



## COUNTRY IN PERSPECTIVE

# ISRAEL



*View of Tel Aviv  
Flickr / José Ángel Morente Valero*

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2017



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DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE  
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*Jezreel Valley  
Flickr / Yuval Shoshan*

## Chapter 1 | Israel in Perspective

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# Geography

## Introduction

Israel, a small country in the Middle East, is slightly larger than New Jersey. It is located on the Mediterranean Sea and surrounded by Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, Syria and Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> Israel has a diverse geography, with occasionally snow-dusted mountains situated only a few hundred kilometers from some of the world's most arid deserts.<sup>2</sup>

Israel is geographically important in the Middle East. Ancient Egyptian traders traveled east to Damascus and beyond on the Via Maris (Derech HaYam) and the King's Highway,

two trading routes that traverse modern-day Israel.<sup>3</sup> Beside Egypt, Israel is the only nation in the Middle East to have ports on both the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea (a pathway to the Indian Ocean).<sup>4</sup>

## Geographic Divisions

Israel has four major geographical regions: the Mediterranean Coastal Plain, the central and northern highlands, the Jordan Valley, and the Negev Desert.<sup>5, 6</sup>

### *Mediterranean Coastal Plain*



Caesarea  
Flickr / Michael Jones

The coastal plain runs the length of Israel's Mediterranean coast. To the north, the Plain of Acre extends from the Lebanese border to Haifa, where the Mount Carmel Range runs to the coast. South of Haifa, the Coastal Plain opens into the Plain of Sharon, a reclaimed marshland. South of Tel Aviv, the Coastal Plain widens, extending 40 km (25 mi) inland.<sup>7, 8</sup> Most of Israel's population is concentrated on the Coastal Plain.<sup>9</sup>



Map of Israel  
CIA

### *Central and Northern Highlands*

The highlands are a group of hills and mountains whose central portion lies entirely in the West Bank. In the north, the Galilean Mountains are separated from the central highlands by the Jezreel Valley, which cuts east to west across Israel from the coast to the Jordan Valley.<sup>10</sup> Israel's highest point, Mount Meron, at 1,208 m (3,963 ft) is located in the Northern Galilean Highlands near the Lebanese border.<sup>11</sup> A peak in the Golan Heights, Mount Hermon,



Montfort Castle  
Wikimedia / Юкатан

rises 2,238 m (7,336 ft).<sup>12, 13</sup>

The central highlands are divided into three sections: the Mount Carmel Range bordering the Jezreel Valley in the north, the Samarian Hills in the center, and the Judean Hills in the south. The Samarian Hills or Highlands make up a large portion of the West Bank. The eastern portions of the mostly barren Judean Hills also lie in the West Bank. Israel's capital city, Jerusalem, is located in the Judean Hills.<sup>14</sup>

### *Jordan River Valley*

Averaging only about 10 km (6 mi) in width, the Jordan River Valley runs about 105 km (65 mi) from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. The Jordan River meanders along the length of the valley floor. The valley is arid, receiving only 7.5 cm (3 in) of rain per year.<sup>15</sup>



*Jordan River Valley*  
Wikimedia / Refael

The Jordan River Valley is a northern extension of the East Africa Rift System, which runs from Mozambique to Turkey.<sup>16, 17</sup> The Hula Valley in the north and the Arava Valley south of the Dead Sea are part of the same rift system.<sup>18</sup>

### *Negev Desert*



*Negev Desert*  
Flickr / Rodrigo Balan Uriartt

Expanding across 12,000 sq km (4,600 sq mi) in southern Israel, the Negev Desert covers about 58% of the country. This region is shaped like an inverted triangle, with its apex at the Gulf of Aqaba in the south and its base extending from Gaza in the northwest to the Dead Sea in the northeast.<sup>19</sup> The Negev is sparsely populated and strikingly barren in its southern reaches. Most rain falls in the north, while areas around Eilat in the Gulf of Aqaba receive almost no rainfall.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the extremely arid conditions, several kibbutzim (collective communities) were established in the Negev, and the area now has a thriving agricultural industry. Though little rain falls in the area, the soil is rich in nutrients. Large-scale water projects transport water from the north to the south and advanced irrigation technology developed in Israel has opened up 160,000 hectares (400,000 acres) for cultivation.<sup>21, 22</sup>

## Topographic Features



Mount Carmel  
Wikimedia Commons

The highest mountains in Israel are located in Galilee. The Beit HaKerem Valley separates the mountains of Upper Galilee from Lower Galilee.<sup>23</sup> Upper Galilee has several peaks higher than 1,000 m (3,280 ft), including Mount Meron. Lower Galilee's highest peak is Mount Tabor, 588 m (1,929 ft).<sup>24</sup>

The Jezreel Valley (Emek Yizra'el) lies between the Galilean Highlands to the north and Mount Carmel Range to the south. It runs northwest from the Jordan

River Valley to the Mediterranean Sea. Historically, the valley has been important as a lowland passage between the Mediterranean coast and the Jordan River Valley.<sup>25</sup>

South of the Jezreel Valley, the Mount Carmel Range extends northwest from the Jordan River Valley and culminates in its highest point 546 m (1,791 ft) southwest of the city of Haifa.<sup>26</sup>



Jezreel Valley  
Wikimedia / Tal Oz

High plateaus run northeast-southwest through the central portion of the Negev Desert. Several depressions called makhteshim (Hebrew for “mortars”) resemble meteorite craters but are actually the result of extreme rock erosion.<sup>27</sup>

The largest and most famous of these is Makhtesh Ramon, which is 45 km (28 mi) long, 8 km (5 mi) wide, and 500 m (1,640 ft) deep.<sup>28</sup>

## Climate

Despite its small size, Israel has a surprisingly diverse climate. Prevailing winds blow from the southwest, bringing significant moisture to northern Israel from the Mediterranean. Farther south, these same winds blow hot, dry air from the Sinai Desert, creating arid conditions in the Negev Desert.<sup>29</sup> Almost all rainfall occurs between November and March. Rainfall totals tend to be higher in the hills and mountains of the north. In winter, occasional snowfall occurs in the higher mountain areas in Galilee and Jerusalem.<sup>30</sup>



*Israel's climate and landscape  
Flickr / Israel Nature Photography by Ary*

The northern and coastal areas have mild winters and hot summers. The coastal city of Haifa, for example, has average daily maximum temperatures of 17°C (63°F) in January and 31°C (88°F) in August. Jerusalem, lying inland and at a higher elevation, has a lower average maximum temperature of 12°C (54°F) in January and lower temperatures than Haifa in the summer.<sup>31</sup>

Near the beginning and end of the summer, Israel is sometimes blasted by khamsin winds (sharav in Hebrew). These hot, dry winds blow westward from the Arabian Desert.<sup>32</sup> Not only does the sharav cycle desert heat toward densely populated areas in central and northern Israel, it can also generate blinding sand storms.<sup>33</sup>

## Rivers and Bodies of Water

Water is a precious resource due to Israel's growing population and goal of agricultural self-sufficiency. Use of water resources in Israel and Israeli-controlled territories has long been a key issue in the region's ongoing conflicts.

### *Jordan River*

The Jordan River (HaYarden) is Israel's longest river, running south for 360 km (223 mi) from its sources north of the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.<sup>34</sup> The Jordan's sources are the Hasbani River flowing south from Lebanon, the Banias River flowing southwest from the Golan Heights, and the Dan River flowing from Israel's northern highlands.<sup>35</sup>



*Jordan River*  
Wikimedia / Beivushtang

After the Yarmuk River joins the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee, the river forms the border between Israel and Jordan. (The Yarmuk flows from the east along the Syrian-Jordanian border.<sup>36</sup>) Continuing south to the Dead Sea, the Jordan River also marks the boundary between the West Bank and Jordan. Much of the Jordan River lies below sea level, making it the world's lowest-lying river.<sup>37</sup>

The exploitation of its water for domestic, agricultural, and industrial consumption has left the lower Jordan River almost dry and highly polluted.<sup>38</sup>

### *Sea of Galilee (Lake Kinneret)*

The Jordan flows into the northern end of the Sea of Galilee and out the southern end. The lake is 21 km (13 mi) long, 11 km (7 mi) wide, and 48 m (157 ft) deep at its northeastern end. It lies 209 m (686 ft) below sea level and has mineral-rich, slightly salty water. Mild winters and hot mineral springs make it popular with tourists. It is a major attraction for Christians because of its association with the life of Christ. The lake supports a modest fishing industry.<sup>39, 40, 41</sup>



*Sea of Galilee*  
Flickr / wesbi

In 1964, Israel began water diversions via the National Water Carrier, a massive project that pumps water out of the Sea of Galilee and carries it via aqueducts and tunnels to central and southern Israel.<sup>42</sup> The subsequent tensions over water control contributed to the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War. By the war's end, Israel had gained possession of the Golan Heights, giving it control over the streams feeding the Sea of Galilee.<sup>43</sup>

In recent years, Israel has eased its water shortage by desalinating seawater from the Mediterranean. As a result, pumping from the lake to the National Water Carrier has been reduced.<sup>44, 45</sup>

## Dead Sea (Yam HaMelach)



Dead Sea Beach  
Flickr / Sue Schoenfeld

At 418 m (1,371 ft) below sea level, the surface of the Dead Sea is the lowest point on Earth. The Dead Sea is Earth's saltiest body of water—about 10 times saltier than the oceans. Only bacteria can survive in it.<sup>46</sup>

The eastern side of the Dead Sea belongs to Jordan while the western side is split between the West Bank on the north and Israel on the south. The lake was separated into two parts at the beginning of the 21st century by the al-Lisan peninsula, which

initially extended from the Jordanian side. Chemical factories near the lake process salt, potash, and magnesium. Several beaches and tourist resorts are located on its shores.<sup>47</sup>

The Dead Sea has been shrinking steadily for several decades.<sup>48</sup> Water diversions on the Jordan and Yarmuk rivers have dramatically reduced the amount of water flowing into it. Scientists estimate that the Dead Sea has now shrunk by one-third from its historical levels.<sup>49</sup> Water levels drop by about 1 m (3 ft) per year, forming dangerous sinkholes on the newly exposed shoreline.<sup>50</sup>

In May 2005, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority began exploring a canal project linking the Red Sea to the Dead Sea in order to stabilize water levels. After a feasibility study in 2012 and a water-sharing deal in 2013, international firms began work on the USD 10 billion project in 2016.<sup>51, 52</sup>

## Aquifers

The Coastal Aquifer lies under the coastal plain from the Gaza Strip to Haifa, and has been affected by over-pumping.<sup>53</sup> The Mountain Aquifer lies east of the Coastal Aquifer and is one of the West Bank's few water sources. Much of the area that drains into the aquifer is located in the West Bank, yet Israel uses 80% of the water pumped from the aquifer. This disproportionate use has complicated the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.<sup>54</sup>



Mountain and coastal aquifers  
ArcWorld UN

## Major Cities

City	Population (2015 est.) <sup>55,56,57</sup>
Jerusalem	865,700
Tel Aviv-Yafo	432,900
Haifa	278,900
Beersheba	205,500
Eilat	48,950
Tiberias	45,000

### *Jerusalem (Yerushalaym)*

Jerusalem is Israel's largest city with over 865,000 inhabitants. It is the capital as well as the spiritual center of the country. A major religious pilgrimage site, Jerusalem attracts Jews, Muslims, and Christians. The Temple Mount, Judaism's most sacred site, and the Dome of the Rock, sacred to Islam, are both in the Old City, a walled compound divided into Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Armenian quarters.<sup>58</sup> Several universities, including Hebrew University, Israel's oldest institution of higher learning, and some of the world's best libraries make Jerusalem a major intellectual center.<sup>59</sup>



*Jaffa Gate, Jerusalem*  
DLIFLC

Jerusalem has a higher proportion of Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews than most other Israeli cities. Jews account for about two-thirds of the population, and about one-third of them identify as Haredi or ultra-Orthodox. Because Haredim and Arabs have relatively high birthrates, Jerusalem has a younger population and a higher poverty rate than the national average.<sup>60</sup>

In 1949, the Israeli government made Jerusalem the capital of Israel, although only the western part of the city was within Israeli's boundaries, while Jordan controlled the eastern part, including the Old City. During the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel took control of the entire city. In 1980, the Knesset reaffirmed that a united Jerusalem was

the capital of Israel, effectively annexing East Jerusalem.<sup>61</sup> The status of Jerusalem remains controversial. Many countries do not recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and maintain their embassies in Tel Aviv.<sup>62</sup>

## *Tel Aviv-Yafo*



*Tel Aviv boardwalk*  
DLIFLC

Tel Aviv is Israel's second-largest city. This modern, secular city is a striking contrast to Jerusalem. Tel Aviv-Yafo is Israel's commercial, financial, and cultural center. It is the core of the Tel Aviv Metropolitan Area, home to nearly one-third of Israel's population.<sup>63, 64</sup>

Tel Aviv hosts the headquarters for many Israeli financial institutions, major newspapers and publishers, almost all foreign embassies, including the US embassy, and the headquarters of the Israeli Defense Force's General Staff.<sup>65, 66</sup> High technology and scientific research firms in the suburbs have bolstered the area's economic profile.<sup>67</sup> The city is the home of Tel Aviv University (TAU), Israel's largest institutions of higher learning.<sup>68</sup>

Tel Aviv, the first all-Jewish city in modern times, was founded in 1909 as a suburb of the ancient port city of Jaffa. By 1950, it had absorbed Jaffa and was renamed Tel Aviv-Yafo.<sup>69</sup> Today, Jaffa is still home to most of Tel Aviv's Arabs, who make up more than one-third of the district's residents.<sup>70</sup>

## *Haifa*

Located in northwestern Israel, Haifa is Israel's third-largest city, with a large seaport and industrial center. The city's numerous plants produce steel, chemicals, textiles, processed food, and refined oil.<sup>71</sup> The port houses the Israel Defense Force's main naval base.<sup>72</sup>

Haifa is set on the slopes of Mount Carmel, overlooking a bay on the Mediterranean Sea. Most of the residential buildings and businesses are located on Mount Carmel's slopes, while the industrial sector lies on the flat land between the mountain and the sea. A subway system links the lower town to the steep slopes of the upper town.<sup>73</sup>

