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MIDDLE EAST HISTORY 8TH GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES

Introduction

The Middle East was an important place even before the bible was written. The region has been fought over and conquered by many tribes, religions and countries. The area has served as a melting pot of three continents and dozens of cultures. It is also the birthplace to three major world religions. Religious, political and economic conflict still occurs today in the Middle East. The United States has allies and enemies in the region. As one of the largest oil exporters in the world, the Middle East has an affect on our daily lives.

Geography



Although the Middle East is part of Asia, the region sits at the intersection of three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. Nowhere else on the globe do three continents come together in one spot. Although there is no set definition of the the Middle East, most people agree that it stretches from Egypt in the west to Iran in the east, and Turkey in the north to Yemen in the south.



The Middle East is also bordered by several bodies of water including the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea (Indian Ocean). The region has a unique geography featuring vast deserts, fertile

agricultural regions, and snow covered mountain ranges. The Middle East covers 5 million square miles and is home to over 300 million people. The countries of the Middle East listed according to population are: **Egypt** (84 million), **Iran** (77 million), **Turkey** (76 million), **Iraq** (35 million), **Saudi Arabia** (30 million), **Yemen** (25 million), **Syria** (22 million), **United Arab Emirates** (8 million), **Israel** (8 million), **Jordan** (6.5 million), **Palestinian Territories**¹ (4.5 million), **Lebanon** (4 million), **Oman** (4 million), **Kuwait** (4 million), **Qatar** (2 million), **Bahrain** (1.5 million).

Culture

Since ancient times, the Middle East has been the cross roads between Asia, Africa and Europe. For over 1,000 years, traders traveled the routes through the Middle East. The Middle East consists of approximately 15 countries, with many ethnicities, and cultures. Culture, is a shared set of traditions, beliefs, and behaviors. It is shaped by history, religion, ethnic identity, language, and nationality, among other factors. Because of the variety of people in the Middle East, there is diversity of cultures existing in the region. When imagining the Middle East, many people have visions of deserts, camels, the pyramids and Aladdin. In reality the culture of the Middle East is much more complex.

¹ According to the U.S. The Palestinian Territories are not a country. Many nations do recognize a country called Palestine. The territories are made up of two areas with a large Palestinian population, The West Bank and The Gaza Strip. The territories are semi-autonomous areas which were occupied by Israel after the Six Day War. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the packet.

There are many different ethnic groups in the Middle East. Some of these groups are: Arabs, Bedouins, Assyrians, Persians, Kurds, Turks, and Hebrews. Most people in the Middle East speak one of four languages: Arabic, Farsi (Persian), Hebrew or Turkish. Even though there are more than a dozen countries in the Middle East, much of the food is made from several key ingredients including: olives, dates, mint, chickpeas, honey, and lamb. Foods that Americans are familiar with that originated from the Middle East include: Kebabs, Hummus, Falafel, Baklava, Shawarma, Pita, and Gyros.



Although much of the Middle East is hot and dry (the highest temperature ever recorded in the Middle East was 129.2°), men and women tend to dress conservatively. Arab men rarely wear shorts, and for religious reasons, many women in the Middle East cover themselves up



from head to toe. On the other hand, in general, men and women in Israel are influenced by western culture (United States) and dress like Americans. It's very

common for men and women in Israel to wear shorts, t-shirts, flip flops or gym shoes. Some Americans would be surprised to know that the Israeli city of Tel Aviv (known as “one of the top party spots in the world”) and Dubai, in the UAE, are big vacation destinations, known for their beaches and clubs.

Religion

The Middle East is the birthplace of three major world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These three religions comprise more than 3 billion people world wide. Tension between Jews, Christians and Muslims has lead to conflict in the Middle East, although the three religions have many similarities.

Judaism

Judaism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It began more than 4,000 years ago with a man named Abraham. According to the Jewish holy book called the Torah², Abraham was told by God (Yahweh) that he would be the leader of a great nation, and they would be God’s chosen people. Abraham and his wife Sarah moved to Canaan (present day Israel). God tested Abraham’s faith by ordering him to kill his son Isaac. Although he was very sad, Abraham agreed, but was stopped by an angel before he killed his son. Later, Isaac’s son Jacob (God would later rename Jacob, Israel) became an important person in the religion. Jacob’s children would

² For Christians, the Old Testament is the books of the bible written before the birth of Christ. These include the 5 books that make up the Torah.

be known as the 12 tribes of Israel or the Israelites. The Israelites moved to Egypt, and were later placed into slavery by the Pharaoh. God chose Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery and back to Canaan.

