in 516 BCE, creating what historians call the Second Temple Period, which lasted until the temple’s destruction by the Romans in 70 CE.
- The Scroll of Esther, a dramatized account of a Persian leader, presumably Xerxes I (Ahasuerus), was produced around 424 BCE. The story presents Ahasuerus’s vizier, Haman, conspiring to annihilate the Jewish inhabitants of the Persian Empire. The scroll is named for Esther, a Jewish woman who became queen and subsequently the tale’s heroine by standing up for the Jewish people, exposing Haman’s

evil plan, and saving the kingdom's Jewish population.

- Alexander the Great conquered the region known as Phoenicia and the Land of Israel in the mid-fourth century BCE, as **Josephus** (born Joseph ben Mattityahu) later narrated. His empire was broken into smaller regions. The Land of Israel found itself governed by the Ptolemies from the south (Egypt) at times and from the north by the Seleucids (Syria) at other times.

Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BCE and allowed Jewish exiles to return to their homeland. Sheshbazzar led the first delegation back in 538 BCE, and Zerubbabel led a subsequent group.

- However, years of Babylonian control left returning Jews ill-equipped to govern themselves. Anarchy reigned over the Land of Israel until the Persian Empire sent Ezra to restore order.

The era of Hellenistic rule ushered in by Alexander the Great (ca. 330 BCE) saw a distinct impact on the

Jewish community of Israel—including the creation of a Greek translation of the Bible known as the Septuagint.

- Though scholarly opinions vary, the Tanakh (compilation of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings) was canonized into its current form by the second century BCE.
- The Seleucid Empire, governed from Syria, imposed strict rule over Jewish practice beginning with the decrees of Antiochus in 167 BCE, which led to the desecration of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and a Jewish revolt led by the Maccabees. The war was both an external battle against the Hellenization imposed by Antiochus as well as an internal battle among Jews who were uninterested in upholding the particular practices of the Jewish people. In 164, the revolt succeeded. The Temple was rededicated (“hanukkah” in Hebrew) and an eight-day festival was established. This laid the groundwork for the vassal Hasmonean dynasty, later to become independent and then a client state.

- From 76–67 BCE, the Land of Israel was ruled by Queen **Salome Alexandra** after the death of her husband King Alexander Yanai. Though the king was divisive among the Jewish population, Queen Salome (whose Hebrew name, Shlomitziyyon, meant “Peace of Zion”) restored improved relations among the Jews and growing groups of rabbinic sages.
- With Greek influence over the Middle East fading in the first century BCE, several prominent Jewish intellectuals arose. Among them was **Philo of Alexandria**, who became the leading philosopher of the Jewish community of Alexandria.
- Rabbinic sages began to establish themselves as the intellectual and spiritual leaders of the Jewish community in the Land of Israel and for the Jewish communities beyond (like those who remained in Babylonia or resided in Egypt). Hillel and Shammai (first century CE) emerged as important teachers and models of Jewish living and instruction. Their disagreements on theological and legal issues gave rise to two competing schools of

thought: *Beit Hillel* (“The House of Hillel”) and *Beit Shammai* (“The House of Shammai”). The two camps became fixtures of later rabbinic debates, and their style of argument was known as *machloket leshem shamayim* (“argument for the sake of heaven”).

The Roman Empire, led by military commander Pompey, assumed control of the area in 63 BCE.

- The Herodian dynasty, a Roman vassal state, effectively began twenty-three years later.
- Roman Judea became a formal province of the now-Roman Empire in 6 CE.
- The First Jewish-Roman war led to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 and the fall of Masada in 73. Many Jews were exiled from the land, and those who remained were forced to live under harsh persecution.

The Roman commander Titus’s siege of Judea (then a Roman province) in 70 CE resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple and the *galut*, the Jewish exile from the Land of Israel.

- The Bar Kochba revolt (132–135), led by remaining Jews against the Romans, resulted in swift backlash. Thousands of Jews including the sage **Rabbi Akiva** (born Akiva ben Yosef) were martyred.
- To show the disgrace of the Jews and the superiority of the Romans, the triumphant Emperor Hadrian renamed Jerusalem Aelia Capitolina and the land Syria Palaestina. This move was humiliating for Jews and sought to erase the Jewish presence from the land where they had lived for many centuries.
- Forced out of their homeland, Jews spread out to Mesopotamia (which some had never left following the First Temple's destruction), Europe, and the Mediterranean region.
- Jewish life began to develop in the diaspora, though eyes, hearts and prayers remained directed toward Israel and Jerusalem. The major centers of Jewish life and thought were in Babylonia, where some Jewish families dated back to the expulsion in 586 BCE, and Israel, despite Roman persecution and sovereignty. Around 220, **Judah HaNasi** codified the

Mishnah, the initial written collection of the Jewish oral tradition.

- The commentaries on the Mishnah emerged into two notable Talmuds, each named for the region where the learning emanated—hence the Jerusalem Talmud (completed in the fifth century) and the Babylonian Talmud (completed around the sixth century). It was the latter Talmud that rose to prominence and became the basis of Jewish law and practice after 70 CE. The period from 70 to the mid-600s is thus known as the Talmudic Period.

As Jews scattered across the globe, the Land of Israel and its Jewish inhabitants were continually governed by outside forces.

- After the Romans, the region was dominated for extended periods of time by a succession of rulers: Byzantines, Umayyads, Abbasids, Fatimids, Crusaders, Mamluks, and Ottomans.
- Though inhabitants of lands far and wide, Jews remained wanderers and never fully “of the land.” Jews were also often subjected to under-class status. This began in earnest as Muslim

conquerors spread out from Arabia across northern Africa and as far as Spain. Even in lands where Jews predated Muhammad's birth—in some cases by centuries—Jews became *dhimmi*, an accepted minority community of non-Muslim residents.

The Medieval Period, lasting from the advent of Islam in the 600s to the exile of Spanish Jewry in 1492, witnessed the contributions of Judaism's most notable biblical commentators.

- In the late 1000s, **Rashi** (Rabbi Shlomo bar Yitzhak) wrote his commentaries of the Tanakh and Talmud. Though he had no sons, his grandsons would also become great scholars and commentators on Jewish law. Rashi's daughters Yocheved, Miriam, and Rachel are traditionally believed to have been learned practitioners of Judaism. Their descendants helped to perpetuate and increase scholarship among Ashkenazi Jewry.
- **Maimonides** (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, twelfth century) became a leading rabbi, philosopher, and legalist, creating the Mishneh

Torah, a compilation of talmudic law distilled and organized in mishnaic Hebrew.

- The period of the *Rishonim*, or the medieval rabbinic sages, began with the likes of Rashi, Rambam, and others. It was during this era when the Jewish mystical practice of Kabbalah came about with the publication of the *Zohar*, a foundational text which serves as both a commentary to the Torah and a mystical approach to understanding God and life.

Throughout the diaspora, Jews' inferior class status meant constant persecution. There were times when individual Jews and/or Jewish communities held social prestige and were afforded great opportunities, such as the Golden Age of Spanish Jewish under Muslim rule from the tenth century to the twelfth century. Yet tragedy was never far out of sight.

- Massacres of Jews occurred in the Muslim and Berber-controlled cities of Cordoba and Granada, as well as in Kairouan and Fez in North Africa (1000s).

- The Crusades, lasting from 1095 to 1291, witnessed the murder of Jews in the Land of Israel and throughout Europe.
- The 1144 death of an English boy named William of Norwich marked the first case of the blood libel (the accusation that Jews use the blood of Christian children in their rituals). The libel soon spread to France and elsewhere throughout Europe. The York Massacre, one of the first documented pogroms (systematic massacres of Jews), occurred forty-six years later.
- When the Black Death swept over Europe in the mid-1300s, Jews were summarily scapegoated and targeted, as in the 1349 Strasbourg massacre.

Following spasms of Jewish expulsion across Europe at the beginning of the Early Modern Period (ca. 1492–1800), the trappings of conventional Ashkenazi culture began to emerge.

- The first Yiddish book was published in 1534 in Krakow, and the first Polish Hebrew publishing house was founded in 1547 in Lublin. A

pioneering yeshiva was established in the mid-1560s, also in Poland.

- In 1563, **Yosef Caro** produced the *Shulchan Aruch*, an authoritative anthology of *halakhah* (Jewish law). It was printed in Venice, Italy in 1565.
- Around the time of the Renaissance in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Jews came to play a significant role in European trade and finance. **Gracia Mendes Nasi** (known as Doña Gracia) was one such example. A businesswoman and philanthropist, she became one of the wealthiest women in Medieval Europe and financed the resettlement of hundreds of Portuguese-Jewish *conversos* (forced Jewish converts to Catholicism) during the Spanish Inquisition (discussed in the following section).
- Jewish life developed elsewhere as well. In Kurdistan, for instance, **Asenath Barzani** emerged as a leading poet and rabbinical scholar around the turn of the seventeenth century.

Elements of Islam, Catholicism, and emerging Christian sects helped to institutionalize antisemitism across Europe and the Middle East.

- Martin Luther, the founder of Protestant Christianity, was initially agreeable toward Jews. But in 1543, he published *On the Jews and Their Lies*, unleashing antisemitism throughout Europe.
- Pogroms like the massacre of Jews by Ukrainian Cossacks from 1648 to 1655 ensued in the succeeding centuries. The rights of Jews were revoked thereafter, such as in Poland in the late 1700s.
- Meanwhile, the Ethiopian Kingdom of Beta Israel, likely descended from the Tribe of Dan, was conquered in 1627.

European-Jewish expressions of faith shifted dramatically in the 1700s and 1800s as the continent witnessed a period of political, social, and intellectual advancement.

- Berlin's first purpose-built synagogue was established in 1714.

- By the late eighteenth century, the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) came into bloom. Led by figures like **Moses Mendelssohn**, Jewish intellectuals pushed aside what they deemed as old dogmas in favor of emerging theories of liberalism and rationalism.
- While Western European Jews balanced ideas of modernity and tradition in the Haskalah, eastern European Jews gravitated toward the ecstatic, though halachic, Hasidic Judaism that emerged from the Baal Shem Tov (born Israel ben Eliezer) in modern-day western Ukraine. The **Vilna Gaon** (born Elijah ben Solomon Zalman) became the leading light of misnagdic (non-Hasidic traditionalist) Judaism.
- The conflicting waves of traditionalism and modernization spurred advances and further segmentation within European-Jewish life. As the Modern Period (ca. 1800–1870) began, these forces culminated in the golden age of Yiddish literature and the rise of the Reform and Conservative movements in mid-century in Western Europe.

For global Jewry, the Modern Period was defined by both domination and liberation.

- In the mid-1830s, Muslims attacked Jews in Hebron, Safed, and Jerusalem. The following decade, the Damascus blood libel caused further unrest in the Middle East.
- Yet around this time, Jews were emancipated in England (1850s) and given rights in Poland and Hungary (1860s).
- The impact of the Enlightenment on the governments of England, France, and the United States afforded Jews unique and previously unknown opportunities, as well as access to citizenship and social advancement hardly experienced in Jewish history. George Washington's famous 1790 letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island included the famous words: "It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only

that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.... May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

I.2. A recurring pattern of expulsion

The practice of expelling Jews began in ancient times.

- The biblical epoch concluded with the Babylonian exile of 586 BCE, prophesied by Jeremiah.
- The end of the Second Temple Period was marked by the *galut*, which resulted from the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70.
- In the 410s (Talmudic Period), Jews were expelled from areas like Alexandria and Minorca.

Jewish expulsions from European and Middle Eastern lands accelerated with the arrival of the Medieval Period.

- In the early 600s, Jews were expelled from the Islamizing Arabian Peninsula.
- Expulsions occurred in Mainz in 1012, Morocco in 1107, and Bavaria, Gascony, Naples, and Anjou in the late 1200s.
- Jews were expelled from England in 1290 and from France in 1306. The late 1300s also witnessed Jewish expulsions from Hungary and Switzerland.
- Lyon and Provence expelled their Jews around 1420 and 1500 respectively. Upper Bavaria, Passau, Nuremberg, Ravenna, and Navarre also did so around the same time.
- The Medieval Period concluded with the Spanish Inquisition by Ferdinand and Isabella, followed by Jewish expulsion under the Alhambra Decree of 1492 (which was not formally revoked until 1968).