The city is known for its mixed population of Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze. The breathtaking Baha'i Gardens, world headquarters of the Baha'i faith, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.<sup>74, 75</sup> The city is also home to the University of Haifa and the Technion—Israel Institute of Technology, which consistently ranks among the world's top science and technology research universities.<sup>76, 77</sup>



*Bahai' Temple, Haifa*  
DLIFLC

### *Beersheba (Be'er Sheva)*



*Beersheba*  
Flickr / Hossein Derakhshan

Beersheba (Be'er Sheva) is the largest city in the Negev Desert and the sixth largest city in Israel. Located on the northern side of the Negev Desert, it is the home of Ben-Gurion University and Soroka Medical Center. The Israel Air Force Museum is located west of Beersheba at the Hatzetim Air Force Base.<sup>78</sup>

After independence, Beersheba absorbed immigrants from North African and neighboring Arab countries and later

became the home of many Ethiopian, Russian, and Indian Jews.<sup>79, 80</sup>

Beersheba's ancient roots as a desert caravan oasis can still be seen at a weekly market held for the Bedouins who live nearby. Because the city was mostly Arab, the 1947 UN partition plan for Palestine placed Beersheba in the Palestinian state. Israeli forces captured it in October 1948, after which most Arabs left.<sup>81, 82</sup>

### *Eilat*

Eilat lies on Red Sea coast at the southern tip of Israel. Its busy port provides Israel access to the Indian Ocean. With its year-round sunshine and mild winter temperatures, the city has been developed into a popular tourist resort with a population of over 48,000.<sup>83</sup>

## Environmental Concerns

In Israel's first decades, economic development and national security took precedence over all else, including the environment. Today, environmental concerns, especially water, are more prominent in the national discourse.<sup>84</sup>

### *Water Pollution*

Water is crucial in Israel. Most of the country's agriculture relies on irrigation. As Israel's population has steadily increased, a higher percentage of the available water has gone to human consumption. To increase the domestic supply of water, Israel is developing several desalination plants along the Mediterranean coast.<sup>85</sup>



*Nahal Taninim*  
Wikimedia / udi Steinwell

Israel has developed innovative strategies for extending the existing water supply. For example, more than one-third of the water now used in Israeli agriculture is effluent—recycled from sewage.<sup>86</sup> Drip irrigation, a technology developed in Israel, is now widely used in agriculture throughout the world. This has allowed water allotments for agriculture to drop by 40% without a subsequent drop in crop yields.<sup>87</sup> Thus, Israel has one of the lowest per capita water consumption rates in the industrialized world.<sup>88</sup>

Israel is using almost all of its renewable water sources, leading to a buildup of salt and other contaminants.<sup>89</sup> During drought years, water levels in the Sea of Galilee fall and salt concentrations rise, impacting the lake's water quality and wildlife.<sup>90</sup> Over-pumping in the Coastal Aquifer has resulted in saltwater infiltration. Nitrates from fertilizers have leached into many wells; in some areas, inadequate sewage treatment systems have led to untreated waste material polluting both surface and ground water.<sup>91, 92</sup>

### *Air Pollution*

Air pollution has been a persistent problem. One of the worst affected areas was Haifa; during the 1980s, its sulfur dioxide levels were more than four times the allowable limit. Israel has implemented strict emissions regulations to reduce air



*The iconic cooling towers of the Haifa oil refinery  
Wikimedia / Eneemann@gmail.com*

pollution, and levels of most air pollutants have decreased in recent years.<sup>93</sup>

Power plant emissions are the largest source of pollution. Many of Israel's power plants burn coal and oil, and demand for energy has grown in recent decades along with the population and standard of living. To combat energy emissions, Israel has begun using low-sulfur coal and natural gas at some plants while upgrading more plants to take advantage of recently discovered natural gas reserves, allowing it to produce more energy with lower emissions.<sup>94</sup>

Due to increased traffic, automobile emissions are now the main air pollutant in crowded urban areas such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.<sup>95</sup> Newer, more efficient cars and more stringent emissions requirements have led to an overall drop in car emissions, even as the number of cars on the road has increased.<sup>96</sup>

## Natural Hazards

Although Israel lies along two fault lines, the Carmel Fault and the Dead Sea Fault, no high-magnitude, life-threatening earthquake has occurred in almost a millennium. Most seismologists agree that Israel is overdue for another "big one."<sup>97</sup>

Dry conditions leave Israel vulnerable to many hazards. Economically, the most costly natural threats are extreme temperatures and drought.<sup>98</sup> The Judean Hills and the Negev Desert are prone to flash floods during winter.<sup>99</sup>



*Israeli desert storm  
Flickr / Niv Maoz*

Sandstorms, usually occurring in spring and late summer in conjunction with the sharav winds, are also hazardous, especially for those with respiratory problems. Sandstorms can limit visibility on the road. Authorities recommend limiting outdoor activity during sandstorms, especially for people with health problems.<sup>100</sup>

## Endnotes for Chapter 1: Geography

- <sup>1</sup> “Israel: Geography,” Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, 12 January 2017, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>
- <sup>2</sup> “Israel: The Land,” Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 19 August 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Israel#toc23066>
- <sup>3</sup> “Via Maris,” Jewish Virtual Library, accessed 30 March 2017, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/ViaMaris.html>
- <sup>4</sup> “Israel,” Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 19 August 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/296740/Israel>
- <sup>5</sup> References to Israel throughout this report are, except as noted, specific to the country as defined by the armistice boundaries of the 1947-48 war (the “Green Line”).
- <sup>6</sup> Kevin Avruch, “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Topography,” in *Israel: A Country Study*, ed. Helen Chapin Metz (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1990), <http://countrystudies.us/israel/>
- <sup>7</sup> “Israel: The Land: Relief,” Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 19 August 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Israel#toc23067>
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- <sup>12</sup> “Mount Hermon,” New World Encyclopedia, 20 February 2014, [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mount\\_Hermon](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mount_Hermon)
- <sup>13</sup> Mount Hermon, where Lebanon and Syria meet the boundary of the Golan Heights, is substantially taller than Mount Meron. Israel controls the southern and western slopes. See “Mt Hermon General Overview,” n.d., [http://www.hermon.com/mt\\_hermon/](http://www.hermon.com/mt_hermon/)
- <sup>14</sup> Marshall Cavendish Corporation, “Geography and Climate: The Land of Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and West Bank and Gaza: Hills of Central Israel and the West Bank,” in *Middle East, Western Asia and Northern Africa* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2007), 871-872.
- <sup>15</sup> “Jordan River,” Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 12 January 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/306217/Jordan-River>
- <sup>16</sup> “East African Rift System,” Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 21 February 2017, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/176462/East-African-Rift-System>
- <sup>17</sup> “Geography of Israel: The Jordan Valley,” Jewish Virtual Library, n.d., <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-jordan-valley>
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- <sup>20</sup> “The Negev Desert,” Jewish Virtual Library, n.d., <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-negev-desert>
- <sup>21</sup> “Negev Desert,” Tourist Israel, The Guide, n.d., <https://www.touristisrael.com/negev/295/>
- <sup>22</sup> Jon Fedler, “Focus on Israel: Israel’s Agriculture in the 21st Century,” Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 24 December 2002, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/economy/pages/focus%20on%20israel-%20israel-s%20agriculture%20in%20the%2021st.aspx>
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## Israel in Perspective

# Chapter 1 | Geography

## Assessment

1. Israel is the only nation in the Middle East with access to the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.
2. Most of Israel's industries are located in the geographic region known as the Negev Desert.
3. Work has begun on a canal linking the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, to combat declining water levels in the Dead Sea.
4. Tel Aviv is the political hub of the nation of Israel.
5. A showdown over water control was one of the main causes of the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True*



*Declaration of State of Israel 1948*  
Wikimedia Commons

## Chapter 2 | Israel in Perspective

# History

## Introduction

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, it was mostly settled by Russian and European Jews who had joined the Zionist Movement and immigrated to Palestine at the beginning of the 20th century to build a homeland for the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup> For those who founded the Zionist movement, a Jewish state represented emancipation and freedom from persecution.<sup>2</sup> Before the Jews returned to the region, all or part of the ancient land of Israel was ruled by the British, Ottoman Turks, Arabs, Byzantines, Romans, Greeks, Persians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Mamluks, Philistines, Babylonians, and the Jewish Israelites.<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem is holy for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The short history of the state of Israel is shaped by waves of immigration, spurts of economic growth, political crises, and warfare. At the center of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stands the dispute over land claimed by Jews and Palestinians who were displaced by the creation of the state of Israel.<sup>4</sup>

## Zionism and Jewish Immigration



Theodor Herzl  
Wikimedia Commons

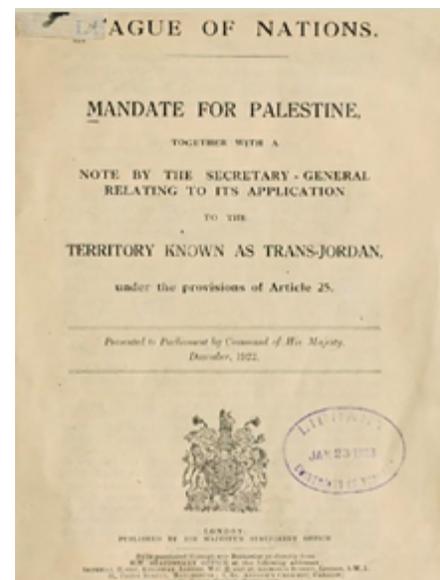
Jewish immigration to Palestine, known as *aliyah*, or “ascent” in Hebrew, began at the end of the 19th century and occurred in waves. The Jews who came in the first wave, called the First Aliya, were largely from Russia and Eastern Europe, many driven out of their homes during pogroms.<sup>5</sup>

During the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901, the Zionist Organization established the Jewish National Fund to collect money to purchase land for Jewish settlements in Ottoman-controlled Palestine.<sup>6, 7</sup> The organization began buying land in 1903; in 1909, the first kibbutz, or communal farming settlement, was established on land purchased near the Sea of Galilee.<sup>8, 9</sup>

## British Mandate

World War I brought the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled Palestine for 400 years.<sup>10</sup> After the war, Britain and France divided the Middle East between them, with Britain receiving a Mandate for Palestine in 1922.<sup>11</sup>

In 1917, the foreign secretary of the United Kingdom, Arthur James *Balfour*, declared the British government’s support for “the establishment of the Jewish National Home . . . and the development of self-governing institutions” in Palestine.<sup>12</sup> The Balfour Declaration recognized the World Zionist Organization (WZO) as “an appropriate Jewish agency” for advice and cooperation.<sup>13</sup> In 1929, the WZO designated the



Palestine and Transjordan memorandum, 1922  
Wikimedia Commons

Jewish Agency to oversee immigration and settlement. The Jewish Agency acted as the de facto government of the Jewish community in Palestine.<sup>14</sup>

### *Tension over Jewish Immigration*

As Jewish immigration to Palestine increased, so did tensions with the local Arab population. When attacks on Jews became more frequent, the Jewish community organized its own defense force, the Haganah (Defense). In August 1929, clashes between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem and Hebron left 133 Jews dead and nearly 339 wounded.<sup>15</sup>

### *White Papers of 1930 and 1939*

In an effort to protect Arab interests in Palestine, the British government issued a series of policy reports known as the White Papers. The 1922 White Paper established the principle that Jewish immigration should not exceed the capacity of the economy to absorb a growing population. The 1930 White Paper called for the government to limit, or even cut off, Jewish immigration if it threatened the livelihoods of Arabs.<sup>16</sup>

After the Nazi Party came to power in 1933, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased. Between 1929 and 1939, more than 250,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine. Unlike the first waves of immigrants who mostly settled in cooperative farming communities, Jews arriving in the late 1920s and 1930s (referred to as the Fourth and Fifth Aliyahs) were more educated and tended to settle in urban areas.<sup>17</sup>



*Jewish protest demonstrations against Palestine White Paper,  
May 18, 1939  
Wikimedia Commons*

Arab-Jewish tensions continued to escalate, culminating in the Arab Revolt of 1936-39. Thousands died before the British quelled the violence.<sup>18</sup> In May 1939, the British government issued another White Paper, limiting Jewish immigration and stipulating that the Jewish national home should be established within, rather than separate from, an independent Palestinian state.<sup>19</sup> Both sides rejected the White Paper, and David Ben-Gurion, Chairman of the Jewish Agency, vowed to fight its implementation.<sup>20</sup>

## World War II



*Exodus ship carrying Jewish emigrants to Palestine in 1947*  
Wikimedia Commons

During World War II, the British sought to prevent immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine, despite increasing evidence that the Nazis were exterminating Jews. In 1940 and 1942 the British turned away two ships with refugees seeking to escape the Holocaust; both ships sank. In retaliation, a Zionist splinter group known as Lohamei Herut Israel (acronym of “Fighters for the Freedom of Israel”) conducted several attacks on the British, including the assassination of Lord Moyne, the British minister of state for the Middle East.<sup>21</sup>

## Israeli War of Independence (1948–1949)

In 1947, the British turned to the United Nations (UN) to resolve the situation in Palestine. The United Nations voted for the region to be divided into Arab and Jewish states. The Arabs opposed the partition plan while the Jews celebrated on the streets.<sup>22</sup> By the end of the year, Palestine was embroiled in war, making it impossible to implement the partition plan.<sup>23</sup>

On 14 May 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared Israel an independent Jewish state. The next day armies from Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, and Egypt invaded Palestine, initiating a full-scale war with Israel. Over the next year, Israel secured one-fifth more land than it had in the original partition plan.<sup>24</sup> In 1949, Israel signed armistice agreements with Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Syria, establishing the armistice demarcation line and a demilitarized zone, known as the Green Line.<sup>25</sup>



*End of British mandate, Haifa 1948*  
Wikimedia / מיה ליחו הלפעהר ונאיזומ רואמ ריב ל"את

The war caused the displacement of thousands of Jews and Arabs. Palestinian refugees settled in refugee camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Jews

who lived in Arab countries were persecuted. They lost their property, rights, and nationality and became refugees as well.<sup>26, 27, 28</sup>