Even people who are not familiar with religion probably know the story of Moses and the Exodus. Moses went before the Pharaoh asking for the release of the Israelites, Pharaoh refused. God cursed the Egyptians, and killed the 1st born child in every Egyptian family. In order to avoid this terrible curse, God instructed the Israelites to smear lamb's blood over their doors. Today, Jews celebrate this event with a holiday called Passover. Pharaoh's son was also killed that night, and in his sadness he agreed to allow the Israelites to go free. Moses and the Hebrews left Egypt towards



Canaan (Israel). As the Hebrews reached the Red Sea, Pharaoh, who was now furious at the Hebrews, decided to hunt them down and return them to slavery. To escape, Moses parted the Red Sea and the Hebrews escaped to Canaan. Later God gave the Israelites a set of rules known as the Ten Commandments.

For the next 200 years, the Israelites battled each other and other tribes for control of the land between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan (today the country of Israel). A warrior King named David, who became famous for killing Goliath with a stone and beheading him, moved the capital of his kingdom to Jerusalem. Later, Jews adopted the six point star as their

symbol. The symbol is called “the star of David”. In 586 BC, the Babylonians conquered the Israelites and the kingdom of Judah (Judea). The Israelites returned to Judea but, were eventually conquered and expelled from the land by the Romans.



After being expelled from Judea by the Romans, the Israelites, now known as Jews (because they had lived in the area of Judea), scattered to Europe and Africa. This period of time is known as the Diaspora. In the late 1800s, Jews began to move back to the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River (which was then called Palestine). As more Jews moved to Palestine, tensions

grew between the Jewish settlers and the Arabs (people who speak Arabic) that were already living there. Violence was common between the two groups, and against the British who gained control of the area after WWI (1914-1919). When the Nazis took control of Germany in the 1930s, Jews tried to escape Europe. 6 million Jews who did not escape the continent were murdered by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. This event was called the Holocaust. When the war ended, more Jews moved to



Palestine, hoping to create a Jewish homeland. In 1948, the country of Israel was created out of land Jews controlled in Palestine. The creation of Israel has caused a lot of problems in the Middle East. Violence continues even today. Israel is also one of the United States' closest friends in the world. This is one of the reasons, the U.S. does not have a good relationship with many countries in the Middle East. More about Israel's



wars and the role of the United States in the Middle East will be discussed later.

Being one of the oldest religions in the world, Judaism has many unique cultural aspects. Jews worship in a building called a synagogue. The Jewish holiday is Friday, not Sunday like Christians observe. Jewish holy men are called priests or rabbis. One thing that most people know about Jews is that many Jewish men wear a

hat called a Yarmulke, especially while at worship.

Most Jews will only eat food that is Kosher, which means, it doesn't violate Jewish law. One food that is not Kosher is pork. Jews will not eat any meat that comes from a pig. Jews are also forbidden from eating meat and dairy products together. Which means most Jews will not eat sausage pizza.

Besides Passover, which was discussed earlier, Jews celebrate other major holidays including: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Hanukkah. Rosh Hashanah is the celebration of a new year. Jews ponder the mistakes they made the previous year and how they will live their lives better. One of the main parts of Rosh Hashanah is the blowing of a “shofar”, which is a trumpet made from a rams horn. Yom Kippur is probably the most important Jewish holiday. Yom Kippur means, “the day of atonement”. In short, it’s a day where Jews atone, or think about, their lives and sins. Jews spend most of the 25 hours praying at the synagogue. During Yom Kippur, Jews do not eat or drink anything, and working is prohibited. Hanukkah³, the festival of lights, is an 8 day holiday celebrating the building of the second temple in 164 B.C. Since Hanukkah is usually celebrated in December, many compare it to Christmas. Each day of Hanukkah Jewish families light a candle on a Menorah and Jewish parents give small gifts of money or chocolate to their children. During Hanukkah, Jews eat traditional food like Latkes (potato pancakes) and chicken.



Today, Jews live in many countries around the world. Israel and the United States have the largest numbers of people that are Jewish. Other

³ Hanukkah can also be spelled Chanukah.

countries with large Jewish populations are: France, Canada and the United Kingdom.

There are many holy sites in the Middle East important to Jews. One of the most important places in Judaism is the Western Wall located in Jerusalem. The wall was part of the ancient temple that housed the 10



commandments. People pray at the Western Wall, and place notes in the cracks of the wall. Legend says these notes go directly to God. The Western Wall is also called the Wailing Wall because at the wall, Jews weep over the destruction of the original temple. Another

holy site is the Foundation Stone which sits inside the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The Foundation stone is said to be the spiritual link between heaven and earth. It's customary that Jewish people face in the direction of the Foundation Stone when they pray.