The Early Modern and Modern Periods, too, saw numerous Jewish expulsions across the world.

- Jews were expelled from Portugal in 1496 and from Dubrovnik, Regensburg, and Bratislava in the early-to-mid 1500s.
- Most Papal States, as well as Milan and the Holy Roman Empire, expelled their Jews in the late 1500s and early 1600s.
- Oliver Cromwell readmitted Jews to England in 1655 (of note: William Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* while Jews were still under expulsion).
- Jews were expelled from Vienna, Yemen, and France's Caribbean territories in the latter half of the seventeenth century.
- In the 1700s, Russian Jews were sent to the Pale of Settlement (instituted in modern-day Ukraine and Belarus), and Moroccan Jews were once again expelled.
- Regrettably, the United States was not spared from this trend. During the Civil War, Union General Ulysses Grant expelled Jews from the states of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky. Nevertheless, President Abraham Lincoln

revoked the order, and Grant later repented of it as president.

The record of Jewish expulsions provided here is not exhaustive. Many more expulsions and massacres took place.

Still, this listing is indicative of the grim realities the Jewish people faced over the centuries. Across the globe, Jewish families or entire communities were accommodated, tolerated, and integrated...until they were not.

II

ZIONISM AMID A DARKENING WORLD (1870–1917)

Key People

A. D. Gordon (1856–1922)—Labor Zionist leader

Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927)—Founder of cultural Zionism

Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873–1934)—Father of modern Hebrew poetry

Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858–1922)—Founder of modern Hebrew

Emma Lazarus (1849–1887)—Writer, teacher, and early proto-Zionist

Henrietta Szold (1860–1945)—Founder of Hadassah

Leon Pinsker (1821–1891)—Founder of Hovevei Zion

Max Nordau (1849–1923)—Early Zionist leader

Micha Berdyczewski (1865–1921)—Renegade Zionist thinker

Moses Hess (1812–1875)—Early proponent of socialist Zionism

Roza Pomeranc-Melcer (1873–1939)—Polish-Jewish novelist

Sholem Aleichem (1859–1916)—Playwright and author

Theodor Herzl (1860–1904)—Founder of political Zionism

Uri Zvi Greenberg (1896–1981)—Poet and political activist

Yosef Chaim Brenner (1881–1921)—Pioneer of Hebrew literature

Ze'ev Jabotinsky (1880–1940)—Founder of Revisionist Zionism and co-founder of the Jewish Legion

Key Themes

- Rising antisemitism in Europe
- Competing visions for European Jewry
- Opposition to Zionism in the Arab world

II.1. Rising antisemitism in Europe

Though the nineteenth century saw popular revolutions unfold across Europe in the mold of the 1789 French Revolution, giving rise to an age of nationalism and enlightenment—what historians refer to as *La Belle Époque* (“The Beautiful Era” in French)—antisemitism grew rapidly throughout the continent.

- The late 1800s witnessed pogroms across the Pale of Settlement, where the Russian Empire required most of its Jews to live.
- Pogroms intensified in frequency from 1881 to 1884, when Russian Jews were falsely blamed for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II.

As conditions for European Jews worsened, about 25,000 to 35,000 Russian Jews left for the Land of Israel in the First Aliyah (immigration to the Land of Israel).

- A flow of Jewish immigrants headed to the Land of Israel in response to the pogroms of the early 1880s, while a second stream, from 1890 to 1891, fled in response to Russia’s passage of anti-Jewish laws. Later historians

would call these immigrants part of the First Aliyah (ascent) to Israel.

- Around this time, over 2,000 Yemenite Jews also moved to the Land of Israel. Many of them held faith-based messianic beliefs.

In 1894, Alfred Dreyfus, a French-Jewish artillery captain and a high-ranking Jew in France's military, was falsely convicted of treason and sentenced to life in prison.

- Antisemitic groups like the French newspaper *La Libre Parole* campaigned for Dreyfus to be found guilty.
- The Dreyfus affair, which lasted until the captain's full exoneration in 1906, was seen as an inflection point for antisemitism in France. Many Jews concluded that modernity would not inexorably lead to the acceptance of Jews in Europe.
- Novelist Émile Zola published a famous letter titled *J'accuse...!* ("I accuse...!") in 1898, in which he accused the French army of convicting Dreyfus on false grounds.

- **Theodor Herzl**, then a young journalist, covered the events for his hometown paper in Vienna, the *Neue Freie Presse*.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an antisemitic text alleging a Jewish plot for global domination, was published in Russia in 1903.

- A total fabrication, the *Protocols* were read widely and served as a pretext for antisemitism in Europe and the Muslim world throughout the twentieth century.
- Among the distributors of the historic forgery was Henry Ford, who published a column in *The Dearborn Independent* for many years about the “international Jew” and shared his antisemitic views openly. His newspaper ran from 1920–27 and was distributed to Ford dealerships across the United States.

In no small part due to the *Protocols*, the first decade of the 1900s witnessed a surge of anti-Jewish pogroms across Eastern Europe.

- In 1903, an instance of the blood libel led to the Kishinev pogrom, in which dozens of Jews were slaughtered. Poet **Chaim Nachman Bialik** described the gruesome scenes in his poem, “In the City of Slaughter.”
- Other pogroms in Eastern Europe that occurred around the same time, most notably in Odessa, resulted in further Jewish deaths.

From 1904 to 1914, the Second Aliyah brought tens of thousands of Jews from Russia to the Land of Israel.

- Many of these immigrants adhered to socialist principles that shaped the political culture of the Yishuv (the pre-independence Jewish community of the Land of Israel) for decades to come.

II.2. Competing visions for European Jewry

In the late 1800s, Hovevei Zion (“Lovers of Zion”), a coalition of Jewish advocacy groups, was supported

by Russian-Jewish activist **Leon Pinsker** to encourage Eastern European Jews to move to the Land of Israel.

- Initially optimistic about the Jews' future in Europe, Pinsker became a firm Zionist following the Odessa pogrom of 1881.
- With its vision and philanthropic efforts, Hovevei Zion served as a precursor to Theodor Herzl's Zionism, and its agricultural focus lent to later efforts to cultivate the Land of Israel.

Before this time, numerous thinkers had already considered the need for a Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel.

- One such individual was **Emma Lazarus**, the American-Jewish poetess whose sonnet “The New Colossus” is mounted on the Statue of Liberty.
- Christian Zionism, whose roots trace back to sixteenth-century Puritanism and mid-nineteenth-century English Evangelical Protestantism, also played a considerable role in popularizing this sentiment beyond Jewish

circles. In 1922, with Christian Zionist lobbying, the US Congress passed the Lodge-Fish Resolution, which echoed the themes of the Blackstone Memorial, an 1891 petition penned by Evangelical minister William Blackstone that called upon the American government to support the return of the Land of Israel to Jewish hands. Interestingly, *The New York Times* had endorsed the memorial when under non-Jewish ownership, but later came out against the effort while owned by a Jew.

In 1896, **Theodor Herzl** published *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jews' State*, alternatively *The Jewish State*), in which he spelled out a political vision for Zionism in the Land of Israel.

- A journalist by profession, Herzl closely followed the Dreyfus affair with concern while stationed as a correspondent in Paris. His Zionism was also influenced by the concurrent rise of Viennese Mayor Karl Lueger, a far-right demagogue whose antisemitism presaged trouble for European Jewry.

- Herzl's pamphlet gave particular attention to "The Jewish Question," a widespread, continental debate concerning the status of European Jews.
- Six years earlier, writer Nathan Birnbaum had coined the term "Zionism" to describe the resettlement and rebirth of the Jewish people. Eight years prior to that, in 1882, Pinsker had published the proto-Zionist pamphlet *Auto-Emancipation*.

Under Herzl's stewardship, the First Zionist Congress met in Basel, Switzerland in 1897.

- There, Herzl was elected President of the Congress, and **Max Nordau**, a physician who advocated muskeljudentum ("muscular Judaism" in German), assumed a senior leadership role.
- The conference saw the creation of the Zionist Organization (later the World Zionist Organization), which absorbed groups previously affiliated with Hovevei Zion.
- Following the event, Herzl wrote: "At Basel I founded the Jewish State," predicting his vision would be realized within fifty years.

The First Zionist Congress and Herzl's 1902 publication of *Altneuland* (*Old New Land*), which offered a utopian model for the Zionist project, amplified internal debates about what Zionism ought to look like.

- **Ahad Ha'am** (lit. “one of the people,” born Asher Ginsberg) considered himself a Zionist but disagreed with Herzl’s vision significantly. He saw the Land of Israel as the cultural and spiritual center of the Jewish people—not as their political center—and opposed European Jews’ mass resettlement there.
- **A. D. Gordon** was a vital force behind Labor Zionism. He held that working the Land of Israel in keeping with socialist principles was key to reviving the Jewish spirit, which had wilted in the diaspora. He took inspiration from **Moses Hess**, an early advocate of the “redemption of the soil” of the Land of Israel. A founder of Hapoel Hatzair (“The Young Worker”) in the Yishuv, Gordon also shaped the Hashomer Hatzair (“The Young Guard”) and Israeli *kibbutz* (communal living) movements.

- **Ze'ev Jabotinsky** recognized the importance of Jewish self-defense in the wake of the Kishinev pogrom. His Revisionist Zionism, based on a national-liberal philosophy, promoted Jewish settlement of the Land of Israel and an “iron wall” to protect from Arab resistance. Jabotinsky’s Zionist vision inaugurated the Betar youth movement in the diaspora, the Irgun paramilitary organization in the Yishuv, and right-of-center Israeli politics.
- **Micha Berdyczewski**, a Russian-Jewish writer, advocated Zionism as a departure from ancient Jewish dogmas. He said his generation could be the “last Jews or first Hebrews.”
- **Henrietta Szold**, an American Jew, recoiled at the poor health conditions faced by inhabitants of the Yishuv. In 1912, she founded Hadassah, the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, to support health and women’s initiatives in Palestine.

Herzl’s Zionism found support in some quarters of Jewish literary and artistic life in Eastern Europe.

- **Sholem Aleichem** (lit. “peace be upon you,” born Solomon Rabinovich), a playwright whose stories inspired the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, was one of a number of Jewish artists who supported Zionism. In 1907, he attended the Eighth Zionist Congress in The Hague.
- **Eliezer Ben Yehuda**, a Russian-Jewish linguist, saw the revival of the Hebrew language as key to the Zionist project. An early migrant to the Land of Israel, Ben Yehuda enabled Tel Aviv to become the first Hebrew-speaking city of modern times. Ben Yehuda’s contribution allowed the Hebrew literary movement, pioneered by **Yosef Chaim Brenner**, to flourish in the Yishuv and later on in the State of Israel.
- **Uri Zvi Greenberg**, later a founder of the Revisionist faction *Brit HaBiryonim* (“The Strongmen Alliance”) alongside Abba Ahimeir and Yehoshua Yevin as well as the recipient of several Israeli prizes for literature, got his literary start around this time.
- **Roza Pomeranc-Melcer**, a Polish-Jewish novelist, was a strong supporter of Zionism.

In 1922, she became the first Jewish woman to be elected to the Sejm (Polish Parliament).

However, Herzl's Zionist vision was met with disapproval by many European Jews.

- At the turn of the twentieth century, the vast majority of European Jews chose to remain in Europe. Jews from the socialist, assimilationist, and territorialist (seeking land elsewhere) camps railed against Herzl's vision. So too did many religious Jews, who believed that the Jewish people shouldn't return to the Land of Israel before the coming of the Messiah.
- The General Jewish Labor Bund (or the "Bund"), a secular Jewish socialist movement in Eastern Europe, rejected Jewish migration to the Yishuv and preferred the use of Yiddish over Hebrew.

With European antisemitism nearing a boiling point, members of the Zionist Organization debated over where to resettle Europe's Jews.

- At the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, Herzl offered the Uganda Proposal, agreed to by the British government, that would provide temporary safe harbor for Russian Jews in Africa.
- In 1905, however, the Seventh Zionist Congress rejected the plan and committed to establishing a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, the Jewish people's ancestral homeland.

II.3. Opposition to Zionism in the Arab world

For centuries, Jews living in Muslim lands had experienced *dhimmi* status, but conditions worsened in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

- Exacerbated by the entry of European antisemitism into the Muslim world through works like the *Protocols*, attitudes toward Jews and Jewish sovereignty morphed from derision into full-fledged conspiracy.
- Starting from the nineteenth century, antisemitic violence broke out across the Muslim

world in the form of blood libel accusations and pogroms.