## Ben-Gurion Era (1948–1963)

Ben-Gurion served as prime minister for 13 years, from 1948 to 1953 and 1955 to 1963.<sup>29</sup>  
<sup>30</sup> One of Ben-Gurion's first challenges was the consolidation of various militias into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). In June 1948, Ben-Gurion ordered the IDF to fire on Altalena, a ship attempting to deliver arms into Tel Aviv harbor for the Irgun militia. The ship sank, killing 16 Irgun members.<sup>31</sup> To avert a civil war, Irgun's leader, Menachem Begin, ordered his troops to back down.<sup>32</sup>



*Ben Gurion returned from African tour, 1962  
Flickr / Government Press Office*

In May 1948, the Provision Council of State appointed Ben-Gurion provisional prime minister and set elections for later in the year. In January 1949, an assembly (the Knesset) was elected to draw up and ratify a new constitution. Because of disagreement over the role of religion in government, the constitution never materialized.<sup>33</sup> Israel's state institutions, operations, and basic rights are defined by a series of basic laws passed by the Knesset in 1958.<sup>34</sup>

The fledgling state was in financial distress, exacerbated by an influx of immigrants. Many of the newcomers were Sephardim Jews, refugees from North Africa and the Middle East. Their socioeconomic and cultural differences frequently caused friction with the Ashkenazi Jews of European and Russian descent who dominated Israeli culture and politics.<sup>35</sup>

In 1950, the Knesset passed the Law of Return, ensuring citizenship for any Jewish immigrant to Israel. By the time Ben-Gurion stepped down as prime minister in 1963, the Jewish population of Israel had tripled.<sup>36</sup>

## The Suez Crisis



*Dayan in Sharm El Sheikh, Sinai*  
Wikimedia Commons

Israel's relations with Egypt, already tense over attacks on civilians launched from the Gaza Strip, were further strained when Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser blockaded the narrow Straits of Tiran, cutting off Israel's outlet to the Red Sea.<sup>37</sup>

In 1956, Israel conducted a joint military operation with Britain and France, who wanted to reassert their control over the Suez Canal, which Egypt had nationalized. In October, the IDF overran Gaza and

continued on into the Sinai Peninsula as the French and British moved into the area around the canal.<sup>38</sup>

The United States pressured the three countries to leave the region. Though Israel was forced to pull out of the Sinai, the Israelis did gain some benefits, including fewer attacks from the Gaza Strip and closer military relations with France. The strong performance of the IDF also bolstered confidence in Israel's military capability.<sup>39</sup>

## Leading Up to War

In 1963, Levi Eshkol succeeded Ben-Gurion to the premiership.<sup>40</sup> Eshkol was less experienced in national defense and relied on advisors.<sup>41</sup> In 1964, the Arab League admitted the newly created Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was created to provide leadership for disparate Palestinian nationalist groups.<sup>42</sup> Dominating the PLO was Fatah, a militant group cofounded by Yasser Arafat, notorious for terrorist attacks on Israeli targets.<sup>43</sup>



*Israeli reconnaissance forces in Sinai during the six-day war*  
Wikimedia / לגור יפר

Between 1964 and 1967, violent incidents between Israel and Syria escalated, spurred by disputes over water rights.<sup>44, 45</sup> In April 1967, Egyptian President Nasser sent troops to the Israeli border and Gaza Strip as part of a mutual defense agreement with Syria.

He also blockaded the Straits of Tiran. In May, Jordan joined the defense pact. Israel was now surrounded and facing war on three fronts.<sup>46, 47, 48</sup>

## The Six-Day War



*Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin, Gen. Rehavam Ze'evi (right) and Gen. Uzi Narkiss, Jerusalem Flickr / Government Press Office*

On 5 June 1967, Israel destroyed Egypt's air force on the ground within two hours, in a preemptive attack. In the following days, the IDF routed Egypt's ground forces, pushing into the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula. After Jordan began shelling Jerusalem, Israel attacked Jordan's airfields and prepared to storm Jerusalem. By 10 June, the IDF had captured East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan and pushed Egyptian troops from the Suez Canal. The fighting ended with Israeli troops capturing the Golan Heights in the northeast.<sup>49</sup>

Following the Six-Day War, the Israeli government began allowing the development of Jewish settlements in the areas beyond the Green Line, mostly in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Settlement would later be built in the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.<sup>50, 51</sup>

International concern over the potential for continuing conflict and the unresolved status of the areas conquered by Israel resulted in the United Nations Resolution 242, adopted in November 1967. The resolution called for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories in exchange for Arab recognition and acceptance of the State of Israel.<sup>52</sup>

## 1973 Yom Kippur War

The Arab states unanimously rejected Resolution 242, refusing to recognize or negotiate with Israel. Following the war, Egypt instigated a "war of attrition" along the Suez Canal. These deadly skirmishes intensified in 1969 after Prime Minister Golda Meir ordered air raids deep into Egypt.<sup>53</sup> On the eastern front, Israelis were increasingly subject to PLO raids launched from Jordan.<sup>54</sup>

On 6 October 1973, the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, Syria and Egypt surprised Israel with a two-pronged attack. During the first week, the IDF suffered heavy casualties

as Syria and Egypt made gains in the Golan Heights and on the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>55</sup> However, the Israelis quickly regrouped and reversed their losses. In the north, Israeli troops retook the Golan Heights and advanced into Syria. To the south, Israel surrounded Egypt's Third Army after capturing the Suez Canal.<sup>56</sup>



*Evacuated casualties during Yom Kippur War  
Flickr / Israel Defense Forces*

US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger traveled to the Soviet Union at Moscow's urgent request to negotiate a ceasefire.

The agreement was adopted as UN Resolution 338 on 22 October. Three days later, Israel accepted the ceasefire, but only after the Soviet Union threatened to intervene to preserve the Third Army.<sup>57</sup>

## Aftermath of the 1973 War



*Ma'ale Gamla, Golan Heights  
Wikimedia / Idobi*

After hostilities ended, Israel still controlled the territories it had held since 1967. However, the 1973 war had significant political repercussions. During the war, Arab countries staged an oil embargo against Israel-friendly nations. Fuel shortages in the United States demonstrated the effectiveness of using oil as leverage in the Middle East conflict.<sup>58</sup>

Since 1967, Israel had become a focal point for Cold War hostilities, relying increasingly on the United States for support. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, had supplied arms to Israel's adversaries.<sup>59</sup> However, after the 1973 war, Egypt increasingly distanced itself from the Soviet Union, forging closer ties with the United States.<sup>60</sup>

Early losses in the war shook Israel's self-confidence. Under heavy criticism for the military's lack of preparedness, Golda Meir and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan resigned early in 1974. Labor Minister Yitzhak Rabin succeeded Golda Meir as prime minister.<sup>61</sup>

During his three-year tenure, Rabin negotiated a disengagement agreement with Egypt but made little progress in resolving other regional issues. The ultranationalist

Gush Emunim movement gathered momentum, establishing small Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These settlements complicated Israeli policy and became a lightning rod for international opposition to continued Israeli occupation.<sup>62</sup> Rabin's administration was further hampered in 1974 when an Arab summit declared the PLO, categorized by Israel as a terrorist organization, as the sole representative of Palestinian Arabs.<sup>63</sup>

A high point for Israel came in July 1976 with the success of Operation Yonathan. Palestinian and German terrorists had hijacked an Air France flight, diverted it to Uganda, and detained over 100 Israeli and Jewish passengers as hostages at the airport in Entebbe. The IDF planned and conducted a daring rescue operation, which resulted in the freeing of the hostages but also in the death of the operation's commander, Yonathan Netanyahu, brother of Benjamin Netanyahu who would later become Israel's prime minister.<sup>64, 65</sup>

## Rise of Likud

In the 1977 elections, the conservative Likud Party, led by Menachem Begin, capitalized on economic recession and internal Labor weakness to sweep to power.<sup>66</sup> For the first time in its history, a non-Labor government led Israel.<sup>67</sup> The change in parties reflected a seismic shift: The Ashkenazim of the Labor Party (HaAvdo'a), who had dominated Israel politically, socially, and economically since its inception, were now on the outside. More and more government posts went to Sephardi Jews, who had become the country's most populous group and were strong Likud supporters. As a result, the cultural dividing line in Israeli society between the Ashkenazim "haves" and the Sephardim "have-nots" began to blur.<sup>68</sup>



*Menachem Begin with Ariel Sharon  
Flickr / Government Press Office*

In 1978, Israel signed the Camp David Accords with Egypt, formally ending the two countries' state of war. As part of the agreement, Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and Egypt offered Israel full diplomatic recognition, a move for which Egypt was expelled from the Arab League.<sup>69, 70</sup>

The Camp David Accords attempted to set a framework for a broader agreement encompassing the West Bank, but its vague wording plagued later negotiations.<sup>71</sup> Though

Begin and Sadat received the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts, the agreement did little to solve the ongoing Israeli settlement of the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>72, 73</sup>

In June 1981, Begin launched Operation Opera, bombing Iraq's nearly completed Osirak nuclear reactor at Tuwaitha.<sup>74</sup> The operation was meant to prevent Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein from developing nuclear weapons and came in the wake of unsuccessful diplomatic efforts. The audacious raid required Israeli warplanes to fly undetected over Jordan and Iraq before reaching their target.<sup>75, 76</sup>

## First Lebanon War



*Israeli Troops in South Lebanon, June 1982  
Wikimedia / P.mielen*

By the late 1970s, Lebanon had eclipsed Egypt as Israel's primary national security concern. The PLO, forced out of Jordan in 1970, took advantage of sectarian violence in Lebanon to establish a base of operation in the south of the country.<sup>77</sup> In 1978, a terrorist attack launched from Lebanon killed 38 civilians including 13 children. The IDF moved into Lebanon, taking control of the area south of the Litani River in an effort to push the PLO away from the border.<sup>78</sup> Under international pressure,

Israel allowed its forces in Lebanon to be replaced by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFL).<sup>79</sup>

Despite UNIFL presence, cross-border attacks continued from both sides.<sup>80</sup> In June 1982, the IDF once again entered Lebanon, intent on destroying the PLO infrastructure. The IDF advanced to the outskirts of Beirut where the remnants of the PLO forces had taken up positions. After a 70-day siege on Beirut, the combatants negotiated a truce and Palestinian forces evacuated to Tunisia.<sup>81, 82</sup>

Israeli support for the Lebanon mission withered when it emerged that the IDF had been complicit in a September 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees by a Lebanese Christian militia in retaliation for a political assassination.<sup>83, 84, 85</sup> Defense Minister Ariel Sharon resigned after an investigation found him indirectly responsible for the massacre. The public called for Begin's resignation as well. Already in poor health, he stepped down in September 1983.<sup>86</sup>

## The First Intifada



*Israeli Patrol - Gaza Strip  
Flickr / Robert Croma*

After the 1984 elections ended in a stalemate, Likud and Labor agreed to share power, with Labor leader Shimon Peres acting as prime minister for the first 25 months of the term and Likud head Yitshak Shamir taking over for the remainder.<sup>87</sup>

Shamir's term, which began in late 1986, saw the onset of the First Intifada in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Increased Israeli intervention in the daily lives of Palestinians, including expansion of settlements, led to widespread Palestinian demonstrations and street violence. Israel's international reputation suffered when the media published images showing Israeli soldiers beating Palestinian youths. As tensions rose, pressure mounted on both sides to seek a diplomatic settlement.<sup>88</sup>

In 1988, King Hussein of Jordan ceded the West Bank to the PLO.<sup>89</sup> In an address to the United Nations that year, PLO leader Yasser Arafat renounced Palestinian terrorism, accepted Israeli statehood, and called for recognition of a Palestinian state.<sup>90</sup> Satisfied with Arafat's new stance, the United States began talks with the PLO.<sup>91</sup> Prime Minister Shamir, however, rejected direct negotiations with the PLO and insisted that Palestinian negotiators come directly from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.<sup>92</sup>

## Gulf War and New Immigrants

Shamir's reluctance to negotiate with the PLO sparked a new round of political infighting. By 1990, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait overshadowed domestic politics. Israeli cities came under fire from Iraqi Scud missiles during the Gulf War. The attacks threatened to draw Israel into the conflict and alienate Arab coalition members, but the United States persuaded Israel not to retaliate.<sup>93, 94</sup>



*Minister of Education Navon visiting kindergarten class  
of Ethiopian immigrants  
Flickr / Government Press Office*

After Mikhail Gorbachev relaxed emigration rules, Israel absorbed a new wave of immigrants from the Soviet Union. Between 1989 and 2000, more than 800,000 Jews arrived in Israel from Russia and the former Soviet Bloc.<sup>95</sup> The arrival in the 1980s and 1991 of thousands of Ethiopian Jews in Operation Moses and later in Operation Solomon compounded the challenge of absorbing so many new immigrants in such a short time.<sup>96</sup>

## Peace Process

In October 1991, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon attended a peace conference in Madrid, cosponsored by the United States and Russia.<sup>97</sup> While the PLO was excluded from Madrid, its representatives held secret talks with Israelis in Oslo, Norway, addressing the issue of Palestinian rule. By 1993, both sides were ready for official negotiations.<sup>98</sup>



*1993 Oslo Accords: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, U.S. president Bill Clinton, and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat*  
Wikimedia Commons

Meanwhile, in 1992 the Labor Party, led by Yitzhak Rabin, won the election. Rabin immediately put a freeze on the construction of settlements in the occupied territories. The freeze encouraged greater cooperation from Israel's neighbors and helped Israel secure United States housing loans to alleviate the housing shortage caused by the influx of Russian immigrants.<sup>99</sup>

In September 1993, Arafat and Rabin signed the Declaration of Principles in Washington, the first of a series of agreements known as the Oslo Accords. As part of the accords, Israel agreed to turn over civil administration of much of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho to the Palestinian Authority (PA).<sup>100</sup>

## A Shift in the Political Landscape

Building on the Oslo Accords, Israel signed a comprehensive peace agreement with Jordan in 1994. As other Arab states began to initiate contact, the promise of peace and greater stability encouraged economic growth.<sup>101, 102</sup> Then, in November 4, 1995, a Jewish extremist who opposed a peace deal with the Palestinians assassinated Rabin. Peres once again became prime minister and continued to pursue the process laid out in Oslo.<sup>103</sup>