Christianity

As noted Christianity, like many religions has its roots in Judaism. Christians believe in the Old Testament the same as Jews (although they call it different a name). The beginnings of Christianity really begin with the birth of Jesus. Almost all scholars believe Jesus actually existed. Christians believe Jesus was the son of God. He was the son of Joseph and Mary but,

he was conceived by the holy spirit and eventually born in Bethlehem (a real city near Jerusalem). Many people, including many Jews believed Jesus was the Messiah. He was referred to as Jesus Christ and his followers were known as Christians. Jesus began to preach his beliefs and Christianity spread. In the Gospel according to John (in the New Testament, it is the 4th gospel), Jesus is said to have performed 7 miracles, including turning water into wine, walking on water, and raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus also healed the sick and blind. Jesus had 12 main followers who helped spread his message. They were called the 12 Apostles or

disciples. There names were:

Peter, Andrew,

James, John,

Philip,

Bartholomew,

Thomas,

Matthew,

James,

Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas. Even though Jesus was preaching peace, he made enemies by claiming to be King of the Jews. Some wanted him arrested and executed. Christians believe Jesus and his 12 disciples met for a meal, commonly referred to as the last supper. At the last supper Jesus predicted one of his disciples would betray him. One of the Apostles, Judas, did betray Jesus for money. Jesus was arrested and sentenced to



death by crucifixion. People who were crucified had their hands and feet nailed to a cross and were hung from the cross until death. Jesus was taunted by Roman soldiers who placed a crown of thorns on his head, beat him, and forced Jesus to carry the heavy wooden cross to his crucifixion site. The cross has become an important symbol in Christianity. After Jesus died his body was placed in a tomb. Christians believe Jesus was resurrected on the third day and ascended into heaven. Christians celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ during Easter. Good Friday commemorates the day Jesus died. Easter Sunday celebrates the day Jesus was resurrected.

Christians believe Jesus will return to earth again. Eventually the



living and the dead will be judged and the faithful will be rewarded with entrance to heaven.

Much like Judaism, Christianity has many holy places and holidays unique to the religion.

Easter, commemorating the death and

resurrection of Jesus has already been discussed. The other major holiday important to Christians is Christmas. During Christmas, celebrated on December 25th, Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Family gatherings, large meals and gift giving are customs Christians celebrate on Christmas.

One of the holiest sites for Christians is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The Church is believed to be the place where Jesus was buried. Christians believe the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is built upon the place where Christ was born.

Christianity has many different types or denominations. Each denomination has slightly different beliefs. The largest denomination within Christianity is Catholicism. Of the 2 billion Christians in the world, 1.2 billion are Catholics. By the early 1500s, many Catholics, for a variety of reasons,



were upset with the Catholic church. In 1517, Martin Luther began the Protestant Reformation. To protest the Catholic church, many new religions, with similar beliefs to the Catholic church were born. In general, anyone who is a member of one of these religions is known as a

Protestant. Examples of Protestant religions are: Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Lutherans. Today, 800 million people around the world are members of a Protestant denomination.

Islam

Many people would be surprised to know that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share the same roots.



Many of the same people are central to all three religions. For instance, Jesus is also a key figure in Islam and Moses (Musa) is the person mentioned most in the Islamic holy book called the Quran (also spelled Koran and Qu'ran). Believers in Islam are called Muslims. Muslims believe God, called Allah, chosen a group of humans to be prophets. These

prophets would deliver the message of Allah to the people. Some of the prophets are also key figures in Judaism and Christianity including: Adam, Noah, Moses and Jesus. The last prophet was a man named Muhammad. Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca around the year 570 AD. Later in life, Muhammad would go to a nearby cave to pray and enjoy the quiet. On one of these trips to the cave in the year 610, Muhammad was visited by the Angel Gabriel. Gabriel gave information and verses to Muhammad. This

would later become the Quran. Later, he is commanded to go around and spread Allah's message and warn those who do not accept it.

Many people mocked Muhammad but, some did convert and become followers of Islam. Muslims believe in 620 AD, Muhammad made a famous nighttime journey. He was visited again by Gabriel, and on a winged horse, they flew from Mecca to Jerusalem. Muhammad also toured heaven and hell and spoke with the earlier prophets. Muhammad's life was in danger as new leaders, who were unhappy with him, came to power in Mecca. This forced Muhammad and his followers to move from Mecca to the city of Medina. This journey known as the Hijra, is celebrated on the 1st day of the Muslim new year. In Medina, Muhammad established the 1st Islamic state. In 624 AD Muhammad is told by God that Muslims should no longer face Jerusalem during prayer. Rather, they should face Mecca. The tradition that Muslims face Mecca during prayer still continues today.