- The first Palestinian anti-Zionist newspaper, *Al-Karmil* (“Mount Carmel”), was founded in 1908.

III

THE STATE OF ISRAEL IS BORN (1917–1948)

Key People

Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935)—Father of religious Zionism

Arthur Balfour (1848–1930)—British foreign secretary

Avraham Stern (1907–1942)—Founder of Lehi

Baron Edmond de Rothschild (1845–1934)—Major philanthropist to the Yishuv

Berl Katznelson (1887–1944)—Labor Zionist leader

Chaim Arlosoroff (1899–1933)—Socialist Zionist leader

Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952)—Zionist thinker and first president of Israel

Chanah Szenes (1921–1944)—Jewish paratrooper in WWII

David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973)—Head of pre-state Jewish Agency and first prime minister of Israel

Joseph Trumpeldor (1880–1920)—Co-founder of the Zion Mule Corps

Menachem Begin (1913–1992)—Commander of Irgun and sixth prime minister of Israel

Natan Alterman (1910–1970)—Israeli poet laureate

Rachel Bluwstein (1890–1931)—Hebrew language poet

Sarah Aaronsohn (1890–1917)—Jewish spy for the British

Zivia Lubetkin (1914–1978)—Polish-Jewish underground fighter

Key Themes

- Persecution of European and Arab Jewry
- Transformation and unrest inside the Yishuv
- A pathway to Jewish sovereignty

III.1. Persecution of European and Arab Jewry

In 1917, the Russian Revolution overthrew Russia's Tsarist government and came to replace it with far-left Bolshevik rule.

- The unrest it created, as well as ongoing pogroms in Eastern Europe, triggered the Third Aliyah, which brought some 40,000 Jews to the Yishuv (pre-state Israel's Jewish community) between 1919 and 1923.
- Many thousands of Polish and Russian Jews left for the Yishuv for similar reasons during the Fourth Aliyah, which lasted from 1924 to 1928.

The Treaty of Versailles, signed in 1919 to declare Allied victory in World War I, was deeply humiliating for Germany.

- The nationwide economic disrepair that followed, coupled with resentment toward the West, fueled the rise of the once-insignificant National Socialist (Nazi) Party in Germany. Its

leader, Adolf Hitler, became chancellor of the country in 1933.

- Early in Hitler’s rule, the rights of German Jews—scapegoated for Germany’s troubles—began to deteriorate, with the Nuremberg Laws passed in 1935 and formal segregation further instituted. Meanwhile, over 50,000 Jews from Central Europe migrated to the Yishuv from 1929 to 1939 as part of the Fifth Aliyah.

In 1939, after years of restricting the rights of German Jews, Hitler invaded Poland and prepared to carry out the Holocaust—the attempted annihilation of European Jewry.

- Between 1941 and 1945, roughly six million Jews from across Europe, representing two-thirds of European Jewry, were systematically murdered in gas chambers and mass shootings in what was called the “Final Solution.”
- Nazis built dozens of thousands of camps in Europe, extending from Germany to areas as far as France, Russia, the Scandinavian countries, and Italy. Many of these were labor camps, though the Nazis established Poland

as the epicenter of their death camps. Among the places where the Nazis attempted to implement their “Final Solution” were Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, and Chelmno. Only a few hundred thousand Jews survived the Nazi concentration camps and death marches, while others survived in hiding.

- At first, the global community did little as the genocide unfolded. Boats carrying Jewish refugees were turned away by the United States, Canada, and Western European nations. Overcome by the winds of isolationism, the US was slow to join the British-led Allied war effort, only doing so following Imperial Japan’s devastating bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Even the British Mandate for Palestine let in very few Jewish refugees, though groups of migrants known as “Aliyah Bet” managed to sneak into the territory illegally.
- Still, Jewish activists like Hillel Kook (under the alias Peter Bergson) agitated for international action, and a Jewish resistance coalesced

in Europe to try to fight back. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the most well-known instance of this; one of its participants was **Zivia Lubetkin**, who helped lead the Jewish underground in Nazi-occupied Warsaw.

- Some scholars believe that if not for the Holocaust, the global population of Jews today would stand between 25 and 35 million, as opposed to the roughly 16 million Jews currently alive.

Several Arab leaders supported Hitler's program, and antisemitism surged across the Muslim world in the 1930s and 1940s.

- Pogroms occurred against Jews in Libya, Algeria, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. The most notable among these was the *Farhud* ("violent dispossession" in Arabic) in 1941, which saw the murder of some 200 Iraqi Jews.
- That same year, Hitler met with Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti (regional Islamic political head) of Jerusalem, to discuss their collective struggle against the Jewish people.

III.2. Transformation and unrest inside the Yishuv

In the late 1910s and early 1920s, as pogroms and the rise of extremist political movements in Europe sent waves of Jews to the Yishuv, immigrants met fierce resistance from local Arabs.

- In 1920, the Battle of Tel Hai, in which Arabs attacked Jews in the Northern Galilee, saw the deaths of several Jews defending the area. These included famed Russian-Jewish veteran **Joseph Trumpeldor**, who supposedly said, “It is good to die for one’s country.”
- In 1920, the Nebi Moussa (“Prophet Moses,” an Islamic festival) riots saw Arabs kill five Jewish Jerusalemites. The following year, Arab riots broke out in Jaffa, killing forty-seven Jews.

In the early 1920s, massive efforts were undertaken to sustain Jewish life in the Yishuv and fight rising antisemitism in Europe.

- In 1920, the Haganah, the Yishuv’s main Jewish paramilitary group, and the Histadrut, its main

labor organization, were created. The latter was influenced by **Berl Katznelson**, a leading light of the Labor Zionist movement, who also served as editor of the Histadrut's newspaper, *Davar* ("Word"). Among the most celebrated contributors to *Davar* was **Rachel Bluwstein** (known as Rachel the Poetess), whose beloved poetry earned her the title of the "founding mother" of modern Hebrew poetry.

- Betar, the diaspora youth movement inspired by Jabotinsky's Revisionist Zionism, was founded in Riga, Latvia in 1923.
- **Baron Edmond de Rothschild**, a member of a prominent French-Jewish banking family, continued to sustain the Yishuv through his contributions to the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association, though many socialist residents objected to his meddling efforts.

As more European Jews relocated to the Yishuv, particularly at the dawn of the Holocaust, local Arabs sought to resist their legal settlement.

- In 1929, Arabs rioted against Jews in various cities including Jerusalem, Safed, and Jaffa. The

demonstrations reached a breaking point with the Hebron massacre, in which, with the incitement of Jerusalem's Grand Mufti, Arabs killed nearly seventy Jews.

- From 1936 to 1939, Arabs staged a revolt against Jewish residents and British overseers of the Yishuv that saw the deaths of hundreds of Jews and thousands of Arabs.

Developments in Europe and the Yishuv around this time led to new theories about how best to implement Zionism in the Yishuv.

- **Abraham Isaac Kook**, the spiritual father of Religious Zionism and the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the Mandate, deviated from many Orthodox Jews by stating that Jewish relocation to the Land of Israel was not only permitted, but encouraged by Jewish law.
- **Chaim Weizmann**, later the first President of Israel, preferred a synthetic model that combined elements of Leon Pinsker and Theodor Herzl's thought. He scorned violence against the British in the pre-independence period of

the mid-to-late 1940s because of his links to and admiration of the British political class.

- **Menachem Begin**, a future prime minister of Israel, was commander of the Irgun (formed by Haganah dissidents) from 1943 to 1948. A Revisionist Zionist and student of Jabotinsky, he advocated force against the British presence in the Yishuv and an “iron wall” to defend against hostile Arabs. Yet the Irgun supported British efforts against the Nazis in World War II, leading Irgun member **Avraham Stern** to split off and found a more extreme anti-British paramilitary organization called the Lehi in 1940.
- **David Ben-Gurion**, the first Prime Minister of Israel, was a Labor Zionist who sought to maintain diplomatic openness with the British in the pre-independence period. As the chief political rival of Begin, Ben-Gurion publicly disavowed his actions as Irgun commander while likely backing them behind the scenes.
- Other Zionist leaders preferred a General Zionist approach that adhered to centrist, democratic principles.

Because of their different attitudes toward negotiating with the British, Jewish paramilitaries in the Yishuv, all descendants of the early Bar-Giora and Hashomer (“The Watchman”) defense groups, argued relentlessly.

- The shadow of two assassinations—the 1924 killing of anti-Zionist Jacob Israël de Haan by a Haganah member and the 1933 murder of **Chaim Arlosoroff**, a socialist leader who negotiated an agreement with Nazi Germany to allow German Jews to migrate to the Yishuv, possibly at Arab hands—hovered over these divisions.
- Internal tensions also arose along ethnic and cultural fault lines. The Haganah and the Palmach, its elite counterstrike unit, were seen as dominated by white Ashkenazi “elites.” But the Irgun was among the first organizations in the Yishuv to promote Sephardic and Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) Jews to their senior ranks.
- The Irgun pledged not to raise arms against fellow Jews. By contrast, the Haganah exposed Irgun members to the British and sometimes even fought them. During the *Saison* of

1944–45, the Haganah attempted to suppress the Irgun through force. This also came to pass during the *Altalena* Affair of 1948, in which the newly formed Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the Haganah's successor, fired at the *Altalena* cargo ship carrying weapons and Irgun soldiers to Israel. Though several of his men were killed, Irgun commander Begin instructed his soldiers not to fire back. This decision may have prevented civil war, though Prime Minister Ben-Gurion claimed that *his* actions, not Begin's, saved the day.

Eventually, the groups broadly joined forces, leading to an unsustainable situation for the British that resulted in their dismantling of the Mandate.

III.3. A pathway to Jewish sovereignty

Following World War I, the Ottoman Empire, which governed the Land of Israel, fell after being defeated by the Allied Powers.

- The Sykes-Picot Agreement, which had been created secretly between the United Kingdom

and France in 1916, planned to split control of the empire's lands between the two countries.

- Allied mandates were recognized in 1920 by the San Remo Resolution (dividing the land between British and French control) and the Treaties of Sèvres and Lausanne (breaking up the Ottoman Empire). The Land of Israel, as well as modern-day Jordan and Iraq, were given to the British, while the French assumed control over Lebanon and Syria.
- During the war, influenced by Ze'ev Jabotinsky and Joseph Trumpeldor, the British had trained a unit of Jewish volunteers known as the Zion Mule Corps. Many group members later joined the British Army's Jewish Legion, which helped the British wrest the Land of Israel from the Ottomans.
- Jews in the Yishuv (pre-state Israel's Jewish community) had also gathered intelligence for the British during the war. **Sarah Aaronsohn**, executed by the Ottomans for spying, became a Jewish folk hero upon her death.

In 1917, British Foreign Secretary **Arthur Balfour**—whose prime minister, David Lloyd George, was long steeped in Christian Zionism—sent a letter to the British Jewish community in which he pledged his government's support for a Jewish national home in the Land of Israel.

- Years before, Chaim Weizmann, a biochemist, had been recruited to teach at the University of Manchester. There, he contributed to industrial fermentation and the development of processes to manufacture acetone, a chemical vital to the British war effort. Weizmann's discovery gave him significant political clout, which he used to convince Lord Balfour to write his letter.
- Known as the Balfour Declaration, the letter marked the first formal step toward the realization of Herzl's Zionist vision.
- The League of Nations, the predecessor to the United Nations, incorporated the Balfour Declaration in 1922 as the British Mandate for Palestine came into effect.
- Following the 1929 riots, the British-led Shaw Commission and subsequent Passfield White

Paper capitulated to Arab demands by limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine, angering many in the Yishuv.

In response to the Arab revolt of 1936 to 1939, the British established the Peel Commission, which called for the division of the British Mandate for Palestine into Jewish and Arab areas.

- The Zionist Congress, under the leadership of Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion, approved the recommendations, while Arab leaders rejected them.
- Also in response, the British issued the White Paper of 1939, which restricted Jewish immigration to the British Mandate.

The White Paper of 1939 complicated the Yishuv's relationship with the British, as Jews there detested the White Paper while supporting the British war effort against the Nazis.

- During the war, Ben-Gurion famously said to the Jews of the Yishuv: "We will fight the

White Paper as if there is no war, and fight the war as if there is no White Paper.”