With a strong economy and the peace process seemingly on track, the Labor Party and Peres were widely expected to win the election. However, a wave of suicide bombings by Hamas derailed the peace process. Israelis' faith in the peace process was shaken, and they questioned the trustworthiness of Arafat, the newly elected president of the PA, as a negotiating partner.<sup>104</sup> In May 1996, Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud defeated Peres by less than 1%.<sup>105</sup>



*Song of Peace Lyrics*  
Wikimedia Commons

## Netanyahu Administration



*Benjamin Netanyahu, Madeleine Albright and Yasser Arafat at Wye River talks, 1998*  
Wikimedia / PD-USGov-DOD

While Netanyahu reluctantly continued peace talks, public enthusiasm for negotiating with the Palestinians was waning. A 1997 agreement on the status of the city of Hebron was followed by the US-brokered Wye River Memorandum, in which Israel agreed to transfer control of parts of the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority in return for the PA's implementation of antiterrorist measures.<sup>106</sup> However, attacks on civilians by Hamas led to increased criticism of Netanyahu's pursuit of "land-for-peace agreements" and the Wye River Memorandum was shelved.<sup>107</sup>

A weakened economy furthered Netanyahu's problems. In May 1999, Ehud Barak of the Labor Party ran for prime minister and easily defeated Netanyahu.<sup>108</sup>

## Revival of the Peace Process



*Arafat and Barak in peace negotiations, November 1999*  
*Wikimedia Commons*

Barak's administration took strong steps to revive the peace process, with the IDF completely withdrawing from southern Lebanon, and the government making several peace overtures to Syria.<sup>109</sup> President Clinton convened a summit at Camp David in July 2000, but the peace talks failed to resolve persistent Israeli-Palestinian problems, mainly the status of Jerusalem, borders and security, and the Palestinian's right of return.<sup>110, 111, 112</sup>

In September 2000, violence again broke out between Palestinians and Israelis. By the end of the year, hundreds had died in the Second or "al-Aqsa" Intifada. In a final effort to forge a comprehensive peace plan, Barak and Arafat met in Taba, Egypt, in January 2001, just weeks before Israeli elections. While both sides were close to reaching an agreement, the conference broke up and never reconvened.<sup>113</sup> In February 2001, Israel, weary of the failed peace process and frustrated by the tide of violence, elected Likud hardliner Ariel Sharon as prime minister by a wide margin.<sup>114</sup>

## The Second Intifada

Sharon took a hard line on the Intifada—no negotiations until the violence stopped—but suicide bombings continued, peaking at 55 attacks in 2002, with 220 fatalities.<sup>115</sup>

After a devastating suicide bomb attack in March 2002, the IDF launched Operation Defensive Shield, seizing control of several Palestinian towns in the West Bank.<sup>116</sup> When reports of heavy civilian casualties and allegations that the IDF was using Palestinians as human shields surfaced, international pressure forced Sharon to stop the operation. In June 2002, the IDF returned to the West Bank in Operation Determined Path.<sup>117</sup>



*A soldier stands guard during an operational activity in Nablus*  
*Wikimedia / Israel Defense Forces*

The aggressive response to the Intifada seemed to stem the violence, and the number of suicide bombings dropped, yet the numerous Palestinian civilian casualties damaged Israel's image, particularly in Europe.<sup>118, 119</sup> In 2002 Israel approved the construction of a barrier around the West Bank.<sup>120</sup> The wall was supposed to follow the pre-1967 border, but portions of it were built around Israeli settlements, suggesting Israel's permanent annexation of those areas.<sup>121</sup>

In April 2003, Arafat nominated Mahmoud Abbas for the new office of PA prime minister. Abbas was viewed as a moderate, and his appointment was perceived by Israel and the United States as an opportunity to circumvent Arafat, whose credibility was tarnished by his ties to terrorist activity.<sup>122, 123</sup> A power struggle ensued between Abbas and Arafat, and Abbas soon resigned, failing to negotiate a permanent ceasefire.<sup>124</sup>

## Leaving Gaza

In late 2003, Prime Minister Sharon announced that Israel would unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip.<sup>125</sup> Although Sharon struggled to win political support, in September 2005, almost 9,000 settlers were peacefully removed from the Gaza Strip and all the settlements and military installations were dismantled.<sup>126, 127</sup>



*IDF Forces Leaving the Gaza Strip, Operation Last Dawn  
Wikimedia / Israel Defense Forces*

The unilateral disengagement from Gaza caused a political rift that led Sharon to break with Likud and form a new centrist party called Kadima. In January 2006, two months before parliamentary elections, Sharon suffered a massive stroke that left him incapacitated. Leadership of the Kadima Party went to Ehud Olmert, who became prime minister after Kadima won the elections.<sup>128</sup>

## Continued Conflict

In July 2006, Hezbollah fighters killed eight Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two others in a skirmish near the Lebanese border. Israel retaliated with airstrikes against Hezbollah targets in Lebanon and a limited ground assault. Hezbollah responded with rocket attacks on northern Israel.<sup>129</sup>

The international community called on Hezbollah to return the hostages, and condemned Israel's disproportionate response that left hundreds of Lebanese civilians dead.<sup>130</sup> The



House in Maalot hit by Katyusha  
Wikimedia / יזרמ ברמ

fighting ceased after the United Nations passed a resolution calling for an arms embargo against Hezbollah, the removal of militia fighters from southern Lebanon, and the deployment of the Lebanese Army, backed by a multinational UN force.<sup>131</sup>

Meanwhile, Palestinian-Israeli relations deteriorated further. In January 2006, Hamas won the PA elections. Abbas, who had been elected president of the Palestinian Authority following Arafat's death in 2004, struggled to bring secular Fatah and Islamist Hamas together.<sup>132 133</sup> The tensions turned into a violent conflict between the two sides and by June 2007 Hamas controlled the Gaza Strip while Abbas's Fatah retained control over the West Bank.<sup>134</sup>

Israel and most of the international community recognized only Fatah's government as legitimate, excluding Hamas from peace negotiations.<sup>135</sup> Hamas's continuous rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel during the political crisis prompted Olmert to declare the Gaza Strip a "hostile entity," close cross-border traffic, and continue military operations there.<sup>136</sup>

## Syrian Talks

Olmert's popularity plunged over the military's inability to stop the missile attacks into northern Israel during the Lebanese military operation.<sup>137</sup> His position worsened when corruption allegations led to an official investigation.<sup>138</sup> Yet he pressed on with efforts to reopen peace talks with Syria. For its part, Syria wanted to regain the Golan Heights, something the Israeli public opposed. Ultimately, the Bush administration's lack of interest in negotiating with Syria, viewed by the United States as one of Iran's closest allies, brought the talks to a halt.<sup>139</sup>



Golan Heights & Syria border  
Flickr / Greg Sass

Olmert resigned in the fall 2008 and elections in 2009 brought Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu back into office.<sup>140</sup> The peace process stalled as Netanyahu reneged on past compromises, especially those of Olmert.<sup>141</sup>

## Troubles in Gaza



*Smuggling tunnel in Rafah, 2009  
Flickr / Marius Arnesen*

In December 2008, a six-month cease-fire with Hamas expired, and rockets once more rained on Israel. The IDF responded with airstrikes and a ground assault. The 22-day offensive resulted in 1400 Palestinian casualties. The invasion brought international condemnation, especially after a UN investigation suggested that Israel had committed serious human rights violations and war crimes during the invasion.<sup>142</sup>

Since 2007, Israel has maintained stringent controls on Gaza's land and maritime borders in response to Hamas's rocket attacks, effectively blockading the strip. Egypt has employed similar restrictions on its border with Gaza.<sup>143</sup> The blockade has been blamed for deteriorating living conditions in Gaza and has drawn international condemnation.<sup>144, 145, 146</sup>

In 2010, Israeli commandos killed nine Turkish activists after boarding an aid ship attempting to break through the maritime blockade of Gaza. The incident led to a diplomatic rift between Israel and Turkey.<sup>147</sup>

## Problems in Foreign Affairs

The diplomatic breach with Turkey came at a crucial time for Israel. There was growing concern in the international community over Iran's nuclear program, and relations with the United States had cooled over Israel's plans to expand settlements in East Jerusalem.<sup>148</sup> In 2010, an attempt to resume Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in Washington faltered when Netanyahu refused to extend a moratorium on settlement expansion in East Jerusalem.<sup>149, 150</sup>

The Arab Spring cast a brief shadow on Israel's 30-year peace with Egypt when Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, a long-time regional ally, fell from power in

February 2011.<sup>151, 152</sup> Later that year, Israeli forces killed five Egyptian police officers while pursuing Palestinian militants in the Sinai Peninsula. The incident sparked violent protests outside the Israeli embassy in Cairo, prompting Israel to evacuate embassy staff.<sup>153</sup>



*AIPAC Conference Protest*  
*Wikimedia Commons*

## Persistent Unrest

In June 2014, Hamas and Fatah reconciled and formed a short-lived unity government.<sup>154</sup> A cycle of violence followed, including the killing of two Palestinian boys by IDF and the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli boys in the West Bank by Palestinian militants.<sup>155, 156</sup>

After Israeli youth retaliated by randomly killing a Palestinian teenager, Hamas responded by launching rockets from Gaza into Israel, and the IDF in turn responded with airstrikes and a ground operation into Gaza in the summer of 2014. The conflict cost over 2,300 lives and was marked by allegations of war crimes on both sides.<sup>157, 158</sup>



*Jewish settlement in the West Bank*  
*Flickr / Jay Voorhees*

In the March 2015 elections, Likud won a surprisingly decisive victory against a center-left alliance.<sup>159</sup> September 2015 saw a new spate of violence—often lone wolf stabbing attacks by young Palestinians—called the “Knife Intifada,” which lasted until late 2016. While its motivations are far from clear, they may include retaliation for IDF and settlers’ aggression as well as general hopelessness.<sup>160, 161, 162</sup>

Israel’s relations with the Obama administration remained cool, culminating in the passage in December 2016 of UN Resolution 2334, demanding an end to Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories, after an uncharacteristic US refusal to veto the measure.<sup>163, 164</sup>

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# Israel in Perspective

## Chapter 2 | History

### Assessment

1. The first Jewish settlers who came to Palestine were mostly from Russia and Eastern Europe.
2. The Balfour Declaration was a policy paper issued by the British government. It limited Jewish immigration to Palestine during and after World War II.
3. During the Six Day War of June 1967, Israel captured East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights after defeating the armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.
4. The Camp David Accords provided the framework for a historic peace agreement between Israel and Jordan.
5. In September 2005, Israel conducted a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip to stop daily rocket fire from Gaza into Israel.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. False*



*The Ramat Gan Diamond Exchange District  
Wikimedia / Ynhockey*

## Chapter 3 | Israel in Perspective

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# Economy

## Introduction

Until natural gas was discovered off the coast of Haifa, Israel had limited natural resources. In spite of this limitation, the founders' endeavor to “make the desert bloom” largely succeeded. Israeli research and development in agriculture expanded farming into the desert. Later, during the 1990s, an influx of highly educated immigrants spurred the growth of the high technology industry and the country's economy.<sup>1</sup> Early on, Israel's economy relied on capital in the form of American aid, West German reparations, and sales of state bonds.<sup>2</sup> Recently, foreign investments in Israeli companies has contributed to the country's economic growth.<sup>3</sup> At one point, the Israeli government was strongly involved in most aspects of the economy. Since

the late 1970s, the government has sought to minimize its economic role and foster the private sector. To this end, the government has privatized many state-owned companies and implemented competition-promoting policies.<sup>4</sup>

Along with the rest of the world, Israel's economy suffered from the 2008 recession. An aggressive economic policy, conservative banking system, control of inflation, and diverse export sectors helped the country's subsequent recovery.<sup>5</sup> Today, Israel is emerging as a leader in high-tech industries. The country devotes 4.9% of GDP to research and development, and the high-tech sector has seen annual growth of 8% in recent years.<sup>6</sup>

## Industry

The growth of the high-tech industry has fueled Israel's recent economic success, fueled by start-up funding and research grants. In 2016, Israel had the largest number of start-up companies per capita, ranking second in the world in innovation.<sup>7</sup> Hundreds of Israeli and multinational companies are involved in the production of semiconductors and other electronic products, telecommunications equipment, software, and biotechnology products such as medical devices and pharmaceuticals. The high-tech industry is concentrated near Tel Aviv and the suburbs of Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup>

Israel's history of conflict has also contributed to the development of a robust defense industry. Defense exports are a major source of revenue. In 2016, Israeli military exports were valued at over USD 6.5 billion.<sup>9</sup> One of the high profile arms deals was the sale of 10 armed Heron drones to India.<sup>10, 11</sup>

Israel is one of the world's largest producers of gem-quality diamonds, with exports totaling USD 4.68 billion in 2016.<sup>12, 13</sup> Israel does not mine rough diamonds; diamond companies purchase rough diamonds from the world market, in turn making diamonds one of the country's largest imports by value. The diamond exchange is located in Ramat Gan, on the outskirts of Tel Aviv.<sup>14</sup>



*Arrow and Barak 8 missiles  
at Israel Aerospace Industries area  
Wikimedia Commons*

## Agriculture

Because developing an agricultural industry was a priority for Israel's founders, they invested millions of dollars into creating a modern agricultural industry during the first decades of the 20th century. Collective farms called kibbutzim and agricultural cooperatives known as moshavim played an important role in absorbing new immigrants and increasing agricultural productivity.<sup>15</sup>



*Farm Watering System*  
DLIFLC

After World War II, a fresh wave of immigrants strained national resources, prompting the government to institute food rationing.<sup>16</sup> During its first decade, Israel invested 80% of its infrastructure budget into irrigation projects to boost food production and ensure food security.<sup>17</sup> Water projects such as the National Water Carrier moved water from the Sea of Galilee and the Yarkon River to drier areas in central and southern Israel, opening new areas to cultivation.<sup>18</sup> During the 1950s,

the amount of arable land increased 150% and the number of farming communities doubled.<sup>19</sup> By 1960, Israel had become food self-sufficient.<sup>20</sup>