In 630 AD, Muhammad led a Muslim army to battle the people of Mecca. The Muslims defeated the Meccans. Most Meccans then converted to Islam. Muhammad then led his army to conquer the entire Arabian Peninsula (today, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain). He united



the people of Arabia in a unified Muslim state. In 632, Muhammad died. Muhammad is buried in the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina. The green dome of the Mosque is one of the most famous sites in Islam. After Muhammad's death there was disagreement among Muslims over the next leader of Islam. Two groups of Muslims formed because of this crisis. Shia Muslims supported Muhammad's cousin Ali. Sunni Muslims thought Muhammad's close friend Abu Bakr should be the new leader. Today, most Muslims are Sunni. Although Sunnis and Shia have mostly lived peacefully, violence has broken out between the groups. Presently, there is deep hatred between the two groups. Almost every country in the Middle East



besides Iran and Iraq have a Sunni majority.

Over the next several centuries, Muslim armies conquered much of the Middle East and North Africa. It will be discussed later but, Muslim armies were turned away from invading Europe at the Battle of Tours in 732, and

the Battle of Vienna in 1683. African Muslims called Moors did invade Spain. They controlled much of the country for over 700 years.

Presently there are more than 300,000,000 Muslims living in the Middle East. That is 90% of the population of the region. Worldwide there

are more than 1.6 billion Muslims, accounting for almost 24% of the world's population.

The Muslim world is responsible for some of the most important innovations in human history. The 1st hospital was built by the Egyptians in 872 AD. Around the year 600 AD, the toothbrush became popular in the Middle East. A Muslim surgeon wrote a book about surgery that was used by Europeans for almost 500 years. Muslim scholars also discovered algebra, and built the world's 1st university.

What are some of the important practices and places in Islam? One of the most important principles for Muslims is the Five Pillars. These five pillars are the basic guide how a Muslim should live their life. One of the Five Pillars is a pilgrimage to Mecca known as the Hajj. Every Muslim is expected to journey to Mecca at least once in their life. One of the main things that Muslims do during the Hajj is to walk 7 times counter clockwise around the Ka'aba. The Ka'aba is a large black cube shaped building in the center of Islam's most important Mosque. Inside the Ka'aba is a sacred black stone Muslims



believe came from heaven. Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims, wearing white robes circle the Ka'aba during the Hajj. Another holy site for Muslims is the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Muslims believe this was the destination for Muhammad during his night time journey on the winged horse.

Muslims celebrate the delivering of the Quaran to Muhammad during a holiday called Ramadan. Ramadan lasts one month. The date of Ramadan changes each year. During that month Muslims are required to fast from sun up to sun down. Fasting means Muslims will not eat or drink anything while the sun is up. The end of Ramadan is called Eid al-Fitr. On this day, Muslims pray then celebrate the end of Ramadan by eating large meals.

Many people believe being Arab⁴ and Muslim are the same thing. They are different, but they are related. Muslims are the followers of Islam. Arabs are those peoples whose main



⁴ The word Arab is pronounce 'AIR UB'. To pronounce Arab 'A RAB' is derogatory and insulting.

language is Arabic. Arabs originated from the Arabian Peninsula, which today contains most of the countries in the Middle East. So, most people from the Middle East are Arabs. Most Arabs are Muslims, but some are Christians and Jews. Not all Muslims are Arab. 80% of Muslims are not Arab, they include Iranians, Pakistanis, Afghans, and Indonesians.

Another thing many people know about Muslims, is that most Muslim women wear clothes that cover much of their bodies. Muslims believe that women should not wear clothes in public that draws attention from men. For Muslim women in the United States, most wear a scarf, called a Hijab,



to cover their hair and neck. At this time also, Muslim women wear clothes that cover their arms and legs. Some Muslim families are stricter about this, requiring women to also cover their face. A dress that covers a Muslim women's body and face is called a burqa. In many Middle East countries women must wear burqas in public. In some countries such as Yemen, women are not allowed in public without their husbands. During Taliban rule in Afghanistan women could not be in public without their husband, they were forbidden from speaking in public, and they were not allowed to

attend school. If a women violated any of these rules, she could be beaten severely.

Some people associate Islam with terrorism. Although radical Islam has been responsible for many terrorist attacks, radicals of other religions



have been responsible for terrorism also. Radical Christians and Jews have killed in the name of their religion. What is a radical? A radical is a person who believes so strongly in their religion, they are willing to kill those who are not followers of their religion.