- Still, during World War II, Jews from the Yishuv enlisted in the British Army to fight the Nazis. Among them was **Chanah Szenes**, who died as a paratrooper in Nazi-occupied Hungary.

The British continued to control the Mandate with an iron fist during and following World War II, restricting the immigration of Jewish refugees. This elicited anti-British resistance by local Jewish paramilitary groups.

- Jewish resistance to the British rose dramatically after 1945. British officials in the region and diplomatic interlopers were routinely targeted, particularly by the Irgun and Lehi.
- The most famous of these instances was the Irgun’s 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, home to the Mandate’s administrative headquarters. Despite warning hotel employees of attack in advance, Irgun members were scolded for the act by the British and by Ben-Gurion’s Jewish Agency, the operational center of the Zionist Organization.

In 1947, the British, worn out from fighting with local Jews, placed the question of sovereignty before the newly formed United Nations.

- In response, the UN created the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP).
- UNSCOP recommended that the Land of Israel be partitioned roughly equally between Jews and Arabs, with Jews controlling coastal and desert areas, and Arabs retaining the heartland. Though the Jewish area was virtually indefensible from attacks, Jewish leaders accepted the proposal, while Arab leadership rejected it.
- Put to a vote as General Assembly Resolution 181, the plan passed, but not without serious opposition.

On May 14, 1948, Zionist leaders met in Tel Aviv and declared the establishment of the State of Israel.

- The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, composed by Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders, proclaimed the independence of the Jewish state citing the irrevocable

passage of UN General Assembly Resolution 181. It established Israel as a democratic state, despite the fact that most of its citizens hailed and would hail from non-democratic countries, in part because of the democratic nature of the Jewish tradition.

- Poet **Natan Alterman** captured the spirit of the times in his poem “A Silver Platter,” published in December 1947. In it, he writes about soldiers who come from battle (and are presumed dead) and, with searing irony, describe themselves as the silver platter on which Israel was given. Alterman was responding to off-handed comments from those who felt that the Jews were given a state on a silver platter. Chaim Weizmann astutely noted that no state is ever given on a silver platter, as he knew that heavy costs were to be borne by the men and women who would fight to death to secure Israel’s borders.

IV

THE JEWISH STATE FINDS ITS FOOTING (1948–1977)

Key People

Abba Eban (1915–2002)—Israeli diplomat

Ada Maimon (1893–1973)—Israeli feminist pioneer

David Elazar (1925–1976)—IDF Chief of Staff

Elie Wiesel (1928–2016)—Nobel laureate and human rights activist

Golda Meir (1898–1978)—Fourth Prime Minister of Israel

Hanan Porat (1943–2011)—Israeli settlement leader

Hannah Maisel-Shohat (1883–1972)—Co-founder of WIZO

Levi Eshkol (1895–1969)—Third Prime Minister of Israel

Meir Ariel (1942–1999)—Israeli songwriter

Moshe Dayan (1915–1981)—Israeli defense minister

Moshe Sharett (1894–1965)—Second Prime Minister of Israel

Naomi Shemer (1930–2004)—Israeli songwriter

Nechama Leibowitz (1905–1997)—Israeli biblical scholar

Rezso Kasztner (1906–1957)—Hungarian-Jewish activist

S. Y. Agnon (1887–1970)—Israeli novelist and poet

S. Yizhar (1916–2006)—Israeli writer and author of *Khirbet Khizbeh*

Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994)—Jewish humanist thinker

Yigael Yadin (1917–1984)—IDF leader in War of Independence

Yigal Allon (1918–1980)—IDF general in War of Independence

Yitzhak Rabin (1922–1995)—Fifth Prime Minister of Israel

Key Themes

- Independence confronts history and reality
- Conflict with Arab neighbors
- An evolving domestic landscape

IV.1. Independence confronts history and reality

While Israel's independence brought long-awaited joy to the Jewish people, challenges continued to predominate the region.

- Local Arab incitement before independence had created much turmoil in the area. Events like the Hadassah convoy massacre (April 1948), in which Arab forces ambushed dozens of medical staff headed to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, roiled the newly-formed state.
- As with any army, Israeli forces were not without incident. The Deir Yassin massacre (April 1948), carried out by the Irgun and Lehi, resulted in approximately one hundred Arab deaths. Though this tragedy, like the later 1956

massacre in the Arab village of Kafr Qasim, is said to have fueled the Palestinian national consciousness, many of its details have been falsified or misrepresented by anti-Israel scholars.

- Israel's eventual victory against local and foreign Arab attackers came to be known to Arabs as the *Nakba* ("catastrophe" in Arabic). The *Nakba* is defined by its users as the forced removal of approximately 750,000 Palestinians from the Land of Israel. While there were Palestinians forced out of their homes and villages, there were many who willingly chose to leave, as they were uninterested in becoming citizens of the new Jewish State.
- Those who claimed refugee status as they left from within the "Green Line" of Israel's borders (based on the 1949 Armistice) fell under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency (UNRWA). To this day, those individuals and their descendants are considered refugees by this agency, which is solely responsible for Palestinian refugees. Other refugees fall under the jurisdiction of UNHCR, whose purpose is to help refugees

find a new home. Refugees from other conflicts are typically unable to transfer their refugee status to future generations. Palestinians, in contrast, create generational refugees, even when they find new homes and establish residency elsewhere.

- After Israel's establishment, nearly one million Jews from Muslim-majority countries were forced to flee, most of whom relocated to Israel. They were not considered refugees, and neither they nor Israel were given UN funding for resettlement.
- Following the Six-Day War (June 1967), a smaller displacement of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza occurred in what is called the *Naksa* ("setback").

Since independence, Israel's wars against enemy forces have given cause to a widespread internal culture of self-reflection.

- The Haganah's practices of *havlagah* ("restraint") and *tobar haneshek* ("purity of arms"), advocating the reduction of civilian deaths in wartime, were adopted by the IDF in its earliest

days. But as threats abounded in the coming decades, *harlagah* was increasingly replaced by deterrence against Israel's enemies.

- After penning “A Silver Platter,” Natan Alterman published content in “The Seventh Column,” his column for the newspaper *Da'at*, acknowledging Israeli wartime misdeeds for the purpose of self-reflection. Rather than scolding Alterman, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion praised his work and distributed it to soldiers.
- In 1949, Israeli writer **S. Yizhar** published *Khirbet Khizeh*, a fictional work depicting Israel's emptying of a Palestinian village. Yizhar's novel inspired a generation of self-critical Israeli authors.
- **S. Y. Agnon**, who received numerous prizes for his literary contributions, was likewise highly self-reflective in his novels, poetry, and short stories.

Well into Israel's establishment, the memory of the Holocaust remained a painful and polarizing force in Israeli society.

- The Knesset (parliament) passed the Law of Return in 1950, allowing any Jew to immigrate to Israel and gain citizenship. The law eventually came to determine one's "Jewishness" based on having at least one Jewish grandparent. Among the Knesset's members at this time was **Ada Maimon**, an Israeli feminist pioneer and one of the first women to serve in the body.
- In 1955, **Rezso Kasztner**, a Hungarian Jew who had led an effort to rescue Jews from the Nazis in exchange for money and precious metals, was found by the Jerusalem District Court to have collaborated with the Nazis. Kasztner, a Labor Zionist who worked for Prime Minister **Moshe Sharett**, was lambasted by Herut (Revisionist Zionist, lit. "Freedom") Party leader Menachem Begin for his "complicity" in the Holocaust. The Kasztner trial is infamous in Israeli history, and though its ruling was overturned posthumously by the Supreme Court of Israel, Kasztner was assassinated in 1957.

- In 1960, Adolf Eichmann, a senior Nazi official who had fled to Argentina after World War II, was caught by Israeli intelligence and brought to Jerusalem to stand trial. He was found guilty of war crimes and sentenced to death, marking the only civilian execution in Israel's history. The events were criticized by the global community as a breach of Argentine sovereignty.
- Still today, survivors like the late **Elie Wiesel** shed light upon the Holocaust, as do museums like Yad Vashem ("Hand and Name").

IV.2. Conflict with Arab neighbors

Following Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948, the neighboring Arab countries of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq invaded.

- Outnumbered and outgunned, the IDF emerged victorious by gathering its forces, previously scattered among Jewish paramilitary groups, and professionalizing under the leadership

of Head of Operations **Yigael Yadin** and Commander **Yigal Allon**.

- Despite the West Bank and the Gaza Strip having been designated as “Arab Palestine” in the 1947 Partition Plan, by the time of the Armistice Agreements of 1949, Jordan gained control over the West Bank while Egypt obtained the Gaza Strip.

In the following years, Palestinian *fedayeen* (terrorists) from neighboring countries infiltrated Israel and attacked its residents.

- A gruesome episode occurred in 1953, when *fedayeen* attacked a home in the village of Yehud. Reprisal came when Israel’s Unit 101, an elite *sayeret* (commando) unit of the IDF, entered the West Bank village of Qibya and killed dozens of Palestinian civilians. The Qibya massacre remains highly controversial in Israel, with many commentators referring to it as “Israel’s My Lai” (a reference to the infamous massacre of the Vietnam War).
- In 1956, Roi Rotberg, an IDF soldier stationed at the Gaza-adjacent Kibbutz Nahal Oz, was

ambushed by *fedayeen* from Gaza. At Rotberg's funeral, IDF Chief of Staff **Moshe Dayan** emphasized in his eulogy the need for Israelis to remain strong and armed against the country's enemies.

In the early decades of Israeli independence, Egypt, the center of the Arab world, emerged as Israel's main geopolitical rival.

- After 1948, Egypt blocked Israel's movement through the Suez Canal and Straits of Tiran, preventing Israeli trade. This resulted in the Suez Crisis of 1956, in which Israel, prompted by the UK and France, captured the Sinai Peninsula to reopen the shipping routes and stop Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of the canal. Once done, Israel returned the Sinai to Egypt.
- The Suez Crisis helped to establish the Arab-Israeli conflict as a proxy for the ongoing Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union (USSR). Though the USSR at first supported Israel due to its socialist roots, it soon shifted support to the Arab world and the

Palestinian liberation movement. Meanwhile, though initially reliant on British and French support, Israel eventually came to consider America as its premier ally.

In 1967, Egypt once again closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, a *casus belli* (case for war) that resulted in the Six-Day War.

- With regional tensions rising, Israeli Prime Minister **Levi Eshkol**, a Labor Zionist like Ben-Gurion, assembled a unity government with opposition leader Menachem Begin of the Herut Party.
- In response to Egyptian aggression, Israel struck Egyptian airfields to demobilize their air force. The effort worked: after six days of war against Egypt, which was supported by Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, Israel won decisively, gaining back the Sinai Peninsula and capturing the Golan Heights, West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Israeli singer-songwriter **Naomi Shemer**'s “Jerusalem of Gold” came to be closely associated with the reunification

of Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty and was immortalized by the singer Shuli Natan.

- Israel's victory was swift and unexpected, giving the Israeli nation a euphoric confidence that led to a groundswell of Jewish pride globally. Ever open to self-reflection, Israeli society and soldiers understood and embraced poet **Meir Ariel**'s "Jerusalem of Iron," a play on Shemer's poem that spoke of the harsh realities of war.

The confidence that followed the Six-Day War was shattered on Yom Kippur of 1973, when Egypt, having failed to regain the Sinai after the Six-Day War, joined Syria in launching a surprise attack on Israel.

- Prime Minister **Golda Meir** and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan were forewarned of the attack by intelligence sources in Egypt but seemingly did not gather enough preparations. This left IDF Chief of Staff **David Elazar** unprepared when Arab forces attacked.
- At first, Israel incurred heavy ground and aerial losses. However, under Elazar's command, the IDF pushed back against Egyptian and Syrian

forces. Following nearly three weeks of fighting, Israel once again emerged victorious.

- The Agranat Commission, established after the war to assess the failures that led to the surprise attack, blamed Elazar and forced him to leave his position. Public anger at the lack of accountability from the top also resulted in Meir's resignation.

As Israel endured war after grueling war, the United Nations continually vilified the Jewish state, mainly at the urging of Arab countries.