Today, Israel produces most of its food.<sup>21</sup> Israel is also a major exporter of agricultural products, including citrus fruits, avocados, and dates. Cut flowers and ornamental plants are other top exports.<sup>22</sup> In 2014, agricultural exports totaled USD 1.4 billion. However, as agriculture becomes increasingly high-tech, the number of people the industry employs is slowly shrinking.<sup>23</sup> In 2016, an estimated 2.1% of the workforce was employed in agriculture, contributing 2.5% to Israel's GDP, while 69% was employed in the service sector.<sup>24</sup>



*Algae production at Kibbuz Ketura*  
Wikimedia / Remi Jouan

Although not as heavily subsidized as in the past, agriculture continues to receive generous government support.<sup>25</sup> Israel invests millions each year in agricultural research and development. Israel developed drip irrigation and micro-irrigation solutions,

which allow limited water supplies to be used more efficiently. It also developed reusable plastic trays that collect dew from the air and trees.<sup>26, 27</sup> New methods for using brackish groundwater and recycled water to grow crops are already in use during drought years.<sup>28</sup> Other innovations include the breeding of insects for biological pest control, breeding bumblebees for natural pollination, developing special strains of potatoes that grow in dry climates and are irrigated by salt water, new varieties of tomatoes, algae for dietary supplements, bio plastics, and fertilizers.<sup>29</sup>

## Services and Tourism



*Acre, city in the Western Galilee region of northern Israel  
Wikimedia / israeltourism*

As the largest sector of the Israeli economy—encompassing both tourism and banking—the service sector employed about 69% of the workforce in 2016.<sup>30</sup>

Numerous religious and historical attractions in Israel draw Jewish, Christian, and Muslim visitors. Resorts on the Mediterranean coast, in Eilat on the Gulf of Aqaba, and on the shores of the Dead Sea attract domestic and foreign visitors.<sup>31</sup>

More than 20% of Israel’s visitors come from the United States, with Russia and France representing about 10% of visitors each. Jewish tourists account for less than a quarter of visitors. Jordan and Egypt, both of whom have peace treaties with Israel, provide the only land routes for visitors to Israel, with most of them arriving in Eilat at the southern tip.<sup>32</sup> The tourism industry has grown over the last few years, straining the capacity to accommodate visitors.<sup>33</sup>

Although more than 2.9 million tourists visited Israel in 2016, these numbers drop dramatically during years of heightened tensions—marked by suicide bombings and missile attacks.<sup>34, 35, 36, 37</sup> In 2016, the tourism sector contributed 6.8% to Israel’s GDP.<sup>38</sup>

## Banking and Finance

Israel’s central bank, the Bank of Israel, manages monetary policy, regulates banking and financial markets, and issues currency.<sup>39</sup> Israel switched to the new Israeli shekel (ILS) in 1985.<sup>40</sup> As of April 2017, the shekel’s exchange rate with the US dollar stood at ILS 3.67: USD 1.41



Bank of Israel, Givat Ram, Jerusalem  
Wikimedia / Ester Inbar

There are 24 banks currently registered in Israel.<sup>42</sup> Its banking sector is dominated by five banking groups: Bank Leumi, Bank Hapoalim, Israel Discount Bank, Mizrahi Tefahot Bank, and The First International Bank of Israel. They account for 93% of the country's banking services.<sup>43</sup> The government assumed ownership of several banks in 1983 following a banking crisis, but has sold most of its shares; it remains a minority shareholder in Bank Leumi.<sup>44</sup>

## Trade

Exports are an important part of the Israeli economy, accounting for 29% of GDP.<sup>45</sup> Israel conducts about 65% of its trade under an extensive network of free trade agreements with other countries.<sup>46</sup> Israel was the first country to have a free trade agreement with the United States.<sup>47</sup>

Israel exports chemicals, pharmaceutical components, electronics, medical equipment, agricultural products, and polished diamonds. In 2015, the United States received 27.5% of Israeli exports; Hong Kong received 8%; the United Kingdom 6.1%; and China 4.9%.<sup>48</sup> In February 2017, Israel's trade deficit was USD 702.9, down from a USD 1149.5 million gap a year earlier.<sup>49</sup>



Port of Haifa  
Wikimedia / Daniel Ramirez

In 2016, Israel imported USD 57.9 billion in commodities, including raw materials, military equipment, investment goods, rough diamonds, fuels, grain, and consumer goods. Israel's major import partners include the United States (13%), China (9.3%), Switzerland (7.1%), Germany (6.1%), Belgium (5.3%), and Italy (4%).<sup>50</sup>

In 1948, the Arab League imposed a strict, three-tiered trade boycott against Israel. In 1994, the Gulf Cooperation Council (Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait) suspended the strictest measures of the boycott, ending

the blacklisting of companies doing business with Israel.<sup>51</sup> In 1997 and 2004, Israel signed trade agreements with Jordan and Egypt, fostering closer economic ties with its neighbors.<sup>52</sup>

Since the early 2000s, a boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement has developed as a protest of Israel's policies toward the West Bank and Gaza Strip and its treatment of Palestinian Israeli citizens. The BDS movement is led by Palestinian civil society organizations and international activists and draws inspiration from previous anti-apartheid efforts in South Africa. It aims to isolate Israel economically, culturally, and academically by urging consumers to avoid Israeli-made products, garnering celebrity endorsements, and petitioning universities to cancel engagements with Israeli academics. Despite its high level of publicity, the BDS movement has had little noticeable impact.<sup>53, 54, 55</sup>

## Investment

Despite periods of increased violence and military activity that might have affected investor confidence, Israel has become a magnet for foreign investment. The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange has one of the highest long-term return rates in the world, and the country's GDP is growing at twice the average pace of the GDPs of the G-10 countries.<sup>56</sup> Despite its small size, Israel has more companies listed on the NASDAQ than any country besides the United States and China, and attracts more venture capital investment than any other nation.<sup>57</sup>

In large part, the cause of this trend is the strong high-technology economy. Driving the technology boom is the country's highly skilled workforce, with 135 scientists and technicians per 100,000 workers. Some 20% of Israelis hold university degrees, and 12% possess advanced degrees.<sup>58</sup> The ready availability of venture capital and a culture that embraces risk-taking helped fuel a proliferation of high-tech start-ups.<sup>59</sup>

Israel's foreign investment supports the areas of telecommunications, software development, internet, semiconductors, electronics, and medical equipment.<sup>60</sup> Intel, Microsoft, Google, IBM, HP, and Apple are among the many companies that have invested in Israel, buying successful start-ups and opening research and development centers.<sup>61, 62</sup>



Green Prophet Wind Turbines  
Wikimedia / בקעי

## Energy



Energy Plant  
Flickr / Eyton Z

Israel depends on foreign sources to meet its energy needs. It has an agreement with the United States for oil should its sources be interrupted. To help offset dependence on oil, Israel converted some of its power plants to coal. Because Israel does not have any known coal reserves, the country is still dependent on imports to fuel these plants.

Since the 1960s, Israel's oil output has fallen drastically to less than 50 bbl/day.<sup>63</sup> The country does have significant reserves of oil shale in the Negev Desert, and research is underway to determine if it is economically and environmentally viable to extract oil from the rock. If successful, Israel could begin producing oil from shale in 2018.<sup>64</sup> Currently, most of the mined oil shale (about 450,000 metric tons per year) is burned like coal in a small power plant.<sup>65</sup>

In 2009 and 2010, the United States and Israel discovered two giant natural gas fields, Tamar and Leviathan, in a joint drilling operation in the Mediterranean Sea, 60 miles off the coast of Haifa. As of 2016, these fields were producing 1.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day.<sup>66</sup> In early 2017, Israel made its first shipment of natural gas to Jordan. Israel plans to start exporting natural gas to Turkey by 2020 in the hope of normalizing relation between the two countries. Israel is also working on a multi-billion-dollar pipeline project that will supply natural gas to Europe.<sup>67, 68</sup>

Because the supply of natural gas will increase—at present it stands at 40% of Israel's power generation—Israel has upgraded its electricity infrastructure to use more natural gas, which is helping to reduce dependence on imported oil and coal.<sup>69, 70</sup>

Over one million Israeli homes, especially those constructed since the early 1990s, have hot water via solar panels.<sup>71</sup> Although Israel receives 330 days of yearly sunshine, solar power accounts for than 2.5% of power output. Because of fluctuating government policies, the solar industry has been slow to expand. Nevertheless, the government aims to have 10% of Israel's power from renewable sources by 2020.<sup>72</sup>

## Transportation

Israel's primary mode of transportation is the automobile, and the country has a modern road network. Congestion has become problematic in Tel Aviv, to the point that the government is instituting congestion charges for cars entering the city during the busiest part of the day, similar to those used to control traffic in central London and Singapore.<sup>73</sup>



*Light rail, Jerusalem*  
DLIFLC

Many Israelis use public transportation to get around. Cities have extensive bus networks, and intercity routes run throughout the country. In 2011, a light rail line opened in Jerusalem.<sup>74</sup>

The nation's rail system links most major coastal cities, as well as inland cities such as Jerusalem and Beersheba. In the past few years, the government has invested in projects to upgrade and expand the capacity of the railway infrastructure.<sup>75, 76</sup> In 2014, the system carried 48.5 million passengers, a huge jump from the 4.8 million who used the system in 1995.<sup>77, 78</sup>

Israel's primary air hub is Ben Gurion International Airport, located about 20 km (12.4 mi) southeast of Tel Aviv. In operation since 1936, the airport has undergone several expansions as air traffic has increased, including the opening of a new terminal in 2004. The airport is known for its stringent security procedures. El Al, Israel's national carrier, handles most international flights.<sup>79, 80, 81</sup>

Israel's major ports are in Haifa and Ashdod on the Mediterranean coast and Eilat, a much smaller port, on the Red Sea. Because of Israel's limited accessibility by land, the ports are important for conducting international trade. Israel has invested in expanding and improving its ports in the last decade. The ports are owned and operated by four government-owned companies.<sup>82, 83</sup>

## Standard of Living

Israel has the highest standard of living in the Middle East as measured by the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), which rates countries according to life expectancy, educational achievement, literacy, and GDP per capita. Israel ranked nineteenth in overall HDI rankings.<sup>84</sup> The positive statistics on the standard of living, however, mask disparities within society. In 2016, about 21% of Israelis lived under the poverty line. The poverty rate is greater than 60% for families with four or more children.<sup>85, 86</sup>



*Downtown Haifa and the Sail Tower*  
Wikimedia / Zvi Roger

Poverty and unemployment rates are higher than average for Israel's Arab population, which is 20% of the total. Nationwide, life expectancy is lower, and infant mortality is higher for Israeli Arab citizens than for Jewish ones.<sup>87</sup> Reasons include lack of access to healthcare and poor infrastructure in some areas, including access to clean drinking water and electricity.<sup>88</sup> The number of Israeli Arab college students in Israel is disproportionately small, and they receive a lower level of social services.<sup>89, 90</sup>

Regionally, Jerusalem stands out for having a poverty rate of nearly twice the national average. One reason for this is the city's large population of Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jewish families. On average, Haredi households have more children than non-Orthodox households, and lower rates of participation in the workforce and few in the military.<sup>91</sup> Many Haredi men devote themselves full-time to religious study, relying on private and state support for their families.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, a large percentage of Jerusalem's working population is employed in the public sector, where wages are generally lower than in the private sector.<sup>93</sup>

## Outlook

Israel's economy weathered the 2008 global recession and 2011 Arab Spring remarkably well, due to solid economic fundamentals and strong international trade relationships. While challenges like geopolitical conflicts, income inequality, low labor participation, and housing shortages persist, strong points such as the development of offshore natural gas fields and a vibrant high technology sector portend a stable economic future.<sup>94</sup>

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## Israel in Perspective

# Chapter 3 | Economy

### Assessment

1. Israel's recent economic success has been fueled by rapid growth in the high-tech industrial sector
2. It is not possible for tourists to enter Israel by land.
3. Israel has major ports on the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea.
4. Kibbutzim and moshavim no longer produce large amounts of Israel's food.
5. Israel is an exporter of natural gas.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True*



Street Scene  
DLIFLC

## Chapter 4 | Israel in Perspective

# Society

## Introduction

Israel is sometimes described as the world's only Jewish state, but such a designation masks the complexity of Israeli society. To begin with, a sizable minority of its people (roughly 20%) are not Jewish. Even among Israel's Jewish population, many do not practice Judaic religious observances (they are known as secular Jews). Alternately, some ultra-Orthodox Jews (or Haredim) are so observant that they have effectively sequestered themselves from much of secular Israeli society.