Many times radicals believe their religion is the only true religion and others should convert. On the way to the crusades, radical Christian knights murdered Jews. When the British controlled Palestine, some radical Jews resorted to terrorism, including blowing up a famous hotel. Unfortunately, radical Muslims have been responsible for a number of terror attacks, particularly since the 1980s. These acts and people have been condemned by most moderate (non-radical) Muslims.

12 Important Events in Middle East History

The Battle of Tours (732 AD)

Although the city of Tours is in France, and not in the Middle East, the battle that took place there is very important to Middle East history. By the year 732 Muslim armies had conquered most of the Middle East, including the holy city of

Jerusalem, the northern part of Africa, and Spain.

A Muslim army under the control of Abdul Rahman, invaded France. Many believe the goal of this army was to conquer Europe and to kill or convert

Christians. The Franks controlled most of western Europe. Their leader, Charles, raised an army to battle the Muslims. Although greatly outnumbered, Charles and his warriors defeated the Muslims, saving Europe from being conquered. After the Battle of Tours, Charles was given one of the coolest nicknames in history, Martel, which means “the Hammer”. Today in history books, he is referred to as Charles “the Hammer”. A Muslim army under the Ottoman Empire attempted another



Statue of Charles “the Hammer” Martel

invasion of Europe in the late 1600s. They were defeated at the Battle of Vienna in 1683.

The Crusades (1096-1291)

As mentioned, a thousand years ago, Muslim armies had taken control of the Middle East, and the city of Jerusalem. In 1095, the Pope

ordered Catholics to travel to the Holy Land, and recapture it. Catholic armies from western Europe headed to the Middle East, to reclaim Jerusalem.

Many historians believe another reason Christians wanted to reclaim the Holy Land was to control the trade routes between Europe, Africa and Asia. Thus began a series of crusades (wars) between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East. In the end, Christian armies were defeated and control of the Holy Land stayed with the Muslims.



Oil is Discovered in the Middle East (1908)

By the 1900s, the demand for oil was huge. Oil was needed for factory machinery, power plants, automobiles, and navies that were



changing from coal to gas engines. A British company obtained a license to search for oil in Persia (Persia would later be named Iran). In 1908, oil was discovered in a remote part of Iran. Companies quickly began searching other areas in the Middle East for oil. Oil was discovered in Iraq in 1927, Saudi Arabia in 1938, and Kuwait in 1938. The largest known supply of oil in the world exists under the ground in the Middle East. Soon many countries in the Middle East began

supplying oil to the rest of the world. In 1960, Middle Eastern countries created the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to make as much money as possible from oil production. Today, Saudi Arabia alone produces 12 million barrels of oil a day.

World War I (1914-1919)

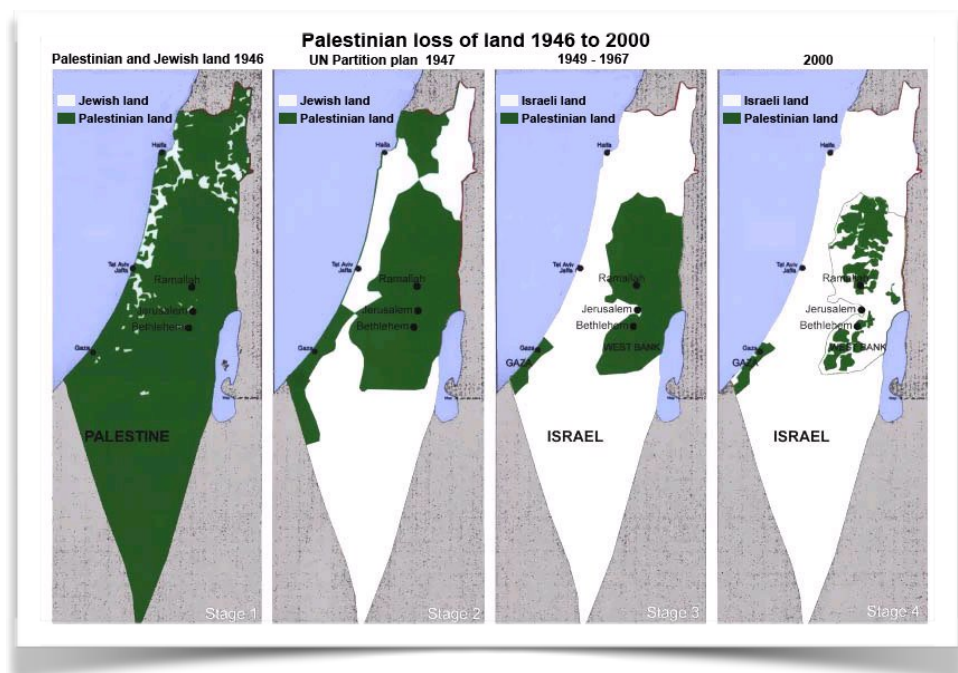
After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand from Austria-Hungary, World War I began. On one



side were the Central Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). The Ottoman Empire had controlled the Middle East for hundreds of years. They battled the Allied Powers: England, France, Russia (who dropped out in 1917), and the United States (who didn't join until 1917). 37 million people were killed in the war. Eventually, the Allied Powers defeated the Central Powers. Because of this defeat the Ottoman Empire was broken up and much of the Middle East came under the control of the British and French.

