

## The Middle East Emerges

In the years following World War II, a number of independent states emerged in the region known as the Middle East. This region—dominated by Europeans and populated by millions of indigenous Arab peoples—soon came into its own in the decades following the war.

Independence was the order of the era. Key Middle Eastern nations such as Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon gained their independence after the war, losing their status as European mandates. Other countries—Egypt, Iraq, and Iran—remained closely tied to European powers, but became increasingly independent, making many decisions autonomously.

Just as a pan-Africa movement developed in the early 1960s, a pan-Arab movement came to a head during the mid-1940s. Embodied in the structure of the Arab League (founded in 1945), its goal was to create unity among disparate Arab tribes and cultural groups. But these Arab groups could not agree on much, with possibly one exception—their opposition to the existence of the new nation of Israel.

Controlled by the British since World War I, the region of Palestine was home, in 1940, to 600,000 Jewish settlers and nearly twice as many Arabs. Traditionally and historically, Arabs and Jews regarded one another as enemies or at least inferiors. In 1947, the British government granted the United Nations the right to divide the region between the Arabs and Jews living there. When the Arabs refused to accept partition of Palestine, war developed and Jewish military forces gained control of the region, leading to the creation of a Jewish state—Israel—on May 24, 1948.

As conflict in the region continued, hundreds of thousands of Palestine Arabs left Israel, becoming refugees in neighboring Arab states such as Jordan and Lebanon.

The existence of the Jewish state of Israel continues to be a sore spot with many Arab leaders today. Wars between the Arabs and Jews have recurred with significant conflicts breaking out in 1967 and 1973.

As Britain surrendered control of Palestine in 1948, she also granted independence to another Middle Eastern mandate nation—Egypt. In 1952, Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser became the state's new

president following the ouster of Egypt's unpopular king Farouk.

Nasser proved to be a charismatic leader who supported the concept of pan-Arab nationalism. His dream never became reality.

Yet through the 1960s, Egyptian leaders, such as Nasser, led the Arab campaign against the Jewish Israelis. In 1964, the Egyptians helped to establish the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which today still bitterly contends with the Israelis over a future homeland and independent state for Palestine Arabs.

In 1967, Nasser brought the Arab world to war with Israel. Israel struck back fiercely launching air strikes against Egypt and other Middle Eastern powers. (The Egyptians even received support from the Soviets.) Nasser's campaign proved short-lived, as the Israelis forced an end to the conflict after just six days of fighting. Through the struggle—known as the Six-Day War—the Israelis not only survived, but annexed additional Arab land along the West Bank (of the Jordan River) and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. The defeat of the Arabs in this war was so bitter, that, in just a few years, the Arabs and Israelis were at war once again.



*Gamal Abdel Nasser*

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### *Review and Write*

1. Why did the pan-Arab movement of the 1940s fail?
2. Describe the failures of the Egyptian leader, Gamal Nasser.