Most of Israel's Jewish population consists of immigrants or descendants of immigrants who moved to the region during the past century. Immigrants brought the cultural

traditions of many regions of the world, including Russia and Eastern Europe, North Africa, the neighboring countries of the Middle East, the United States, Mediterranean Europe, and Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> Hebrew, the nation's official language, acts as a unifying force on these diverse cultures.<sup>2</sup> It has rarely been the first language of any of Israel's non-native-born citizens, but most Israelis, including the majority of Israel's Arab population, speak Hebrew.<sup>3</sup>

## Religious and Ethnic Groups

### *Jews*

About 74.8% of Israelis are Jewish.<sup>4</sup> Israeli law defines Jews as people born of a Jewish mother or who have converted to Judaism and who are not members of another religion.<sup>5</sup> The Jewish population is diverse, and Jews are culturally identified by where their ancestors came from.<sup>6, 7</sup>

Most Ashkenazim Jews in Israel emigrated from Central and Eastern Europe. Some Ashkenazim came from Western Europe, where Jews had established communities after being driven out of Eastern Europe during the Middle Ages.<sup>8, 9</sup>



*Religious Groups*  
DLIFLC

Sephardim are descendants of the Jews of Iberia, who were expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 15th century during the Spanish Reconquista and Inquisition (the word Sepharad means Spain in Hebrew). Many of the survivors relocated to North Africa, Italy, Turkey, and other areas around the Mediterranean Sea and the Ottoman Empire. Some Sephardim eventually migrated north to Amsterdam, London, and other areas of Western Europe, where they were regarded as the Jewish elite.<sup>10</sup> Although the Sephardim represent only a small percentage of the worldwide Jewish population, they immigrated to Israel in large numbers after 1948. Israel's Jewish population is almost evenly split between Ashkenazim and Sephardim.<sup>11, 12</sup>

The Sephardim and Mizrachim who immigrated to Israel from North Africa and the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s were generally less educated than European Jewish immigrants and often relegated to lower positions of Israeli society.<sup>13</sup> Mizrachim are Jews of Middle Eastern or North African origin (mizrach means east in Hebrew).<sup>14, 15</sup>

The Ashkenazim, Mizrachim, and Sephardim differed in their cultural traditions, liturgical rites, and language.<sup>16</sup> Until the 20th century, most Sephardim spoke Ladino, a mix of Castilian Spanish and Hebrew, while Ashkenazim widely spoke Yiddish, based on German, Polish and Hebrew.<sup>17, 18</sup>

There are about 140,000 Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) in Israel.<sup>19</sup> Many were brought to Israel by emergency airlifts in 1984 and 1991.<sup>20, 21</sup>

Some 49% of the Jews living in Israel today consider themselves secular. About 29% identify as traditional, spanning the gap between secular and religious. Some 13% identify as religious and 9% as ultra-Orthodox.<sup>22</sup> Tensions often arise between secular and religious Jews regarding the role of religion in government.<sup>23</sup> One source of contention is that certain rights are extended only to those who meet the legal definition of a Jew, which is based on Orthodox doctrine.<sup>24</sup>

## Arabs



Arabs in Israel  
DLIFLC

About 25% of the Israeli population is Arab.<sup>25</sup> The majority of Israeli Arabs have the full rights of Israeli citizenship, except for some limitations on military service.<sup>26</sup> Israeli Arabs are almost totally segregated from the Jewish population and face serious discrimination.<sup>27, 28</sup>

The majority of Israeli Arabs are Sunni Muslims, and many consider themselves to be Palestinians. About 9% of Israeli Arabs are Christian. Because they consider themselves Palestinians, they rarely serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Christian Arabs are concentrated near the city of Nazareth in Galilee.<sup>29</sup>

About 10% of Israeli Arabs are Bedouin, descended from nomadic tribes that once occupied deserts throughout the Middle East.<sup>30</sup> After the 1948 war, only about 11,000 Bedouin remained in Israel; the rest fled to Egypt or Jordan. As Israel's borders became more defined and less permeable, the remaining Bedouin were increasingly hemmed into an area between Dimona and Beersheva known as the siyag (enclosure or fence), while tribal lands were confiscated by the Israeli government.<sup>31, 32</sup>

Beginning in 1966, the Israeli government began relocating the Bedouin from their

remaining tribal lands to seven towns in the Negev Desert.<sup>33</sup> Many resisted the move because it would force them to abandon their traditional way of life. The Israeli government does not recognize their claim to the land, and the Bedouin are routinely evicted from areas they have lived in for generations. Only 10% of Bedouin maintain their traditional nomadic lives.<sup>34</sup>

### *Other groups*

The Druze are an ethnoreligious group whose faith has been influenced by Shi'a Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and Hindu beliefs. Only those born into Druze families may be Druze—the religion does not allow for converts.<sup>35</sup> Israeli Druze live mostly in the mountains in the north of the country and in the Golan Heights (near the Syrian and Lebanese borders), usually in small, exclusively-Druze villages.<sup>36</sup> Because their religion calls on members to serve the country in which they reside, most Israeli Druze voluntarily serve in the IDF.<sup>37</sup>



*Christians*  
DLIFLC

Circassians are a northwest Caucasian ethnic group, most of whom are Muslim. Some Circassians migrated to Palestine from the area that is now Ukraine in the 1860s. Today, most of Israel's 3,000 Circassians live in the Galileean towns of Kfar-Kama and Rihania. Male Circassians, unlike Israeli Arab Muslims, are required to serve in the Israeli military. Many among the older generation speak Circassian and Arabic, though most young Circassians now learn Hebrew and English.<sup>38</sup>

Nearly 2% of the Israeli population is Christian. The majority are Arabs, but approximately 38,000 non-Arab Christians live in Israel.<sup>39</sup> The Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches are Israel's largest Christian denominations.<sup>40</sup>

## Languages



Languages spoken in Israel  
DLIFLC

Israel is a linguistic hodgepodge because of the disparate origins of its citizens. French, Spanish, Russian, several Eastern European languages, and Amharic are widely spoken by Jewish immigrants and their children. Israeli Arabs also speak Arabic. Most Israelis study English in school.<sup>41, 42</sup>

### Hebrew

Hebrew was spoken by Jews in ancient Israel, but had faded from everyday use by the Middle Ages. It was preserved mostly in written form as scripture and spoken only during religious ceremonies. During the 19th century, Jews living in Palestine revived Hebrew and adopted it as a lingua franca, a common tongue.<sup>43, 44</sup>

Because Hebrew had been dead as a spoken language for several centuries, many new words were needed to adapt it to modern life. By 1922, when the British recognized Hebrew as the official language of Jews in Palestine, Modern Hebrew was widely taught in Jewish schools.<sup>45</sup> Today, most Jewish immigrants to Israel learn Hebrew after arriving, and they use it alongside their native languages.<sup>46</sup>

### Yiddish

Yiddish, a Germanic-Hebrew dialect widely spoken by Ashkenazi Jews, has been largely superseded by Hebrew. It is still widely spoken by Haredi Jews.<sup>47</sup> Ladino, the Spanish-Hebrew dialect of the Sephardim, has also largely faded from use.<sup>48</sup>

### Judeo-Arabic

Some Mizrahim, especially those of older generations, speak Judeo-Arabic languages—dialects of Arabic formerly used by Jews in North African and Middle Eastern nations. Although these languages are similar to Arabic, they use a Hebrew script.<sup>49</sup>

## Modern Standard Arabic



Sign in Arabic and Hebrew  
DLIFLC

Modern Standard Arabic is the second official language of Israel. Israeli Arabs speak a Levantine Arabic dialect, but learn to read and write Modern Standard Arabic in school. Many Israeli Arabs also speak Hebrew as a second language.<sup>50</sup>

Although Hebrew and Arabic are official languages, they are far from equal in terms of use. Hebrew is commonly used for government publications, laws, legal proceedings, and even social services.

Several bills have been proposed in the Knesset that would demote Arabic to a “secondary official language,” giving it equal standing with English and Russian. Israeli Arabs and other Israelis supporting the cause of Arab rights within Israel have strongly opposed any such legislation.<sup>51, 52</sup>

## Cuisine

Israel’s national cuisine reflects the food traditions brought to the country from Eastern Europe, Russia, the Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Middle East. The most popular dishes in Israel are not native or exclusive to the region, and almost all predate the state of Israel by several centuries. Yet certain foods’ popularity within Israel has led to their association with Israel’s unique culinary culture, regardless of their origins.<sup>53</sup>



Hummus and Pita Bread  
DLIFLC

Some consider the Israeli national dish to be falafel, fried chickpea or fava bean balls, a dish popular across much of the Middle East. It may be eaten dipped in tahini (sesame seed paste) sauce or served in a pita-bread sandwich.<sup>54</sup> Hummus, another Middle Eastern favorite made from chickpeas, garlic, tahini, and lemon juice, is also popular in Israel, where it is spread on just about anything.<sup>55</sup>

Religious injunctions define the foods many Israelis eat. Orthodox and many secular Jews follow kosher rules and do not cook or eat meals that combine dairy products with meat or poultry. Observant Jews use separate dishes, cooking utensils, and even sinks for handling meat and dairy dishes. Observant Jews only eat the meat of animals with cloven hooves that chew their cud (that is, sheep and cows, not pigs) and do not eat shellfish (food from the sea must have scales and fins).<sup>56</sup> Israeli Muslims follow a similar dietary law, eschewing pork and alcohol.<sup>57</sup>

Many popular foods are also associated with Jewish holidays and traditions. Tsholnt (or cholent), a stew of beans, barley or buckwheat, meat, and potatoes, is a common Shabbat (Sabbath) meal because it is cooked overnight, between Friday and Saturday (Jewish law prohibits cooking on the Sabbath).<sup>58</sup> A holiday dish eaten on Passover, mainly by Ashkenazi Jews, is gefilte fish, which is balls of ground fish mixed with eggs, onions, and matzo meal. The balls are poached ahead of time and later served cold.<sup>59</sup> A traditional Sephardic dish is burekas. Remnants of the Ottoman Empire, burekas are triangular puff pastries filled with cheese and spinach, potatoes, ground beef, or mushrooms.<sup>60</sup>

## Arts

### Literature

Israeli literature owes much to the revival that transformed Hebrew from a liturgical language of about 8,000 words to a modern language with about 120,000 words.<sup>61</sup> Beginning early in the 20th century, Hebrew was used as a literary language by Jewish writers including Shmuel Yosef Agnon, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1966.<sup>62</sup>

Authors who grew up speaking Modern Hebrew began publishing works in the 1940s and 1950s. Several Israeli authors of this new generation gained international recognition, including Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua, both of whom were born in Palestine, and Aharon Appelfeld, whose childhood experiences of the Holocaust heavily influenced his work.<sup>63, 64, 65</sup>



*Art on the Beach, Nachum Gutman  
DLIFLC*

Some Israeli Arabs, such as Anton Shammas and Sayed Kashua, have also gained wide recognition for their writings in Hebrew.<sup>66</sup> Shammas’s award-winning novel *Arabesques* was translated into seven languages, and his other published works include poetry, children’s literature, and essays in Arabic and Hebrew.<sup>67</sup>

Emile Habibi, arguably the most influential Israeli Arab author, wrote entirely in Arabic. He is the only writer to have received literary awards from both Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization.<sup>68</sup>

## Music



*Classical music on the beach*  
DLIFLC

Among the Jews who came to Palestine in the 1930s to escape Nazi persecution were many of Europe’s most talented classically-trained musicians. They formed what would become the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in 1936. The world-renowned orchestra has been led by some of the most acclaimed conductors of the 20th century, including American conductor and composer Leonard Bernstein, who was at the orchestra’s helm during the war of independence. Israel has also produced a number of musical virtuosos, including violinists Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman, and pianist/conductor Daniel Barenboim.<sup>69</sup>

Israel’s popular music has its roots in the Zionist movement. The early Jewish settlers added Hebrew words to folk melodies from Russia and Europe to create a uniquely Israeli folk style. Lyrics were often patriotic and spoke to the experience of living in Palestine.<sup>70, 71</sup>

Israeli rock music was late to develop, partly because the government considered it a negative influence. (In 1965, the Israeli government refused to allow the Beatles to perform in Israel because of their perceived “corrupting effect.”)<sup>72</sup> After the Six-Day War, economic growth brought a new openness to other cultures, and rock soon became one of the country’s most popular genres.<sup>73, 74</sup> Some artists from this era, such as Matti Caspi, Shlomo Gronich, and Shalom Chanokh, combined traditional Israeli lyrical ballads with harder-edged rock instrumentation, creating a distinctly Israeli sound.<sup>75</sup>

The Mizrahim brought Arabic music to Israel. Their music, with its Middle Eastern and North African influences, was shunned for decades by the Eurocentric Ashkenazi. Yet the Arabic flavors of their music slowly infused Israeli popular music. Today, the Mizrahi musical style has become popular in Israel.<sup>76</sup> Despite the popularity of Arab music, Israeli Arab musicians struggle for recognition in their own country, even while achieving success abroad. One such group is Dam, an Israeli Arab hip-hop group that raps in Arabic, Hebrew, and English about the struggles of Israeli Arabs.<sup>77, 78</sup>

## Traditional Dress

Most Israelis wear modern Western clothes and closely follow trends in Europe and the United States. Israel is well known for its casual dress standards, although more modest attire is standard for formal occasions or in religious settings.<sup>79</sup>

The most conservative parts of the Israeli Jewish Orthodox community observe quite conservative styles of dress.<sup>80</sup> Many of the Haredim, the most conservative Orthodox Jews, follow dress codes established in 19th-century Eastern Europe. Haredi men are easily identified by their plain, black suits and the peyes (long side locks) framing their faces.<sup>81, 82</sup> Orthodox Jews also wear a square white garment called tzitzit, which has tassels at each corner.<sup>83</sup>



*Orthodox Attire*  
DLIFLC

Observant Jews keep their heads covered, even outside the synagogue, but their choice of head covering reflects their particular sect. The Haredim prefer wide-brimmed hats or round, fur-lined caps called streimel. Other sects opt for the kippah (called a yalmulke in some places), which is a skullcap.<sup>84</sup>

Haredi women dress modestly, wearing long skirts and blouses with long sleeves and high necklines. Married women usually cover their hair with a scarf, or sometimes a sheitel (wig).<sup>85</sup>

Within Israeli Arab communities, a traditional headdress known as kaffiyeh is worn mainly by older Muslim men, though some younger people—Jewish and Muslim—wear them as political statements.<sup>86, 87</sup>

Muslim women dress modestly, although many incorporate modern fashion in their wardrobe. It is common for Muslim women to wear a hijab, a headscarf that covers the head. Some still favor the jilbab, which is a long, loose-fitting overcoat, whereas the niqab (or face veil) is used infrequently.<sup>88</sup>

## Folk Culture and Folklore



*Inbal Dance Theater, Jaffa*  
DLIFLC

As Jews began migrating to Palestine, and later Israel, they brought their unique versions of Jewish culture. Early Zionists sought to create a unified culture that celebrated the return of Jews to their ancient homeland. Traditional folk songs received Hebrew lyrics that reflected life in Palestine, and dances brought from south and east of Europe were adapted. Even folk tales were re-imagined to reflect the challenges of immigration and Zionist ideals.<sup>89</sup>

Though the kibbutzim produced a distinct “Israeli” culture that reflected the ideals and experiences of the early Zionists, many immigrants also held on to their unique traditions. Before coming to Israel, Jews used “Jewish” culture to set themselves apart from larger national cultures. In Israel, Jews defined themselves by the cultural traditions they brought from their old countries.<sup>90</sup>