The Creation of Israel (May 15, 1948)

Since the late 1800s, Jews had been moving in large numbers to Palestine. They believed it was their right to control the land they felt was their



historical home. The Arabs living in the area of Palestine were very unhappy about losing their lands. Until the end of World War II (1939-1945), violence between Jews and Arabs was common in Palestine.

Both groups hated the British who controlled the area. Unable to figure out a solution, the British asked the United Nations for help. The United Nations was created after WWII, almost every country has a representative



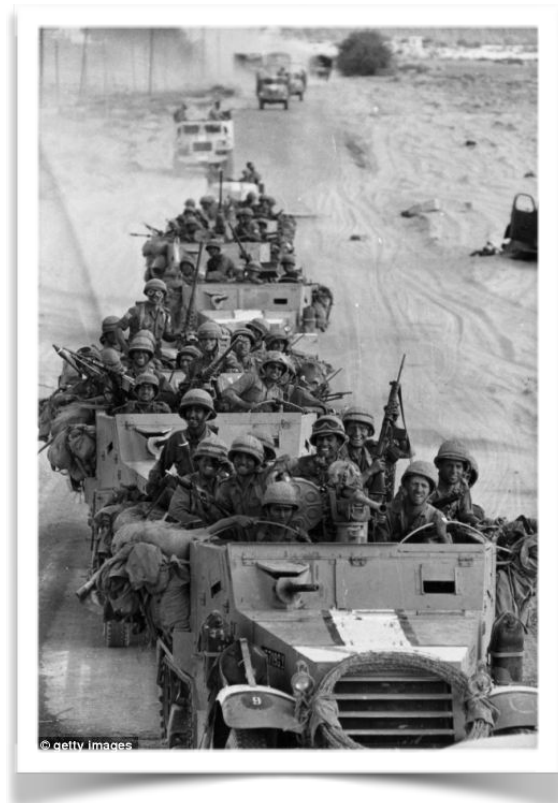
at the UN. The UN decided to partition (split) the land between Palestinians and Jews. After another round of violence, the country of Israel was born on May 15, 1948. Arabs refer to this date as

“al-Nakba” (the catastrophe).

Angered over the creation of a Jewish country in a Muslim dominated area, and the loss of land by the Palestinians, Israel was attacked by it's Arab neighbors the next day. This war is called the War of Israeli Independence. Israel won this war and gained even more Arab land. Several other wars have happened between Israel and Arab countries. Each time, with a aid from the United States, Israel has won. Today, Israel has treaties with only two countries in the Middle East, Egypt and Jordan. Many countries such as Iran, do not even acknowledge Israel's right to exist. Tension and violence still occurs today in the Middle East between Israelis and Arabs. Arabs are also angry at the United States for the support we have given Israel

The Six Day War (June 5-10, 1967)

Tension was running high between Israel and its Arab neighbors, particularly Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Egypt moved thousands of troops near their border with Israel. Fearing war, Israel attacked first. Even though Israel was heavily outnumbered, they easily won the war. Because of their victory, Israel took control of the Sinai Peninsula (which it later gave back to Egypt), the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. These areas were known as the occupied territories. Most of the people living in these territories were Palestinian Arabs. Soon, Israelis began to move into the territories and build towns called settlements. In 1987 and again in 2000, Palestinians rebelled against Israeli rule. These revolts, or Intifadas (“shaking off”) were violent and many Palestinians and Israelis were killed. Today, this is one of the biggest sources of tension between Israel and the rest of the Middle East.



Egypt and Israel Make Peace (1979)



Since the creation of Israel in 1948, Israel and Egypt had been bitter enemies. Both countries have been involved in several wars against each other. In 1967, Israel humiliated Egypt in the Six Day War and took the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt. In 1978, President

Jimmy Carter invited the leaders from Egypt and Israel to the Presidential vacation spot at Camp David, Maryland. After days of negotiations, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed the first peace treaty between Israel and an Arab country. Israel agreed to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, Egypt agreed to formally recognize Israel. The countries have been at peace with each other since the treaty. The Camp David Accords gave hope that there could be peace in the rest of the Middle East.