- In 1975, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 3379, which stated that "Zionism is a form of racism" and was famously condemned by US Ambassador to the UN Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Inspired by a 1973 resolution that equated Zionism with South African apartheid, Resolution 3379 led to future anti-Israel resolutions at the UN.
- Reflecting on his time as Israel's UN ambassador in the 1950s, **Abba Eban** quipped in 1981: "If Algeria introduced a resolution declaring that the earth was flat and that Israel had

flattened it, it would pass by a vote of 164 to 13 with 26 abstentions.”

IV.3. An evolving domestic landscape

Israel’s War of Independence was followed by a period of tremendous economic hardship.

- From 1948 to 1959, Israelis lived under a policy of austerity. Conditions were worsened by the mass immigration of Holocaust survivors and Jews from Muslim lands, who often came with little and were settled in *ma’abarot* (refugee camps), much to the displeasure of bourgeois Ashkenazim.
- In the early 1950s, West Germany offered reparations to alleviate Israel’s economic troubles. The pragmatic Ben-Gurion agreed to them, while opposition leader Begin and his Herut Party saw them as a form of capitulation to the perpetrators of the Holocaust. To little avail, Begin pleaded with Israel’s government to, as he saw it, place Jewish dignity above financial considerations.

Through heavy foreign investment and government-supported projects, Israel slowly climbed out of economic disrepair.

- German reparations financed Israel's national water carrier, which allowed its deserts to bloom.
- Chemist Alexander Zarchin invented a form of desalination, revolutionizing Israeli agriculture. Israel's leading agronomists at this time included **Hannah Maisel-Shohat**, who had helped found the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO).
- Israelis' invention of drip irrigation in 1965 and innovation of the cherry tomato in 1973 enabled further agricultural development.
- The 1970s saw Israelis produce cutting-edge contributions to computer technology and data security.

Israeli settlement of the West Bank (alternatively Judea and Samaria), the cradle of Jewish civilization, began after Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War. The policy was supported not only by the political right, but also by left-wing Israeli politicians.

- In 1967, Levi Eshkol’s government proposed the Allon Plan, which offered Israeli settlement in parts of the West Bank as a buffer against Arab violence. In exchange, Palestinians would be granted autonomy and access to Jordan. Jordan rejected the plan.
- **Hanan Porat**, an Orthodox veteran of the Six-Day War, helped reestablish Gush Etzion (a remnant of the Yishuv) and founded the Gush Emunim (“Bloc of the Faithful”) movement, which would see the creation of over one hundred religious settlements in the West Bank. Today, the Yesha Council serves as Gush Emunim’s successor.
- Settlement policy nevertheless generated fierce domestic debate. Israeli humanist thinker **Yeshayahu Leibowitz** worried that in regarding Israel as a divine entity rather than a political state, settlers would cause repeats of the 1953 Qibya massacre. Yeshayahu’s sister, **Nechama Leibowitz**, was famous in her own right as a leading biblical scholar and Israel Prize laureate.

As Israel came of age, its domestic politics began to shift significantly.

- For nearly three decades after the country's founding, Israeli politics was dominated by left-wing Labor Zionist Ashkenazim.
- But over time, growing elements of Israeli society—particularly non-Ashkenazi Jews of working-class, religious, and recent immigrant backgrounds—began to tire of the seemingly out-of-touch Ashkenazi ruling class and their socialist politics.
- By the mid-1970s, Menachem Begin, the long-time opposition leader who by now led the Knesset's center-right Likud (“Consolidation,” effectively the successor to the Herut Party), coalesced support among these demographics. Begin also encouraged the social integration of Israeli Arabs. To these groups, Begin's principled populism was an appealing contrast to Ben-Gurion's elitist and pragmatic brand of politics.
- The failures of Meir's government exposed by the Agranat Commission, along with the discovery of an illegal overseas bank account

owned by her successor, **Yitzhak Rabin**, further set the stage for political change.

- In the Knesset election of 1977, exit polls showed Begin's Likud Party defeating the left-wing Alignment coalition. Known to Israelis as the Mahapach ("upheaval"), the result allowed Begin to become the first non-Labor prime minister of Israel.

V

ISRAEL BECOMES A WORLD POWER (1977–)

Key People

A. B. Yehoshua (1936–2022)—Israeli essayist, “Israel’s Faulkner”

Alice Miller (1972–)–Israeli pilot

Amos Oz (1939–2018)—Israeli novelist

Ariel Sharon (1928–2014)—Eleventh Prime Minister of Israel and Minister of Defense during First Lebanon War

Benjamin Netanyahu (1949–)–Ninth Prime Minister of Israel

Benny Morris (1948)—Israeli historian and leader of the “New Historians”

Ehud Barak (1942)—Tenth Prime Minister of Israel

Ehud Olmert (1945)—Twelfth Prime Minister of Israel

Naftali Bennett (1972)—Thirteenth Prime Minister of Israel

Natan Sharansky (1948)—Russian-Israeli *refusenik* and human rights activist

Ovadia Yosef (1920–2013)—Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel

Shimon Peres (1923–2016)—Eighth Prime Minister of Israel

Tzipi Livni (1958)—Israeli politician, diplomat, and lawyer

Yair Lapid (1963)—Fourteenth Prime Minister of Israel

Yitzhak Shamir (1915–2012)—Seventh Prime Minister of Israel

Key Themes

- Dashed hopes for two states
- Integration and innovation

- A light unto the nations
- October 7, 2023

V.1. Dashed hopes for two states

The late twentieth century saw Israel begin to patch relations with many of its Arab neighbors.

- In 1978, Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed the Camp David Accords with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and subsequently returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt. Prior to the Accords, Sadat had traveled to Israel to address the Knesset, a decision for which he was vilified at home. He was assassinated by Islamic radicals in 1981.
- In 1994, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed a peace treaty with Jordan's King Hussein.
- In 2020, Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** signed the Abraham Accords, normalizing relations with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (and later Morocco and Sudan).
- Regional peace has also meant weakening neighboring regimes. In 1981, Begin's government

launched Operation Opera, in which IDF fighter jets covertly struck Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor. The thus-named "Begin Doctrine" of preventive strikes on nuclear facilities has since inspired Israel's efforts to weaken Iran and its proxies.

Nonetheless, a rising Palestinian national consciousness created new regional instability.

- The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in 1964 with the intent to destroy Israel. Beginning in 1969, Yasser Arafat headed the group for nearly four decades.
- In the 1960s and 1970s, Palestinian terrorists hijacked dozens of airliners across the world. In 1976, an Air France flight from Tel Aviv was hijacked and diverted to Entebbe, Uganda by members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Israeli commandos were sent in to free the hostages, which they did, though commander Yoni Netanyahu (brother of Benjamin Netanyahu) was killed during the operation.

- Palestinian terrorists also attacked Israelis directly, including schoolchildren (as in the 1970 Avivim and 1974 Ma'alot massacres) and at the Munich Olympic Games of 1972, where they killed nearly a dozen members of the Israeli Olympic Team.
- Following widespread PLO terrorism in Jordan in the early 1970s, King Hussein expelled the group from the country. Yasser Arafat moved the PLO's base of operations to Lebanon, from which it continued to attack Israelis.

After years of the PLO using Lebanon as a launching pad for attacks on Israel—and following the targeting of Israel's Ambassador to the UK by a Palestinian terrorist group—the IDF invaded in 1982 to root out the PLO and install a friendly government run by Maronite Christian Bachir Gemayel.

- Under Defense Minister **Ariel Sharon**, the IDF managed to march to Beirut and surround PLO forces there.
- But tragedy struck when Gemayel was assassinated by pro-Palestinian, Syrian-backed forces. In response, Christian Phalangists entered the

Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in southern Beirut and murdered at least several hundred civilians.

- The events generated outrage in Israel, as Begin and Sharon seemingly did not do enough to stop them. After public outcry, Begin's government organized the Kahan Commission, which found Sharon to be indirectly responsible for the attacks and recommended that he be removed as defense minister.

Beginning in the late 1980s, Palestinians staged violent uprisings and attacks on Israelis in what is now known as the First Intifada (“Shaking Off” in Arabic).

- Starting with the throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails, Palestinian terrorists later upgraded to more violent tactics. They were met with reprisal by Prime Minister **Yitzhak Shamir** (and his successor, then-Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin) and the IDF.
- The First Intifada saw the emergence of new Palestinian terror groups, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and Hamas.

- Violence temporarily stopped with the signing of the Oslo I Accord in 1993. Oslo II, signed in 1995, built upon the earlier agreement by specifying interim arrangements between Israel and Arafat's new Palestinian Authority (PA). For these efforts, Arafat, Prime Minister Rabin, and Foreign Minister (and former Prime Minister) **Shimon Peres** were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
- For his role in Oslo, Rabin was assassinated in 1995 by an Israeli extremist. More Palestinian terror attacks soon followed.

Despite ongoing violence, Israel continued to advance proposals for a Palestinian state with Arafat, but was continuously rebuffed by Palestinian leadership.

- Israeli land concessions in the Hebron Protocol of 1997, the Wye River Memorandum of 1998, and the Sharm El Sheikh Memorandum of 1999 did little to curb Palestinian terrorism.
- In 2000, Prime Minister **Ehud Barak** met with Yasser Arafat at Camp David in an attempt to settle the conflict. Though Barak offered the Palestinians substantial concessions, including

sovereignty over the Gaza Strip and the vast majority of the West Bank, Arafat walked away from the talks. US President Bill Clinton likely told Arafat in response to his intransigence: “I’m a colossal failure, and you made me one.”

- Eight years later, Prime Minister **Ehud Olmert** offered a near-complete withdrawal from the West Bank—a deal Palestinian leadership once again rejected.

The failure of the 2000 Camp David Summit, coupled with backlash to the Oslo Accords and then-opposition leader Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount that September, resulted in the Second Intifada, a period of violence that lasted from 2000 to 2005.

- Palestinian terrorists staged numerous suicide bombings in buses, restaurants, and other public venues across the country.
- To block terrorists from attacking Israelis, a barrier was built separating the West Bank from the rest of Israel. The hard border and security checkpoints, while restrictive for Palestinians who work in Israel, have curbed terrorist activity significantly.

- In 2005, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon began implementing plans for the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli residents and troops from the Gaza Strip, giving Palestinians autonomy. The following year, residents elected Hamas to rule over Gaza. Israel began erecting a border with Gaza in the early 2000s, and by 2008, the border was set with select entry/exit points into Israel and Egypt.

Since 2005, Gaza and the West Bank have become increasingly dangerous for Israelis. Like the Iran-backed terrorist organization Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, Hamas has fired on Israel from Gaza, while terrorist activity has remained potent in the West Bank.

- Gaza has functioned as a launching pad for rockets, with Hamas operating weaponry from hospitals and other civilian areas and storing weapons caches in their massive tunnel network.
- The West Bank has continued to serve as a breeding ground for Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist activity.

- Both areas have received the bulk of their weapons from Iran and Iranian-supported groups through their porous borders with neighboring Arab countries. And yet, until recently, Israel has provided their residents with water, power, and other necessities.

Israel has maintained a security presence throughout the West Bank and along Gaza's borders, though terrorism often forces it to intervene.

- Israel engaged in direct conflicts with Gaza in 2008, 2012, 2014, 2021, and 2023, all in response to rocket or civilian attacks by Hamas on Israelis.
- Prior to 2023, Israel engaged in a policy of restraint and limited intervention known by many as “mowing the grass,” whereby Israel would launch limited military operations into Gaza designed to stop Hamas’s escalations.
- On several occasions, Hamas captured Israelis in sovereign Israeli territory and held them hostage inside Gaza. Hamas abducted soldier Gilad Shalit in 2006 and held him until a prisoner swap in 2011. They captured hundreds

more in the October 7, 2023 attack (elaborated in a coming section).

- Meanwhile, different Palestinian factions have jockeyed for power over Gaza and the West Bank. Hamas currently runs Gaza, having murdered political dissidents after the strip's 2006 election. Fatah, closely aligned with the PLO, currently controls the West Bank, though it is highly unpopular among residents there.

Following the failure of the Oslo Accords and especially after the 10/7 attacks, increasing numbers of Israelis migrated to the political right.

- Prior to 10/7, Israeli politics had already been shifting rightward for some time, in no small part due to the rising population (and electoral power) of Religious Zionists, ultra-Orthodox Haredim, and hawkish (defense-oriented) secular Jews from the former Soviet Union. Once at the core of Israeli politics, left-wing parties are now diminished in Israel. Many left-of-center politicians like **Tzipi Livni** have in recent years chosen to retire from politics.