Folk dancing remains popular in Israel, with several national folk dancing companies regularly performing nationally and around the world.<sup>91</sup> The horah is perhaps the most famous Israeli folk dance. The circle dance was adapted from its Romanian roots and came to symbolize Zionism before Israel became a state.<sup>92</sup>

Arabs living in Palestine also had distinctive folk traditions that continue to be practiced today.<sup>93</sup> In the Israeli Arab community, the debke, or dabke, a traditional line dance that is over 500 years old, is still performed by numerous dance troupes in the country. In 2007, over 2,700 Israeli Arabs performed the largest and longest debke dance in history through the streets of the Old City of Acre.<sup>94</sup>

## Sports and Recreation

The two most popular spectator sports in Israel are football (soccer) and basketball. The Israeli national football team qualified for the World Cup finals once, in 1970, although they came up just short in the European Cup qualifying rounds in 2006.<sup>95</sup> The team that year was led by its two Israeli Arab stars, Abbas Suan and Walid Badir.<sup>96</sup> (Due to Israel's strained relationships with many Arab and Muslim states in Asia, Israeli sports teams compete in European leagues.)<sup>97</sup>



*Paddleball*  
DLIFLC

At the international level, Israel has had more success in basketball. The Maccabi Tel Aviv club team has dominated professional basketball within Israel for many decades and has won several European club championships, most recently in 2014.<sup>98, 99, 100</sup>

Israel has had some success at the Olympic Games since 1992, particularly in judo. The nation's only gold medal came in 2004, when Gal Fridman won the men's windsurfing competition.<sup>101</sup> It was fitting that Israel's first gold medal came in a sport that has become one of the nation's most popular outdoor activities, along with mountain biking and scuba diving.<sup>102</sup> Tennis, volleyball, and handball are also popular participatory sports in Israel.<sup>103</sup>

The 1972 Olympic Games in Munich mark a dark point in Israeli history. Palestinian terrorists belonging to the PLO faction Black September broke into the living quarters of the Israeli Olympic team, killing and capturing team members. By the time the crisis ended with a botched rescue attempt at a nearby air base,<sup>11</sup> Israeli athletes had been killed.<sup>104</sup>

## Gender Issues

Although Israeli law prohibits discrimination against women, the status of women in society is largely determined by their religious affiliation. Israeli Jewish women are well represented in higher education and the workforce, accounting for 65% of the civil service.<sup>105</sup> Women are also expected to serve in the military, though there are limits on their participation in elite combat units.<sup>106</sup> Women serve 24 months and

make up about one third of the active force. Women can be exempted from military service for religious reasons, marriage, pregnancy, and motherhood.<sup>107</sup>

Yet women earn considerably less than men—about 66 cents on the dollar for similar work—and generally hold lower positions.<sup>108, 109</sup> Former Prime Minister Golda Meir notwithstanding, Israeli women occupy a disproportionately low number of elected government posts. Just over 34% of Knesset members are women, although the number has been increasing with each successive election.<sup>110, 111</sup>



*Gender segregation*  
DLIFLC

Relations between Haredi men and women are highly structured by religious rules. In recent years, the Haredi community has pushed for greater gender segregation in public spaces, including public transportation and sidewalks in some areas. Although the Israeli government declared gender segregation on public buses illegal, women are still expected to ride in the back of the bus in certain neighborhoods and are frequently harassed if they refuse to comply with the “voluntary” segregation.<sup>112, 113</sup>

For Orthodox and Haredi women, family and home are priorities. Haredi women marry young and marriages are arranged.<sup>114, 115</sup> Religious Jews have a considerably higher fertility rate than the general population—nearly seven births per woman, compared to three for the entire country.<sup>116</sup> Because only about 45% of Haredi men work, Haredi families also have higher rates of poverty than the general population.<sup>117, 118</sup> In recent years, more Haredi women have been finding work outside the home to support their families.<sup>119</sup>

### *Status of Israeli Arab Women*

Israeli Arab women are affected to varying degrees by traditional Middle Eastern gender roles. In urban areas especially, many Israeli Arab women wear modern Western clothing. Yet modesty in dress and behavior are expected by their families, and many observant Muslims wear the hijab. In general, gender segregation is not strictly enforced in public, but many women are still pressured to marry young and to confine their activities to the home.<sup>120, 121</sup>

Israeli Arab women are guaranteed basic rights under Israeli law but, like Jewish women, they are often subject to religious courts that limit their rights, including the right to seek a divorce. Although rare, honor killings do occur in the Israeli Arab community.<sup>122, 123</sup>



*Arab Women  
Flickr / Jeremy Price*

Israeli Arab women are doubly challenged by traditional gender roles and their status as an ethnic minority. Only one in five Israeli Arab women work, compared to 74% for the general population, and they are practically absent from government.<sup>124</sup> Though they are more likely to graduate from high school, Israeli Arab women are severely underrepresented in higher education and have the highest illiteracy rates in Israel.<sup>125</sup>

It is not cultural pressure to remain home that excludes Israeli Arab women from public life, but the general lack of economic opportunity for ethnic minorities in Israel. Despite increased educational opportunities, many struggle to find employment, or work in jobs for which they are overqualified.<sup>126, 127</sup>

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## Israel in Perspective

# Chapter 4 | Society

### Assessment

1. Most Israelis are Jewish immigrants or descendants of Jewish immigrants who have moved to the region in the past century.
2. The majority of Israeli Arabs follow the Shi'a branch of Islam in their religious practice.
3. Hebrew and Arabic are both official languages of Israel.
4. Israeli women do not serve in the Israeli military.
5. Israel supports a vibrant artistic community.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True*



*Helicopters over Tel Aviv*  
DLIFLC

## Chapter 5 | Israel in Perspective

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# Security

## Introduction

Israel's national security challenges have always been at the center of its domestic and foreign policy. Though Israel has signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan in the previous century, tensions in the region are high. Resistance to Israel's existence in the early days and later to the occupation of the West Bank and control of the Gaza Strip has frequently been violent, costing the lives of many Israelis and Arabs (Palestinians, Egyptians, Lebanese and others).<sup>1</sup>

Israel relies heavily on its military, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), to maintain its security, along with several intelligence agencies, including the Mossad, the Shabak,

(an acronym for General Security Service, also called Shin Bet, which is the acronym of Security Service), and a paramilitary police branch that monitors the borders.<sup>2, 3</sup> Israel's police force also monitors security and has specialized units that carry out counterterrorism operations, one of which is called Yamam (acronym of Special Police Unit) which performs hostage-rescue operations and SWAT duties.<sup>4, 5</sup> Israel receives significant defense support from the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Israel is widely believed to be the only country in the Middle East with nuclear weapons, though it has never disclosed the extent of its nuclear stockpile and has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>7</sup>

## Military

Although Israel is a small country with a population of about eight million people, it has one of the best armed forces in the world. Because of Israel's security concerns, the government has long invested a substantial amount of its budget in defense. In 2015, Israel spent 5.4% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defense, a percentage exceeded by only five other countries (all in the Middle East).<sup>8, 9, 10</sup>



*Israeli soldiers in Jerusalem*  
DLIFLC

Israel's ground, air, and naval forces are collectively known as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Jewish men and women and Druze and Circassian men are required to serve active duty in the IDF: two years for women and three years for men, beginning at age 18.<sup>11</sup> Married or pregnant women as well as religious Jews studying in yeshivot are eligible for exemptions. Israeli Christians and Muslims may volunteer for the IDF. Among minority groups, Muslim Arab Bedouins represent the highest number of volunteers.<sup>12</sup>

The IDF has an active force of over 160,000 members, most of whom are in the land forces. Israel relies on an extensive reserve force of about 630,000.<sup>13</sup> Israelis are expected to serve as reservists until age 50 for women and 55 for men.<sup>14</sup> Reservists periodically perform training exercises and may be called up for active duty once every three years.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years, defense spending has been rolled back because of budgetary concerns. Training was reduced for regular soldiers and all but eliminated for reservists, whose reserve duties were cut to just a few days per year. The poor performance of ground troops during the 2006 conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon led to an investigation of troop preparedness and an increase in defense spending for training.<sup>16, 17, 18</sup>

## US–Israel Relations

The United States and Israel have long had close ties, politically and economically. Israel is second only to Afghanistan in the amount of annual aid from the United States, and since World War II has received more US aid than any other country.<sup>19</sup> Israel receives roughly USD 3 billion each year for military aid, accounting for approximately 20% of its defense budget.<sup>20, 21</sup>



*American Embassy in Tel Aviv  
Wikimedia / Krokodyl*

As major arms manufacturers, the United States and Israel have signed agreements regarding arms sales to other nations, including a pledge from the United States that it will not sell to Israel’s adversaries any technology that would compromise Israeli security.<sup>22</sup> The United States and Israel have worked together to develop the missile defense shield Iron Dome.<sup>23</sup>

Politically, Israel receives broad bipartisan support in the US Congress, and US presidents have long been actively facilitating peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>24</sup> However, US support for Israel has not been unequivocal. For example, the United States does not officially recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital; the US embassy was moved to Tel Aviv in 1980, and three presidents have blocked its return to Jerusalem.<sup>25</sup>

The issue of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has been problematic.<sup>26</sup> Peace talks in 2010 collapsed when Israel refused to renew its temporary freeze on the construction of settlements, a main Palestinian precondition for conducting further negotiations.<sup>27</sup> In December 2016, the United States abstained from vetoing a UN Security Council resolution condemning Israeli settlements in the West Bank.<sup>28, 29</sup>

In February 2017, shortly after Donald Trump became president of the United States, Prime Minister Netanyahu visited the White House. At the meeting with the president, Netanyahu stated that there is no greater supporter of the Jewish people and the Jewish state than President Trump.<sup>30</sup>

## Relations with Neighboring Countries

### Egypt



Map of Egypt  
CIA

Israel and Egypt have been at peace for more than 30 years and have developed security ties based on mutual interests.<sup>31, 32</sup> After Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, Egypt closed its border with Gaza, helping Israel create a blockade intended to weaken the regime.<sup>33</sup> The blockade gave rise to a thriving smuggling industry. Food, building supplies, people, and weapons from Iran are trafficked between Gaza and Egypt through underground tunnels.<sup>34, 35</sup>

When popular unrest and free elections brought the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Mohammed Morsi to power in 2012, the Egypt-Israel relationship seemed tenuous. Yet during his short-lived administration, Morsi largely honored the 1979 peace treaty with Israel. In August 2012, Islamist militants killed 16 Egyptian policemen on the Sinai Peninsula. Egypt increased its military presence in Sinai to combat the militant groups, and cracked down on smuggling.<sup>36, 37</sup>

Since President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi came to power in 2014, after the ouster of Morsi, relations between Egypt and Israel have been especially strong. In 2016, Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry visited Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem. It was the first visit by an Egyptian foreign minister in close to a decade.<sup>38</sup> The two countries have cooperated militarily in the Sinai Peninsula against Islamic State militants, a common enemy. Additionally, both governments dislike and distrust Hamas, and Sisi has kept Egypt's border with Gaza sealed, complementing Israel's blockade.<sup>39</sup>

## Jordan

Jordan concluded a peace accord with Israel in 1994.<sup>40</sup> Signed shortly after the Oslo Accords, the peace agreement with Jordan was broader than the treaty with Egypt, focusing on more than border security and diplomatic exchange.<sup>41, 42</sup> The Jordan-Israel peace treaty paved the way for economic development in Jordan.<sup>43</sup> But the “warm peace” between Jordan and Israel has cooled in the last decade as peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians have stalled. During the Second Intifada, Jordan temporarily removed its ambassador from Tel Aviv.<sup>44</sup>



*Military exercise in the Jordan Valley  
Flickr / Israel Defense Forces*

Jordan has not experienced the degree of unrest that other Arab countries experienced during the Arab Spring. Public protests in 2011 prompted King Abdallah II to announce reforms, but he has since been criticized for their slow implementation.<sup>45</sup> The government has remained largely stable, but the situation is volatile. The ongoing conflict in neighboring Syria may embolden Islamist groups in Jordan, many of whom are critical of Jordan’s alliances with the United States and Israel.<sup>46</sup>

## Syria



*Field Intelligence Corps soldier guarding the Syrian border  
Flickr / Israel Defense Forces*

Recent events in Syria have placed even greater pressure on its strained relationship with Israel. Initially, Israel worried that the popular uprising that began in 2011 would lead Syria to attack the Golan Heights. But the Syrian government has pulled troops away from the Golan Heights to protect Damascus. Israel and many other nations are concerned about Syria’s chemical weapon arsenal falling into the hands of Hezbollah in Lebanon, who could use them to attack Israel.<sup>47</sup> The Syrian conflict has also led to a rift between Hezbollah and

Hamas, with the Shiite Hezbollah supporting Bashar Al Assad's regime and the Sunni Hamas aligning with rebel Islamists.<sup>48</sup>

Israel has admitted to periodically conducting airstrikes in Syria, with the aim of preventing transfers of weapons from Syria to terrorist groups. In March 2017, Israeli jets struck a Syrian military installation near Palmyra.<sup>49</sup>

Israel and Syria have been in a state of truce since the Six-Day War in 1967, which ended with Israel occupying the Golan Heights. Since 1973, a buffer zone manned by UN forces has separated the Golan Heights and Syria. Although Israel officially annexed the Golan Heights in 1981, the United States and the international community do not recognize Israel's claim.<sup>50, 51</sup>

Syria and Israel engaged in peace talks in 2008, but the issue of the Golan Heights remained an obstacle to a peace agreement. Although there are 42 settlements with approximately 19,000 Israelis living in the Golan Heights, the region remains a bargaining chip for Israel toward an eventual peace deal.<sup>52</sup>

Israel has not agreed to return to the pre-1967 borders, which would give Syria access to the Sea of Galilee.<sup>53</sup> Israel currently holds a monopoly on the lake, which is a valuable source of fresh water. Disputes over water rights were a contributing factor to the Six-Day War, and continue to be a serious source of conflict in the region.<sup>54</sup>

## Lebanon



Rosh Henikra border crossing  
DLIFLC

Due to the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Lebanon has never signed a peace treaty with or formally recognized Israel. Israel's relations with Lebanon have also been complicated by the continuing presence of Hezbollah militia forces in southern Lebanon.<sup>55</sup>