The Iran Hostage Crisis (1979-1981)

Iran was led by a man named Reza Pahlavi. He held the title of Shah (King). Although the Shah was friendly with the United States, he was a

brutal leader, jailing and torturing many Iranians. In 1979, the Iranians revolted against the Shah. The Shah and his family fled to the United States. The Iranians, now led by Ayatollah Khomeini, demanded the return of the Shah so he could

be put on trial in Iran.

The U.S. refused.

Dozens of Americans worked at the embassy (most countries, including the U.S. have government buildings in other



countries called embassies. They are there to help Americans in other countries and assist people in other countries who want to come to the U.S.) The U.S. embassy in Iran was located in the capital, Tehran. Iranians protested daily outside the embassy. One day, they broke down the gate, stormed the embassy and took 52 Americans hostage. They refused to return the hostages until we returned the Shah. The U.S. tried a rescue mission but it failed. When Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter and became President in 1981, the hostages were finally released after 444 days in captivity.

Desert Storm (1991)

Saddam Hussein became the leader of Iraq in 1979. He was a brutal dictator who tortured, murdered and at one point used poison gas on his own people. He was very unpopular with many other leaders in the Middle East. In August of 1990, Iraq invaded its tiny neighbor Kuwait. The

government of Kuwait

appealed for help

from the world,

including their close

friend, the United

States. President

George H. Bush

warned Saddam

Hussein to withdraw

from Kuwait. For the

next few months, the

United Nations imposed sanctions (penalties) against Iraq, while the U.S.

built a coalition of allies in case war was necessary. Soon 34 nations,

including several Middle East countries sided with the U.S. against Iraq.

After the deadline passed without Iraq leaving Kuwait, coalition planes

began to bomb Iraqi forces. One month later, soldiers, mostly American,

began the fight to liberate Kuwait. The war became known as the Persian

Gulf War, or Desert Storm. Many thought the war could last for months.

Instead U.S. forces dominated the Iraqi military, Iraq surrendered in 4 days.



Although Saddam Hussein would remain in power for 12 more years, the U.S. helped dull the memory of the Vietnam War and also test new military technology like laser guided smart bombs and stealth airplanes. Desert Storm is also the 1st war in history to be covered live by the media, as reporters were in Iraq during the war and also with U.S. troops during the fighting.

September 11th Attacks (September 11, 2001)



In 1988, A Saudi named Osama Bin Laden started a radical Islamic terrorist organization called Al Qaeda. Angered that American troops were in Saudi Arabia to protect the oil fields against Iraqi invasion, Bin Laden

declares a Jihad or “holy war” against the United States. Many Al Qaeda terrorists were willing to kill themselves in order to help the cause. In the 1990s Al Qaeda was responsible for several terrorist attacks, including a car bombing of the World Trade Centers in 1993. On September 11, 2001, 19 Al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four planes inside the United States. Two planes crashed into the World Trade Centers. One plane crashed into the headquarters for the U.S. military, called the Pentagon, in Washington D.C. In the final plane, which was thought to be headed for the White House, passengers stormed the cabin of the plane.



Terrorists crashed the plane in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania rather than be captured. In all 2,977 victims were killed on 9/11. In response to the attacks President W. Bush ordered an invasion of Afghanistan. Why Afghanistan? Because it was the headquarters for Al Qaeda, and the group that controlled Afghanistan, called the Taliban, allowed Al Qaeda to stay and train in their country. American forces quickly killed or captured many Al Qaeda terrorists and Taliban fighters. Although Osama Bin Laden escaped capture, the Taliban were defeated.

Today, many firemen and first responders to the WTC attacks are sick from breathing in toxic materials after the collapse of the buildings at “Ground Zero”. American troops are still in Afghanistan, as the Taliban terrorize many parts of the country. All U.S. troops are set to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

Iraq War (2003)

After the Persian Gulf War ended in 1991, Saddam Hussein remained in power in Iraq. The United States suspected Iraq was trying to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) including nuclear weapons. In March, 2003, President George W. Bush gave Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave Iraq. Hussein did not leave. In March, the United States invaded Iraq, to capture Saddam Hussein and find Iraq’s WMDs. After 44 days, U.S. forces captured Iraq’s capital, Baghdad. Only 139



Americans were killed. In

December, Saddam Hussein was captured. Later, he was put on trial by the Iraqis and executed. Soon, a second phase of the war began. Opposing groups of Muslims fought each other, with U.S. troops stuck in a police role. Terrorists and ex-Iraqi soldiers began planting bombs (IEDs) in roads,

which were exploded when American soldiers passed by. 90% of Americans killed in Iraq died during the second phase of the war called the insurgency. For several years after the insurgency, Iraq was peaceful. Recently, violence has increased dramatically in Iraq between Muslims. A violent, radical Muslim group (ISIS), has taken over large parts of Iraq, murdering anyone who opposes them. Recently, American journalist, James Foley was captured by ISIS and beheaded.