- However, Israeli politics remains highly factional. The main political divides today essentially exist between the center and right-wing and between secular and religious groups. For instance, secular Russian Jews vote very differently from ultra-Orthodox Israelis despite both populations inhabiting the political right on matters of national security.
- Nonetheless, left-wing Israelis have continued to leave a mark on society. Since the late 1980s, intellectuals like **Amos Oz**, **A. B. Yehoshua**, the “New Historians” led by **Benny Morris**, and the “post-Zionists” have been critical of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. Still today, media outlets such as *Haaretz* (“The Land”) and demonstrations of Israel’s robust civil society (e.g. protests on Tel Aviv’s Kaplan Street) counterbalance centrist and right-leaning politicians and publications such as *The Jerusalem Post*, *Israel Hayom* (“Israel Today”), *Yedioth Ahronoth* (“Latest News”), and *Makor Rishon* (“Firsthand Source”).

Until recently, despite relentless international condemnation of Israel, Israeli politicians across the spectrum have expressed a willingness to reach out to the Palestinians for peace talks.

- In 2001, the UN’s World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa declared that “Zionism is racism.” “Durban I” was rife with antisemitic programming and set the tone for increased attacks against Israel on the global stage.
- And yet, events like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s 2009 speech at Bar-Ilan University, in which he expressed openness to a Palestinian state, show Israel’s continued hope for peace. In 2021, the newly elected Israeli government, led by rotating Prime Ministers **Naftali Bennett** (right-wing) and **Yair Lapid** (centrist), included the United Arab List party led by Mansour Abbas, representing a high point in Israeli Arab political involvement.

V.2. Integration and innovation

The Mahapach of 1977 brought a new development into the open: the increasing presence of traditional culture in Israeli society.

- For decades after the country's creation, secularists dominated Israeli society and politics. While non-religious politicians like David Ben-Gurion kept the ultra-Orthodox at ease through the Status Quo Agreement, which made many public expressions accord with Jewish law (e.g. laws related to the Jewish Sabbath/Shabbat from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday), secular cultural icons remained dominant in Israeli life.
- Yet the existential dread caused by the Yom Kippur War reignited religion in the public square. Israelis turned to faith not only through politics, but also through music, dance, and other modes of cultural expression. The Ashkenazi folk culture of the early to mid-1900s took on more religious and Mizrahi influences in the late century. Once-libertine artists began to create musical renditions of

liturgy like high-holiday *piyyutim* (poems) and the medieval writings of Yehuda Halevi. By the 2010s, Mizrahi music became synonymous with Israeli pop culture through the likes of Sarit Hadad, Omer Adam, Eyal Golan, and Dana International.

- Around this time, Nechama Leibowitz's biblical commentaries gained immense traction, coinciding with the rise of pluralistic Torah study within mainstream Israeli culture.
- Still, religious matters like the exemption of Haredi Jews from the military draft have remained a major source of tension in Israeli society.

With Israel's increasing embrace of traditionalism, some groups faced challenges as they sought to integrate into Israeli society.

- Not all rabbinic authorities considered Ethiopian Jews to be Jewish, as their ancestors had split off before the advent of Talmudic Judaism. However, Sephardic Chief Rabbi **Ovadia Yosef** affirmed that they were Jewish, enabling them the right of return. Yosef formed the

political party Shas in 1984, providing a platform for more non-Ashkenazi religious Jews to enter politics.

- Russian arrivals presented a matter of grave concern for rabbinic authorities, as many came from intermarried households. But because they had at least one Jewish grandparent, they were granted Israeli citizenship.
- Israel's growing pluralism has extended to women's rights as well. In the 1990s, soldier **Alice Miller** sued the IDF after being barred entry into the Israeli Air Force Flight Academy. She won, and the IDF lifted its ban on female pilots.

The 1980s saw the rise of Israel's high-tech sector in its coastal region (known as "Silicon Wadi," a play on California's Silicon Valley), which at first focused on military and security needs.

- Israeli high tech experienced massive growth and diversification in the 1990s. This was partly due to the entry of Russian-Jewish immigrants into the workforce, who applied their

advanced education and technical know-how to the industry.

- When Israeli entrepreneurs created ICQ instant messaging in the late 1990s, the rate of new startups in the country exploded.
- This upsurge was aided by political changes. Since Israel's founding, the principle of *mamlachtiyut* (roughly "statism") ensured a robust central state that was committed to sustaining Israel as a cohesive democracy. However, as Israel shifted rightward, free-market policies were increasingly implemented, particularly in the early 2000s by then-Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. These practices helped Silicon Wadi become one of the world's leading centers for high-tech.
- Aside from those previously mentioned, Israeli inventions include the PillCam, Mobileye, the USB flash drive, Watergen, the Iron Dome, instant messaging, the pressure bandage, and much more. Thirteen Israelis have won Nobel Prizes, and Israel continues to be one of the world's leading pioneers in tech. Known by many as the "start-up nation," Israel's

combination of intelligence and on-the-ground innovation has made it a center for tech and new ways of thinking. This accompanies Israel's major recent contributions to global cuisine (e.g. Miznon), TV/film (e.g. *Fauda*), music (e.g. Netta's Eurovision-winning "Toy"), and other cultural artifacts.

V.3. A light unto the nations

Throughout the mid-to-late 1900s, Israel provided refuge to Jewish and non-Jewish migrants seeking to escape persecution.

- Israel's rescue of Jews from persecution began in 1949, when nearly 50,000 Yemenite Jews were brought to safety in Israel during Operation Magic Carpet. Shortly after, Operation Ezra and Nehemiah rescued most of Iraq's Jews, and from 1961 to 1964, Operation Yachin brought 97,000 Moroccan Jews to Israel.
- In his first act as prime minister in 1977, Menachem Begin granted asylum to Vietnamese refugees stranded on the South China Sea. He

said of this decision: “Now there is a Jewish state.... We will act humanely. We will bring these unfortunate refugees here to our country after our ship has saved them from drowning, and we will grant them a haven.”

- Operations Moses (1984), Joshua (1985), and Solomon (1991) rescued tens of thousands of Ethiopian Jews from persecution.
- At the same time, Jews trapped in the USSR sought escape. Soviet Jews faced rampant discrimination and in many respects lived as second-class citizens. Israel tasked American-Jewish college students to travel to the Soviet Union and gather information about *refuseniks* (Soviet Jews refused permission to emigrate). Jewish advocacy on behalf of Jews trapped behind the Iron Curtain like **Natan Sharansky** took the form of protests, legislation, and direct negotiation across the world. While there was a small trickle of Jews let out of the Soviet Union, Jewish efforts culminated in a “Freedom Sunday for Soviet Jews” in December 1987. Over 200,000 Jews rallied in Washington, DC during Soviet premier Mikhail

Gorbachev's visit to the US with President Ronald Reagan. Gorbachev finally started to allow Jews exit in 1987, and after the USSR's dissolution in the early 1990s, over one million Soviet Jews emigrated to Israel.

Debates and initiatives generated in recent decades have shed new insights on Israel's purpose as the world's only "Jewish state" and strengthened the unbreakable bond between Israel and diaspora Jewry.

- Though secular Israel remains in full force, contemporary voices like Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, and Micah Goodman—building upon the legacies of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Aryeh Kaplan—have sought to position Israel as a nation committed at once to liberal-democratic values and traditional Jewish precepts.
- Ilan Troen has emerged as a pioneer of the discipline of Israel Studies, which has sought to bring nuanced and historically rooted conversations about Israel to universities across the world.

- Numerous programs have been developed to stimulate the relationship between Israel and diaspora Jewry. Foremost among these is Taglit/Birthright Israel (est. 1999), whose ten-day trips have brought nearly a million young diaspora Jews to Israel free of charge to engage with Israeli history, society, and culture.
- *Yeshivot* and *midrashot* (Torah study for Orthodox Jews), gap-year programs (e.g. Nativ, Masa Israel), educational trips (e.g. Encounter, Partnership2Gether, RootOne), internship programs for college students (e.g. Onward), and other opportunities emphasize to Jews and non-Jews alike the inextricable link between Israel and world Jewry, the vitality of Israel's Jewish heritage, and the importance of supporting Israel.

Various initiatives created within the past half century have underscored Israel's deep commitment to humanity.

- Since at least the late 1970s, Israel has contributed mightily to discussions around human dignity and genetic research.

- The following decade saw Israeli initiatives arise aimed at providing care to the elderly (Yad Sarah) and promoting afforestation in Africa and Latin America (Jewish National Fund).
- IsraAID was formed in 1992 to coordinate Israeli responses to international humanitarian crises. The group provided lifesaving aid in the aftermaths of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2011 Fukushima disaster in Japan, the 2013 typhoon in the Philippines, the 2015 Nepal earthquake, the 2018 Guatemala volcanic eruption, and the 2023 Turkey-Syria earthquake. IsraAID has also offered help to refugees from the Syrian Civil War, Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar/Bangladesh, and Ukraine-Russia War.
- Israeli society has contributed to humanitarian efforts and long-term development missions in East Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere, demonstrating the nation's commitment to both Jewish particularism and *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life).

V.4. October 7, 2023

On October 7, 2023, a Shabbat morning that also marked Simchat Torah, Hamas terrorists invaded communities in southern Israel, known as the “Gaza Envelope,” murdering approximately 1200 and abducting around 250 Israelis and foreign nationals in a highly coordinated effort.

- IDF investigations have revealed the security and intelligence lapses that led to this violation of Israeli sovereignty and human rights. Hamas may have sought to exploit ongoing domestic turmoil caused by the 2023 judicial reform crisis.
- Named “Al-Aqsa Flood” by Hamas to connect their efforts to their broader goal of eliminating Israel and regaining Arab control of Jerusalem, 10/7 was seen by many in Israel and abroad as the death knell for the two-state solution.
- After breaking through the security barrier separating Israel from Gaza, Hamas militants stormed the Nova Music Festival, *kibbut-zim*, and other communities within the Gaza

envelope—many of which had provided sources of employment for Gazans.

- Several thousand Hamas members and Gazan Palestinians who joined in indiscriminately murdered, raped, and tortured civilians, with many streaming the content live on mounted cameras. The heinous nature of their acts has few parallels in modern history.
- While the IDF was delayed in organizing and manpower was low given the holiday, brave Israelis from across the country, upon hearing the news, immediately headed to the besieged communities and fought the terrorists single-handedly. Many lost their lives doing so.
- Reservists were called up to defend their country after witnessing the single greatest loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust. Within twenty-four hours, more than 100 percent of reservists reportedly showed up prepared for active duty.

In the wake of 10/7, universities across America reacted abysmally.

- Many high-profile American universities saw students and faculty justify the events. Within twenty-four hours of the massacres, over two dozen Harvard student groups cosigned a letter stating that they “hold the Israeli regime entirely responsible for all unfolding violence.” A professor of history at Cornell said he was exhilarated by the events, while an associate professor of Critical Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES) at the University of California, Merced retweeted a post saying, “it’s always ‘let’s decolonise’ until it’s actually time to do it and y’all suddenly cry out ‘oh no...not like that.’” These were not one-offs; they reflected reactions across parts of academia at the murder of Jewish innocents.
- Meanwhile, many university administrators kept mum, in contrast to their recent outspokenness on hot-button political issues like Black Lives Matter and the Russia–Ukraine War.
- At a December 2023 congressional hearing, the presidents of the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) were interrogated by

members of both parties for their inadequate responses to campus antisemitism. Two of the three presidents resigned in the testimony's aftermath.

- In the spring of 2024, anti-Israel students at Columbia set up the “Gaza Solidarity Encampment” on the university’s South Lawn. Encampments in support of “Palestinian liberation” soon sprang up on campuses across the country. Many participating students blocked passageways, invaded academic buildings, and disrupted classes. At several universities, protests became so violent that police were called in to restore order and ensure that Jewish and Israeli students could peacefully go to class.

Many international deliberative bodies also responded grotesquely to 10/7.

- In late October 2023, the UN General Assembly approved a ceasefire resolution that failed to condemn the attacks. The UN’s Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict waited until March 2024 before

formally addressing Hamas's sadism against Israeli women.