Shabaa Farms, a small unpopulated area at the edge of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, is a source of contention between the two nations because of Lebanese

claims that Shabaa Farms belonged to Lebanon, not Syria, before the occupation. Hezbollah has used Israel's occupation of the area to support its claim that Israeli

forces have not completely withdrawn from Lebanon and to justify its resistance to disarmament.<sup>56</sup>

Hezbollah's resistance to the Israeli invasion raised its profile in Lebanon, and led it to become more entrenched in national politics. The group and its allies have used their newfound political clout to force major concessions from successive Lebanese governments.<sup>57</sup> Israel holds the Lebanese government accountable for any activity against Israel by Lebanese nationals within Lebanon's sovereign territory, including any unilateral actions of Hezbollah.<sup>58</sup>

### *West Bank*



*West Bank separation wall  
Flickr / Andy Miah*

The West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Palestinian-populated regions that fell under Israeli occupation after the Six-Day War in 1967, are at the heart of discussions on an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and the creation of a Palestinian state.<sup>59</sup>

In 2007, fighting between Hamas and Fatah led to the collapse of a fragile coalition government and left Hamas in full military and administrative control of the Gaza Strip.<sup>60</sup> Retaining control of the West

Bank, Fatah leader and Palestinian Authority (PA) president Mahmud Abbas used his emergency powers to dissolve the government and appoint a new prime minister. While Hamas and Fatah have made attempts to reconcile, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank remain separately administered.<sup>61</sup>

### *Gaza Strip*

Though Israel removed settlers and soldiers from the Gaza Strip in 2005, it retains control over airspace, land, and water access to the region. Israel has used its ability to control access of goods and people in and out of Gaza to put economic pressure on Hamas, which refuses to recognize Israel and has called for its



*Erez crossing, Gaza border  
Flickr / Joff Williams*

destruction.<sup>62</sup> After international activists protested that the blockade has led to food and fuel shortages that were harming all Palestinians trapped in Gaza, Israel agreed to increase the amount of goods entering Gaza.<sup>63, 64</sup>

## Terrorist and Separatist Groups

### *Hamas*



*Terror tunnels discovered in Gaza built by Hamas  
Flickr / Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Hamas (The Islamic Resistance Movement) and its military wing (Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades) emerged during the First Intifada in the late 1980s as the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm in the Palestinian territories.<sup>65</sup> Hamas has both a military and political wing and was part of the PA coalition government before its violent break with Fatah in 2007. Its primary base of operation is in the Gaza Strip, but it maintains some presence in the West Bank. Hamas's leaders have operated out of Syria, Qatar, and Egypt.<sup>66, 67</sup>

Because Hamas's stated objectives are the destruction of Israel and rejection of the peace process, the United States, Israel, and the European Union (EU) consider it a terrorist organization with close ties to Iran.<sup>68</sup> Hamas provides basic social services for many Palestinians, and is seen as less corrupt than the PA.<sup>69</sup> Although by early 2017 Hamas had shown some willingness to work with Israel and Egypt toward an eventual peace, mistrust and the influence of hardliners persist.<sup>70</sup>

### *Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade*

The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (AAMB) emerged during the Second Intifada as a militant offshoot of Fatah. It is designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the US State Department. AAMB's objective is to push Israeli troops and settlers out of the West Bank and establish a Palestinian state. Originally, AAMB's activities targeted the IDF and Jewish settlers, but in 2002 its operatives broadened their actions to include civilian targets inside the Green Line.<sup>71, 72</sup>

The AAMB has been known to both collaborate and clash with Hamas.<sup>73</sup> The Palestinian Authority has attempted to disband the group since 2007. In 2011, AAMB launched rockets

at communities in the Negev Desert.<sup>74, 75</sup> AAMB founder Marwan Barghouti is currently imprisoned for life in Israel for his involvement in terror attacks in 2001 and 2002.<sup>76</sup>

### *Palestinian Islamic Jihad*

Unlike Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) has no political arm. Its goals are the creation of an Islamic state in Palestine and the destruction of Israel. PIJ was established in the late 1970s after its founders split from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>77</sup> Currently, its leadership is scattered throughout the Middle East although its activities are largely based in Gaza.<sup>78</sup>



*Islamic Jihad militants apprehended with multiple weapons  
Flickr / Israel Defense Forces*

PIJ was designated as a terrorist organization by the US State Department in 1997. The group receives most of its training and financial assistance from Iran. During the early years of the Second Intifada, PIJ was responsible for several suicide bombings, but in the last few years its anti-Israeli attacks have mostly been rocket launches from Gaza.<sup>79</sup>

### *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine*

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) came into existence in the 1960s as a secular, Marxist-oriented group that staged several high-profile international attacks in the 1960s and the 1970s. PFLP's activities and influence waned during the 1990s when it lost its main external supporter upon the collapse of the Soviet Union. During this period, the Islamist group Hamas supplanted PFLP as the main rival to Fatah within the Palestinian movement.<sup>80</sup>

Designated a terrorist group in 1997, the PFLP is believed to be sponsored by Iran and closely aligned with the Assad regime in Syria.<sup>81</sup> During the Second Intifada, the PFLP reemerged and carried out several attacks against Israel, including the assassination of Rehavam Ze'evi, Israel's national Tourism Minister, in 2001.<sup>82</sup> The PFLP has also been responsible for several attacks on Israeli forces in Gaza and mortar and rocket attacks against Israeli targets.<sup>83</sup>

## Hezbollah



Hezbollah secret bunker  
Flickr / Israel Defense Forces

Like Hamas, Hezbollah has a military and a political wing. It provides an extensive network of social services to its supporters in Lebanon. Though the United States considers Hezbollah a terrorist organization, most of the Arab world considers it a legitimate “resistance group.”<sup>84</sup> Hezbollah is politically active in the Lebanese government, and has at times controlled the cabinet as part of a governing coalition.<sup>85</sup>

Hezbollah is fiercely anti-Israel. It formed as a Shi’a militia group in response to Israel’s incursion into Lebanon during 1982. Despite its claims to legitimacy, Hezbollah maintains stores of weapons outside of government control and controls access to certain areas of Lebanon.<sup>86</sup>

## Issues Affecting Stability

### Israeli Settlements

After Israel acquired additional territory at the Six-Day War in 1967, Israelis began constructing numerous settlements outside of the Green Line. Settlements also sprang up in Gaza and the Golan Heights.<sup>87</sup> West Bank settlements are now home to approximately 400,000 Israelis, with an additional 200,000 living in East Jerusalem (captured in 1967, but officially annexed in 1981).<sup>88, 89</sup>



Palestinian girl checked by IDF soldiers, Hebron West Bank  
Flickr / Ronan Shenhav

Israel has justified the settlements as necessary for national security, but many of the people building and living in the West Bank are religious Jews who believe that the West Bank rightfully belongs to Jews.<sup>90, 91</sup> The United Nations has passed several resolutions on the legality of the settlements, including Resolution 446 in 1979, which

states that building settlements on territory occupied by Israel after the 1967 War is unlawful.<sup>92</sup> More than 100 settlements are considered illegal under Israeli law as well.<sup>93</sup>

Under Netanyahu’s administration, the population of the settlements has grown by 5% per year—more than twice as quickly as the general population.<sup>94</sup> The settlements take land that Palestinians feel rightfully belongs to them. As settlements continue to grow, there is concern that their presence will make it impossible for Israel to turn over large portions of the West Bank, leaving the Palestinians with a fragmented state.<sup>95</sup>

Several US administrations have reiterated the UN’s position that the settlements are illegal and pressured Israel to limit their construction. The Obama administration has been one of the most adamant on the issue, pressuring Israel to halt all settlement expansion. In 2009, the PLO also stated that a freeze on construction in the settlements was a precondition for returning to peace talks.<sup>96</sup> In February 2017, Israel approved the establishment of the first new settlement in the West Bank since the late 1990s.<sup>97</sup>

## Refugees



*Holot immigration detention center, Negev desert  
Wikimedia / TrickyH*

The wars of 1948 and 1967 displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Some settled in refugee camps in Gaza and the West Bank, and about one-third ended up as refugees in neighboring countries. Today, Palestinian refugees and their descendants number between 5 and 6 million.<sup>98</sup> The United Nations definition for “Palestinian refugees” includes the descendants of Palestinians who fled their homes in Palestine, unlike refugees from other parts of the world whose descendants are not included in the definition of refugees.

Palestinian negotiators have long insisted on the “right of return” for Palestinian refugees (including their descendants). UN Resolution 194, passed in 1948, recommended that all refugees willing “to live at peace with their neighbors” be allowed to return, and that financial compensation be provided to those who choose not to return.<sup>99</sup>

Israel strongly opposes the return of Palestinian refugees to modern Israel as part of a peace deal. A large-scale return of Palestinian refugees would threaten a Jewish majority in Israel and weaken its position as the world's only Jewish state. Israel claims that it absorbed many Jewish refugees who were expelled from Arab countries, and that the countries hosting Palestinian refugees should do the same.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, Palestinian refugees are in a state of limbo. They live in countries reluctant to assimilate them for economic and political reasons, and they depend on the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine in the Near East) for their daily needs.<sup>101, 102</sup>

## Water Security

Water rights play an important role in peace negotiations with both Syria and the Palestinian Authority. Israel uses more than twice as much water per capita than Palestinians living in the occupied territories.<sup>103</sup> Palestinians claim that Israel is preventing them from having their fair share of the water.<sup>104</sup> The recharge area for the Mountain Aquifer lies under the West Bank, but most of the water is used by Israel. Meanwhile, the Coastal Aquifer, which supplies Israel and the Gaza Strip, has been extensively over-pumped.<sup>105</sup>



*Lake kinneret receding coastline*  
DLIFLC

To the north, the Jordan River is fed by streams and rivers originating in the Golan Heights and Lebanon. A return to pre-1967 borders would force Israel to share the Sea of Galilee with Syria, which would call into question the viability of Israel's National Water Carrier and place the sources of the Jordan River outside its borders.<sup>106, 107</sup> In recent years the development of desalination plants has eased Israel's water needs.<sup>108</sup>

## Outlook



*Security barrier wall  
Flickr / Erik Törner*

Israel's security situation remains volatile and unpredictable. The conflict with the Palestinians has reached a dead end, with little effort to re-start peace talks.<sup>109</sup> Tensions over a number of grievances between the two sides—such as expanding Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the blockade of Gaza, Hamas rocket attacks into Israel, and access to natural resources—threaten to lead to renewed hostilities at any moment.<sup>110, 111, 112, 113</sup>

To Israel's east, Syria continues to be embroiled in a bloody civil war. Several of the factions fighting in Syria could pose an even greater threat to Israel's security than the already-hostile Assad regime.<sup>114, 115</sup> Furthermore, the stakes in Syria have risen as the conflict has become a proxy for the global rivalry between Russia and the United States and the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran.<sup>116</sup>

Israel is concerned with the increasing influence of Iran in the Middle East, especially Iran's potential to develop nuclear weapons. Iran does not recognize Israel, and Iranian leaders have made inflammatory comments about Israel, issuing calls for its destruction.<sup>117</sup> Israel opposed the 2015 deal between the West and Iran which was meant to curtail Iran's nuclear program, on the grounds that the deal did not completely dismantle Iran's nuclear capabilities.<sup>118</sup>

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# Israel in Perspective

## Chapter 5 | Security

### Assessment

1. Israel is the only country in the world with mandatory military service for women.
2. United States support for Israel has weakened in recent years and the relationship between the two countries is perceived as a threat to American security and interests.
3. Israel retains control over airspace, land, and water access to the Gaza Strip.
4. Since President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi came to power in 2014, relations between Egypt and Israel have significantly weakened.
5. 5. Israel maintains extensive reserve forces because of continuous security risks.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True*

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## Further Readings and Resources

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# Israel in Perspective

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## Final Assessment

1. Israel lies between Syria and Jordan.
2. Tel Aviv is the first all-Jewish city of modern times.
3. The Dead Sea is divided between Israel and Syria.
4. Jerusalem is Israel's capital city.
5. To increase the domestic supply of water, Israel is developing several desalination plants on the Dead Sea.
6. Jewish immigration to Palestine from Eastern Europe began in the 20th century.
7. After the end of World War II, the British referred the question of Palestine to the United Nations.
8. In June 1948, Egyptian forces sank the Altalena, a ship that was carrying weapons for Menachem Begin's Irgun Militia, off the coast of Tel Aviv.
9. On 6 October 1973, the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, Syria and Egypt surprised Israel with a two-pronged attack.

10. The 1993 Oslo Accords were a series of agreements signed by PA president Yasser Arafat and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin in Washington.
11. Israel refuses to enter a free trade agreement with the United States.
12. The United States is Israel's leading trade partner.
13. Israel has a difficult time attracting foreign investment because of persistent security concerns and armed conflicts with Hamas and Hezbollah.
14. Israel has developed innovative techniques for irrigation and for treating brackish groundwater.
15. Because of its significant reserves of oil shale in the Negev Desert, Israel is a major oil producer.
16. The Sephardim make up the largest non-Jewish population in Israel.
17. Around 10% of the Israeli Arab Muslim population is Bedouin.
18. Because of the successful revival of Modern Hebrew, no one speaks Yiddish in Israel.
19. Israeli folk music grew out of the Zionist movement.

20. Most Israeli Muslim women wear the full niqab, or veil.
21. The United Nations ruled that it is legal to build settlements on the territories Israel acquired after the Six-Day War of 1967.
22. Approximately one-fifth of Israel's defense budget is funded by the United States.
23. Israel's sworn enemy Hezbollah was formed in response to Israel's pronouncement of statehood in 1948.
24. Smuggling of weapons between Gaza and Egypt is a security concern for Egypt and Israel.
25. The Golan Heights is the site of a major territorial dispute between Lebanon and Israel.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False; 6. False; 7. True; 8. False; 9. True; 10. True; 11. False; 12. True; 13. False; 14. True; 15. False; 16. False; 17. True; 18. False; 19. True; 20. False; 21. False; 22. True; 23. False; 24. True; 25. False*