Osama Bin Laden Killed (May 1 , 2011)

Osama Bin Laden was the leader of the terrorist group Al Qaeda and the mastermind behind the September 11th attacks. Soon after 9/11, the United



States government made it a top priority to capture or kill Bin Laden. He escaped U.S. forces after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and disappeared for years. Americans working for intelligence agencies, like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), looked for clues of his whereabouts. In 2011, the CIA tracked Bin Laden to a house in

the neighboring country of Pakistan.⁵ On May 1, 2011, U.S. Navy SEALs

⁵ Many Pakistanis, including those in the government and military supported Bin Laden and the Taliban.

dropped into the yard of the house, killed the bodyguards inside protecting Bin Laden, and on the top floor of the house, found Osama Bin Laden and shot him. His body was taken to an American ship and dumped in the ocean so nobody could find it. When President Barrack Obama announced the news on television, celebrations occurred across the United States. Although Bin Laden is dead, Al Qaeda is still a threat to the U.S. and the world.

What's Happening In the Middle East Today

Israel

In 1948, the United Nations decided to partition Palestine into 2 regions: Palestine and Israel. After a series of wars, the Palestinian lands are broken into



two areas, the West Bank and Gaza. These two regions are somewhat able to govern themselves but, Israel still has a major impact on these areas. Hamas is an organization, kind of like a political party, that governs Gaza.

Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by many countries including the United States. On June 12, 2014 three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped in the West Bank. The Israeli government blamed Hamas. Israel began arresting members of Hamas in the West Bank. Hamas then began firing rockets into Israel from Gaza. Many of the rockets were intercepted by Israel's missile defense system called, Iron Dome. Israel's air force began bombing launch sites in Gaza. On June 30th, the kidnapped Israelis were found murdered. In retaliation a Palestinian teenager was murdered in the West Bank. Over the next few weeks Hamas fired thousands of rockets, and conducted terrorist attacks into Israel through hidden underground tunnels. On July 8th, the Israeli military, called the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) invaded Gaza with soldiers and tanks to stop the rocket attacks and destroy the tunnels. Hundreds of Palestinians, many of them civilians, have been killed. 64 IDF soldiers have been killed. Peace attempts have broken down over the last few weeks. Rocket attacks on Israel and air strikes on Gaza still continue.



Iraq

For the last few years, things have been pretty quiet in Iraq. Violence between Shia and Sunni

Muslims increased dramatically this summer. Iraq was also invaded by a terrorist group from Syria called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIS. ISIS is a very violent terrorist organization that wants to create one Islamic country in the Middle East. ISIS has captured many American weapons that were abandoned by the Iraqi army. ISIS has taken over large parts of Iraq. They have also murdered many Iraqis and executed a kidnapped Americans. The United States began bombing ISIS targets in Iraq a few last fall to try and stop them from taking control of the entire country. Many fear that ISIS will attempt terrorist attacks inside the U.S. The U.S. government hopes that ISIS can be defeated by American air strikes, and attacks by Iraqi Kurds (an ethnic group in Iraq that is friendly with the U.S. and are known as fierce fighters), and what is left of the Iraqi military. As for now the ISIS advance on Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, has been halted and slowly pushed back.

Iran



Iran is a dangerous country. They have a very bad relationship with the United States and don't believe Israel has the right to exist. The former President of Iraq even doubted the

Holocaust ever happened. Iran is known to supply weapons to terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. For several years Iran has been trying to build a nuclear bomb. This is very scary for the U.S. and especially Israel which is less than 1,000 miles from Iran. This summer, the U.S. and Iran agreed on a treaty to limit Iran's nuclear research. That treaty must now be approved by the Senate. Israel has made it clear that they will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear bomb. They would consider bombing Iran to stop their nuclear program. Israel did the same thing to Iraq in 1981.

Syria

The al-Assad family has controlled Syria for decades. In 2011, Syrians revolted against the current leader of Syria Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian military. Much of the fighting is between Shia and Sunni Muslims. The rebels are supported by the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The Syrian government is backed by Russia and the terrorist organization Hezbollah. Complicating the situation, some of the people fighting the Syrian government

are members of terrorist groups that hate the United States. This makes it difficult for the U.S. to help the



rebels without giving weapons to terrorists, who will then use those weapons against us and our allies. ISIS grew during the Syrian civil war and now controls 1/3 of Syria. It's estimated that 100,000 people have been killed during the Syrian civil war.