- UNRWA has never adequately addressed the fact that at least a dozen of its staffers were likely directly involved in 10/7, as well as the fact that numerous UNRWA facilities were used as access points or were located directly over tunnels in which weapons were stored, fighters travelled, and hostages were tortured.
- In November 2024, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas leadership, drawing a moral equivalence between Israel's democratically elected government and Hamas terrorists.

Cultural institutions and political advocacy groups often fared no better.

- Many human-rights nonprofits and philanthropic ventures were silent in the aftermath of 10/7. Some, like Samidoun and the Tides Foundation, have since financed anti-Israel activity and bolstered demonstrations on campuses and elsewhere.

- The arts world has been roiled by controversy as Jewish and pro-Israel employees have faced exclusion and even firing on account of their views. Hollywood red carpets have featured celebrities sporting red pins reminiscent of the image of Palestinian terrorist Abdel-Aziz Salha's blood-soaked hands following his murder of two Israeli soldiers in 2000.
- Numerous Jewish members of women's groups have reported experiencing discrimination because they stood up for the Israeli women raped on 10/7.
- In response, countless podcast episodes, documentaries, movies, and articles have been produced to expose and explain the events of 10/7 using firsthand and secondary accounts. Women have spearheaded this effort, as has been the case with *October H8te* (directed by Wendy Sachs), *Screams before Silence* (Sheryl Sandberg), and *Beyond October 7th* (Jasmine Kainy).

Meanwhile, antisemitism has risen considerably across the global West.

- Conditions have worsened for Jews in Europe and across the British Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, etc.). Jewish institutions have been routinely targeted with graffiti, arson, and worse. Despite Jews only constituting 2.4 percent of the population of the United States, they are the target of around two-thirds of religiously motivated hate crimes in the US.
- School districts in major metropolitan areas like Toronto, New York, Washington, DC, and San Francisco have become epicenters of the “culture wars” as radical administrators and faculty have sought to indoctrinate their students with anti-Israel and antisemitic material.
- Sporadic pogroms like those of mid-nineteenth-century Europe have made life difficult for Jews in parts of Europe. In November 2024, Israelis and Jews were targeted across Amsterdam following a soccer match featuring Israel’s Maccabi Tel Aviv.

And yet, Israel’s responses to 10/7—particularly in Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iran since the summer of 2024—have severely disarmed Iran’s “Axis of Resistance” and redrawn the map of the Middle East.

- Israel has substantially reduced Hamas's fighting power and killed Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif, and many other Hamas leaders.
- Having breached Iranian territory and deeply penetrated Iranian intelligence, Mossad (Israel's national intelligence agency) agents killed Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas's political bureau, at a Tehran guesthouse in July 2024.
- Hezbollah's leadership has been shattered by a mix of military force and the IDF's simultaneous explosion of thousands of Hezbollah-operated pagers and walkie-talkies in September 2024.
- Israel's military and covert operations in Syria paved the way for the downfall of the Assad regime in December 2024.
- In June 2025, Israel launched a preemptive operation aimed at defanging Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile programs and eliminating their top leadership. Unprecedented in its daring, execution, and depth of intelligence—and with the help of the United States—Israel's campaign severely weakened the regime and has begun to ensure a safer Middle East for all its inhabitants.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How old is each of the Abrahamic religions?

Judaism is by far the oldest at nearly 4,000 years old. Christianity is approximately 2,000 years old, while Islam is roughly 1,400 years old.

What's the difference between Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews?

Sephardic refers to Jewish communities and traditions whose roots lay in Spain, and which, upon the Spanish monarchy's issuance of the Alhambra Decree of 1492, spread to North Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere. *Mizrahi* is a more recent term that simply denotes Jews whose ancestors came from the “East.”

What's the difference between the prime minister and president of Israel?

The prime minister, Israel's head of government, is typically the leader of whichever party heads the majority coalition in the Knesset (parliament). The president, Israel's head of state, is a largely ceremonial position codified by Israel's Basic Laws, a series of legislation that serves as the basis for the country's legal system (Israel has always lacked a constitution, a unique yet often frustrating reality for the country).

Why should Jews outside of Israel care about Israel?

In many ways, to be a Jew is to be a Zionist. There are three critical components to being a Jew: God, Torah, and Israel. God is the Creator. Torah is how we “communicate” with the Divine—through understanding what God expects from us and by demonstrating the sincerity with which we hold God's commandments. Lastly, to be a Jew is to be connected to the land of our people and the people to which we belong. Israel is the name of both our ancestral and modern home, as well as of our people. Jews outside of Israel should care about the State of Israel because roughly one half of world Jewry resides there, and as we have seen so clearly since

October 7, 2023, what happens there has an immediate impact on us abroad.

Is Zionism a left- or right-wing ideology?

Neither. Modern Zionism is a composite of diverse and often conflicting visions, including cultural Zionism (Ahad Ha'am), Labor Zionism (Hess, Gordon, Ben-Gurion), Revisionist Zionism (Jabotinsky, Begin), Religious Zionism (Kook), synthetic Zionism (Weizmann), General Zionism, and, within the inter-faith context, Christian Zionism. Most took inspiration from Theodor Herzl's political Zionism, though their seeds were planted long before Herzl. The Jewish people's attachment and desire to return to the Land of Israel—as evidenced in the prayers and colloquial language of Jewish culture—date back to the destruction of the Second Temple.

Is Zionism racist?

No. From its earliest days, Zionism has focused its efforts on establishing a Jewish home in the Jewish people's homeland. It has sought to welcome Jews from all parts of the globe and walks of life. Sadly, racism seems a part of any culture, and there are racists among the Jewish people. That being said, Zionism, as expressed

in Israel's Declaration of Independence and as manifest from the military to the Supreme Court, embraces, supports, and protects citizens of Druze, Bedouin, Christian, Muslim, and other backgrounds. Jews come from all parts of the world and thus carry with them every imaginable skin tone, making it impossible for anyone to say with any seriousness, "She doesn't look Jewish." We 'look' African, Asian, European, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean because our ancestors settled in those lands following exile. The fact remains that our people were born in the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

Is Zionism a settler-colonial ideology?

No. It is impossible to colonize one's own land. Many nations have colonized lands to which they bore no previous connection; not so with Zionism. Zionism was and remains an ideology devoted to repatriating diaspora Jews to their ancestral homeland. It stands as one of the greatest "homecoming" movements in human history. While the British Mandate (1923–48) was a colonial enterprise, the dissolution of the Mandate ended colonial rule over the Land of Israel.

Is Israel an apartheid state?

No. In fact, calling Israel an apartheid state is an insult to those who suffered the indignities of true apartheid in South Africa. Israel is by far the most tolerant of Middle East nations, though as the only genuine democracy in the region, it has little competition. Israel strives for freedom and opportunity for all its citizens, no matter their background. Arabs in Israel are citizens of the country and comprise around 20 percent of the country's population. They serve in prominent positions of power, with around a dozen serving in the current Knesset and one serving on the Israeli Supreme Court (Khaled Kabub). Arabs in the West Bank are Palestinians—not resident citizens of Israel—and are governed by the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Given the security situation of the West Bank, there are restrictions placed upon Palestinians of the West Bank that are part of the unfortunate political reality.

Is Israel a “right-wing” state?

Israel's politics have shifted rightward following the Second Intifada and the repeated—and failed—attempts for peace with Palestinians. As enemy threats

have become more serious, Israelis have become more willing to elect hawkish, defense-oriented governments. Demographic changes such as the rise of religious electoral blocs and absorption of hawkish members of diaspora communities have also facilitated this shift. However, right-of-center politics in Israel contains deeply liberal and democratic roots, has long advocated for Sephardic Jews, Mizrahi Jews, and Israeli Arabs disenfranchised by the country's left-wing Ashkenazi "old guard," and favors social welfare policies that accord with Israel's foundational principle of *mamlachtyut*.

Does the IDF deliberately hurt and kill Palestinians?

No. This modern-day form of the antisemitic blood libel is constantly weaponized by uninformed and malicious detractors to smear Israel's reputation. While no military is perfect, the IDF embraces an ethos of *tobar haneshuk* (purity of arms) which calls upon its soldiers to act with the highest of ethical standards and to use their weaponry solely for the sake of their mission and for protection. The IDF is well-known for its precautions to protect civilians, which is uncommon in warfare and unique to Israel.

Why does the Israeli settler movement exist?

Following the Six-Day War (1967), many Israelis moved to the West Bank for religious reasons, given that the land is the historical cradle of the Jewish people. With notable and unfortunate exceptions—such as far-right parties in Israel like those that historically followed or currently embrace the ideology of Meir Kahane—the settlers’ goals have not been to uproot the Palestinian population. A sustained Jewish presence in the West Bank is meaningful and significant for a variety of security-based and economic reasons.

Why can’t Israel just give Palestinians the law of return?

When there is a war where entire populations find themselves beyond the borders of their former home and a new state has been established, rare is the occasion that individuals can simply return or are welcomed back. Israel is unable to allow for a universal “right of return” for Palestinians given the demographic and practical realities of the last seventy-six years. Many of the peace efforts of the 1990s and early 2000s aimed to address this issue, but were ultimately rebuffed by the Palestinians. Indeed, Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza was done precisely to allow for Palestinian sovereignty and

self-rule, which could have welcomed Palestinians to settle on their historical lands.

Why has the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians always failed?

Core to the pro-Palestinian narrative is the illegitimacy of Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel. Regrettably, the current conflict emerges from a war lasting more than one hundred years that began with conflicting British approaches to dispensing the Land of Israel to Jews and Arabs. Despite countless partnerships between Palestinian and Israeli individuals, families, NGOs, and businesses, the overwhelming tendency of Palestinian leadership, from the Grand Mufti to Arafat to Abbas to Hamas, has been to negate partnership and normalization with Israel.

Without question, Israeli leadership holds some blame for failed efforts. The security barrier with the West Bank, though necessary, has been destructive in its physical layout and implementation. Israel's inability to control violent, extremist settlers only hurts Palestinians and Israelis. But at the core of a lack of peace in the region is Palestinian denialism

and the majority of world nations' infantilization of Palestinians. Palestinian leadership has never truly been serious about statecraft but has focused solely on making the life of Israelis more difficult—causing an enduring peace to remain improbable.

What is BDS, and what is its purpose?

BDS, or the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement, was founded in 2005 by Omar Barghouti, a Qatar-born graduate of Tel Aviv University. BDS's nominal mission is to “end international support for Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.” However, as Barghouti himself has openly acknowledged, the movement’s real goal is to turn public opinion against the Jewish state.

Why are older generations of Americans so sympathetic to Israel?

Within American society, there is a clear generational divide when it comes to perceptions of Israel. Older Americans’ views on Israel are generally shaped by a collective memory of the Holocaust and Israel as the “underdog” in its existential wars against Arab neighbors. Language such as “settler colonialism,” “apartheid state,” and “genocidal nation” overwhelmingly

fall on deaf ears for older Americans, who intuitively understand how unfounded these terms are.

Older American Jews grew up in an environment shaped by the precariousness of Jewish survival. They lived slogans like “Let My People Go!” in real time as they worked for the freedom of Soviet Jewry. They generally believe in supporting Jewish organizations and/or synagogues because “that’s what Jews do” and “only Jews support Jewish organizations; there are plenty of non-Jews to support secular institutions.”

Many younger Jews and elements of non-Orthodox Jewry, meanwhile, have prioritized the universal values of Judaism, as evidenced by their belief that *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) represents the most important part of being a Jew rather than nationhood and peoplehood.

Why do so many young people seem to dislike Israel?

Many younger Americans have been educated to view the world through a lens that pits the marginal against the privileged or the oppressed against the oppressor. Israel, which is seen as economically and

militarily powerful, appears as the “white oppressor” (note: Israel’s population is majority non-white) in a battle against its weaker Palestinian neighbor who are presumably the “BIPOC” of the Middle East. By erroneously imposing the examples of American racism and South African apartheid upon the Middle East, many young people have come to misunderstand the region’s extremely complex and layered history. They lack a basic historical literacy of the conflict and are prone to manipulation as a result of their honest and heartfelt commitment to social justice. So committed are some “social justice warriors” that they defend misogynistic, racist, predatory, and sadistic terrorist organizations like Hamas.

What is the “Occupation”?

The “Occupation” refers to Israel’s military and civilian presence in the areas captured by the Six-Day War: the West Bank, Golan Heights, and Gaza Strip (from which it withdrew in 2005 and has only “reoccupied” since 2023 on account of the war). The term has been used to delegitimize Israel in all manner of settings. The Golan Heights is generally not disputed within Israel, and the United States recognized its

annexation during the first Trump Administration. There have been no Israelis living within Gaza since 2005, and prior to the 2023 War, there was no military presence in Gaza.

The West Bank remains a contested subject in Israeli society, as many Israelis are deeply troubled by settler violence, the moral implications of the “Occupation” (the phrase “occupation corrupts” has long been associated with Israel’s peace camp), and the Israeli presence’s potential effect upon the country’s future demography. Nonetheless, Judea and Samaria is the cradle of Jewish civilization, and Arab rejectionism bears significant responsibility for Israel’s continued presence in the biblical heartland. Each of these regions is also highly sensitive for Israel’s security; events like the 10/7 massacre demonstrate the continued need for Israelis to safeguard their homeland by maintaining oversight of them.

Why do some Christians call themselves Christian Zionists?

Many Jews wrongly believe that Christians who stand with Israel do so only for messianic reasons. The most cited version of this theory, known as dispensationalism,

does not adequately explain Christian Zionism. The vast majority of Christians who stand with Israel do so out of a genuine love for the Jewish people, a belief that Jews are entitled to live in their ancestral homeland, and a concern over protecting the only Western democracy in the Middle East. No doubt, their views are informed heavily by the Bible. Nonetheless, Christian Zionism is not predicated on the ingathering of the exiles, but on an understanding that the State of Israel has the right to exist and defend itself from enemies who have made life exceedingly difficult for Jews and Christians throughout the Middle East. Israel would not exist without the support of both Jews and Christian Zionists.

Who is responsible for the Palestinian refugee problem?

The Arab world and the United Nations share blame for the Palestinian refugee problem. Since Israel's independence in 1948, Arab countries have consistently used the Palestinian issue as a battering ram against Israel in the media and diplomacy. Kuwait expelled their Palestinian population in the 1990s, and many Palestinians were killed amid Syria's recent civil war. It is unfortunate how many countries have used the Palestinian people as pawns and accuse Israel of

doing what they themselves are guilty of with respect to the Palestinians.

Through the United Nations Relief Work Agency, the United Nations has perpetuated the narrative of Palestinians as refugees rather than helping them settle into new lands and find new homes. Palestinians are among the world's only refugees who are allowed to take on new citizenship and transfer their refugee status to their children (and grandchildren) while maintaining refugee status themselves.

Why has the United Nations targeted Israel with more condemnatory resolutions than any other country?

In the UN Security Council, where the “Big Five” permanent member states (US, UK, France, Russia, and China) possess the power of veto, the US has often vetoed anti-Israel measures. However, the anti-Israel bloc (composed of the League of Arab States and their allies) forms an automatic majority in the UN General Assembly, where no power of veto exists. Thus, when anti-Israel resolutions come forward in this body, they easily pass. In 2024, for instance, the UNGA passed

seventeen anti-Israel resolutions as opposed to six for the rest of the world *combined*.

Why is anti-Zionism a form of antisemitism?

To deny the Jewish people the fundamental right of self-determination—a right that is and ought to be granted every other ethnoreligious group on the planet—is antisemitic. Engaging in the “Three D’s” of demonizing Israel, delegitimizing Israel, and holding Israel to a series of double standards is antisemitic.

How is the memory of the Holocaust used today to promulgate anti-Zionism?

Critics of Israel weaponize the Holocaust in two particular ways to deny Israel’s right to exist. First, from the Iranian Ayatollah to the president of the Palestinian Authority, many of the world’s anti-Zionists deny that the Holocaust took place. They employ this falsehood to reject the need for Israel to exist as a safe-harbor for persecuted Jews from across the world. Secondly, anti-Zionists engage in Holocaust inversion, which often involves comparing Israeli military conduct to that of the Nazis. In the wake of the 10/7 massacre, many equated the Palestinian terrorists who murdered,

raped, and kidnapped innocent Israelis with the Jewish participants in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Such parallels are erroneous and outrageous, particularly because the Nazi regime's stated goal, like Hamas's today, was to annihilate the Jewish people. As often occurs in antisemitic acts, Jews come to represent the worst of a given society. Therefore, many represent Jews—not Hamas, who are actual perpetrators of evil and committed actual genocidal actions on 10/7—as modern-day Nazis.

Why does America stand with Israel?

America stands with Israel for several reasons. First and foremost, Israel is the only outpost of liberal democratic values in a highly non-Western region. The aspirational and lived values embodied by Israel mirror those of America and the West. Israel's high-tech sector is a hub for innovation, and trade with America promotes both countries' economic development. On the national security front, Israel shares vital intelligence on Middle Eastern geopolitics, nuclear proliferation, and terrorism with the United States. Israel's development of cutting-edge cyberweaponry and electronic warfare is a tremendous boon for American

security needs, and the country's location as a stalwart American ally in the most volatile region in the world (a "permanent American aircraft carrier in the Middle East," as some describe it) is hugely advantageous for the United States. Lastly, most Americans feel a sense of kinship with the Jewish people and recognize Israel as a like-minded country and natural ally.

Why do so many progressives stand against Israel?

One would think that the only country in the Middle East that guarantees the dignity of women and LGBT people would be an object of admiration for progressives. Instead, the opposite has become true. In recent years, many progressives have come to see the world through a lens of power inspired by postmodernism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory. While the far-left has viewed Israel with suspicion since at least the 1950s, Israel has come to be reviled by many progressives today with uncanny fervor. That Israel is a haven of tolerance in such an intolerant region is secondary to the belief that Israel is a fundamentally white, colonial, occupying entity. For "Queers for Palestine" and related groups, the hierarchy of victimhood derived from these beliefs trumps all, which is why they respond

to fact-checks with the claim that Israel is engaged in “pinkwashing” (promoting its gay-friendliness to conceal its oppression of the Palestinians). Some leading progressives even regard Israelis of Ethiopian descent as white, despite the obvious falsity of this claim.

Can one be “pro-Israel” and care about the plight of the Palestinians?

Yes. The two are not mutually exclusive. The *kibbutznikim* who helped shuttle Palestinians from Gaza to medical appointments in Israel, for instance, were strongly Zionist and aware of Palestinian needs. Israeli civil society has often reckoned with its treatment of the Palestinians, and there are numerous “shared society” nonprofits that work to bridge the gap between Palestinians and Israelis. The real question that should be asked is this: Why do many ‘pro-Palestinian’ activists deny the basic humanity of Israelis and ignore human rights abuses within the Palestinian community?

Can universities address antisemitism without infringing upon students’ free speech rights?

Yes. Anti-Israel speakers are often invited to college campuses. As long as their speech adheres to proper

time, place, and manner restrictions, they have the right to speak their mind. The larger issue is that universities have not afforded these rights to speakers whom they believe to espouse the “incorrect view” (a.k.a. deviating from extremist orthodoxies) on contentious political issues. This has created a double standard in which universities enforce “free speech” when it comes to Israel to avoid needing to take a principled stance, whereas they have spoken up on many similarly charged issues in the recent past (e.g. the killing of George Floyd in 2020, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, etc.).

In short, universities have twisted themselves into pretzels in their attempts to justify the imposition of unique free-speech standards upon Jewish students. Moving forward, pro-Israel voices on campus should be sure to promote free speech, ensure its universal application (within proper time, place, and manner restrictions), and invite as many strong pro-Israel voices as possible to counterbalance the dominant anti-Israel narrative. Free speech is encoded in the DNA of the Jewish tradition, and pro-Israel voices must do their utmost to champion this bedrock value at universities and elsewhere.

Why are universities and their departments so stacked with anti-Israel voices in the first place?

First, many university faculty, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, support and teach the cocktail of postmodernism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory outlined above that primes them to look at Israel through an oversimplified “oppressor/oppressed” lens. Secondly, anti-Israel adversaries like Qatar have donated huge sums of money to American universities to ensure that departments, endowed chairs, and assorted academic and extracurricular programming promote an anti-Israel agenda. This codependency between far-left extremists and radical Islamists typifies the “Red–Green Alliance” that many observers hold responsible for the current anti-Israel trend in academia.

Should Jews demand “safe spaces” on campuses?

This seemingly benign request is actually counterproductive for Jewish students. Safe spaces are not the solution to the problem; they are a problem in and of themselves. Many students are anti-Israel in part because they have insulated themselves from views that differ

from their own. Students must be guaranteed physical safety at all times, but they must also understand that diverse views exist on important issues. Universities are places to learn, challenge, and be challenged. Students should not be sheltered from uncomfortable views for the sake of their mental safety.

Has Israel committed genocide in Gaza?

No. Israel has done more than perhaps any army in history to protect civilian lives while fighting in unprecedented conditions. John Spencer, one of the world's leading experts on urban warfare, said the following at the height of Israel's intervention in Gaza: "[A]ll available evidence shows that Israel has followed the laws of war, legal obligations, best practices in civilian harm mitigation and still found a way to reduce civilian casualties to historically low levels."

Israel has successfully relocated Gazans in order to dismantle Hamas, an act that represents the antithesis of genocide. Israel recently halted fighting in order to vaccinate hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children—again, a clear sign that Israel supports life, not death. Note as well: Hamas has used billions of dollars (from Qatar and Iran among other countries, including

US aid) to build an infrastructure for its leadership and fighters to destroy Israel rather than protect, support, and foster its own population. Hamas has openly declared that it does not care how many of its civilians die in the war against Israel. If anyone is committing genocide, it is Hamas, which butchered Israeli Arabs and Bedouin alongside Israeli Jews on October 7.

Why does everyone seem to hate Israel?

This impression is false. Israel has many friends beyond the Jewish community. While some well-meaning critics exist, the extreme anti-Israel voices amplified on TV and social media are generally not reflective of how the American population at large feels about Israel. The West's adversaries, including Iran, Russia, and China, seek to construct this narrative to sow discord in the West. All citizens of good conscience must therefore push back and recognize this narrative for what it is: an affront to our shared values and a fiction meant to destabilize both the global Jewish community and the free world at large.

Is normalization between Israel and more Arab countries still on the horizon?

Yes. While anti-Israel rhetoric has spread throughout the Arab world amid the Israel–Hamas conflict, it is notable that normalization agreements between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco have all held. Saudi Arabia remains likely to sign an agreement with Israel in the near future. Even as the Israel–Hamas conflict has created more instability in the region, the prospect of peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors remains attainable. Despite often posturing otherwise in public, leaders of numerous Muslim countries recognize Israel's economic prowess, military might, and strategic utility as a deterrent against Iran, which threatens all civilized peoples of the Middle East.

REFERENCES & RECOMMENDED READINGS

Avner, Yehuda, *The Prime Ministers*.

Dershowitz, Alan, *The Case for Israel*.

Friedman, Matti, Columns for *Tablet Magazine* and *The Free Press*.

Glick, Caroline, Column for *Jewish News Syndicate*.

Gordis, Daniel, *Impossible Takes Longer; Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*; “Israel from the Inside” Substack.

Jewish Virtual Library.

Klein Halevi, Yossi, Blog for *The Times of Israel*.

Kramer, Martin, Blog for *Martin Kramer on the Middle East*.

Mead, Walter Russell, *The Arc of a Covenant*.

Oren, Michael, “Clarity” Substack; *Six Days of War*.

Schwartz, Adi, and Einat Wilf, *The War of Return*.

Senor, Dan, and Saul Singer, *Start-up Nation*.
Shapira, Anita, *Israel: A History*.
Shavit, Ari, *My Promised Land*.
Shilon, Avi, *The Decline of the Left Wing in Israel*.
Tishby, Noa, *Israel: A Simple Guide to the Most Misunderstood Country on Earth*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jared Stone graduated *magna cum laude* from Princeton University in 2025 with a degree in politics and minors in history and classics.

His senior thesis examined the ideological foundations of early Revisionist Zionism, analyzing how figures such as Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Abba Ahimeir, and Uri Zvi Greenberg articulated Jewish nationalist visions shaped by competing currents of European political thought.

In college, he served as chairman of the Cliosophic Society, president of the university's pro-Israel student group, and leader of a major Jewish campus community. He has completed fellowships and internships in political theory, US foreign policy, and Jewish communal affairs.

He contributes on topics including American and Israeli politics, the US–Israel relationship, Zionism, and Jewish peoplehood.