Regional Conflict in the Middle East

Introduction

The **Middle East** has been a hotbed of **conflict** for decades, with complex historical, political, and religious factors at play. This presentation will delve into the **regional conflicts**, analyzing key events and their lasting impact.

Ethnic, religious, ideological, natural resources conflicts:
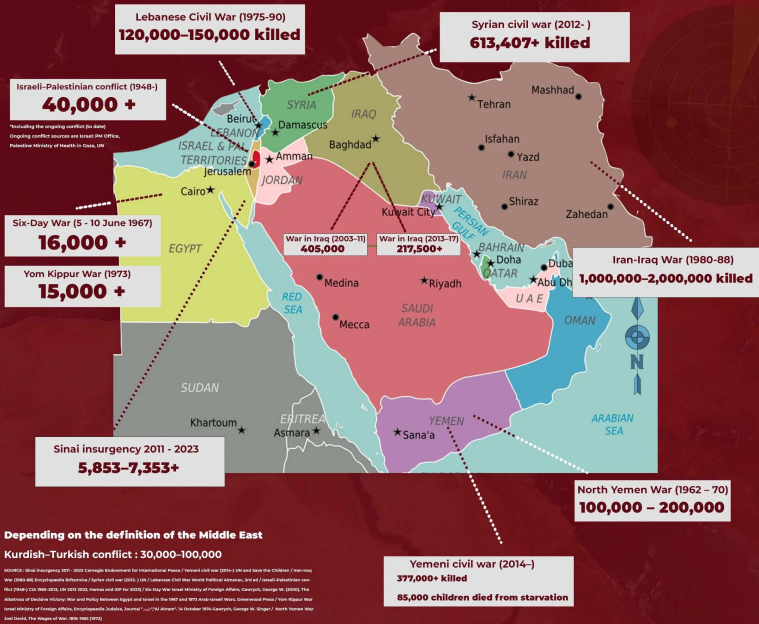
- **Competition for resources** - The region contains a large percentage of **global oil reserves** which has intensified rivalries. **Water scarcity** is also a source of tension.
- **Religious and ethnic divisions** - Groups like Arabs vs. Persians, Jews vs. Muslims, and Sunni vs. Shia Muslims have come into conflict at various points. Divisions have also occurred along ethnic lines.
- **Ideological battles** - Secular nationalist movements, Islamic political factions and Western liberalism have clashed. Revolutions like the **1979 Iranian Revolution** have triggered regional turmoil.
- **Intervention by foreign powers** The Middle East's oil resources and strategic location have prompted involvement by powers like the USA, Russia, Europe and others in its conflicts.

Colonial Legacy

The **legacy** of European colonization in the Middle East has had a profound impact on the region's **political landscape**. The arbitrary drawing of **borders** and manipulation of local power dynamics set the stage for future conflicts.

Total casualties of wars in the Middle-East

Both side military + civilian killed

Lebanese Civil War (1975-90)
120,000–150,000 killed

Syrian civil war (2012-)
613,407+ killed

Israeli–Palestinian conflict (1948-)
40,000 +

Including the ongoing conflict (to date)
Ongoing conflict sources are Israel PM Office,
Palestine Ministry of Health in Gaza, UN

Six-Day War (5 - 10 June 1967)
16,000 +

Yom Kippur War (1973)
15,000 +

War in Iraq (2003-11)
405,000

War in Iraq (2013-17)
217,500+

Iran-Iraq War (1980-88)
1,000,000–2,000,000 killed

Sinai insurgency 2011 - 2023
5,853–7,353+

North Yemen War (1962 – 70)
100,000 – 200,000

Depending on the definition of the Middle East

Kurdish–Turkish conflict : 30,000–100,000

Yemeni civil war (2014–)
377,000+ killed
85,000 children died from starvation

SOURCE : Sinai Insurgency 2011 - 2023 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace / Yemeni civil war (2014–) UN and Save the Children / Iran-Iraq
War (1980-88) Encyclopaedia Britannica / Syrian civil war (2012-) UN / Lebanese Civil War World Political Almanac, 3rd ed / Israeli-Palestinian con-
flict (1948-) CIA 1948-2013, UN 2013 2023, Hamas and IDF for 2023 / Six Day War Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gawrych, George W. (2000), The
Albatross of Decisive Victory War and Policy Between Egypt and Israel in the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars, Greenwood Press / Yom Kippur War
Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Encyclopaedia Judaica, Journal " ..." "Al Ahram". 14 October 1974 Gawrych, George W. Singer / North Yemen War
Joel David, The Wages of War. 1816-1965 (1972)

Map labels: Mashhad, Tehran, SYRIA, IRAQ, Beirut, Damascus, Isfahan, Yazd, LEBANON, Baghdad, IRAN, ISRAEL & PAL. TERRITORIES, Amman, Shiraz, Zahedan, Jerusalem, JORDAN, Cairo, KUWAIT, Kuwait City, PERSIAN GULF, EGYPT, BAHRAIN, Doha, Dubai, QATAR, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E, RED SEA, Medina, Riyadh, SAUDI ARABIA, OMAN, Mecca, N, SUDAN, Khartoum, ERITREA, YEMEN, ARABIAN SEA, Asmara, Sana'a

The **Iran-Iraq War** (1980-1988) was a brutal and protracted conflict that shaped the **geopolitical dynamics** of the Middle East. It resulted in massive **casualties** and had far-reaching implications for regional **power struggles**.

The **Iran-Iraq** war was power struggle between the regimes of the two Gulf countries:

- Revolutionary Iran under **Ayatollah Khomeini** vs. **Saddam Hussein**'s Iraq
- Ideological contest between Iran's Islamic Revolution vs. Iraq's secular Arab nationalism.
- Disputes over territory, particularly border regions like **Shatt al-Arab waterway**.
- Geopolitical rivalry over dominance in the Gulf region
- Proxy battles with the U.S. and Soviet Union supplying arms to Iraq and Iran respectively
- Use of **chemical weapons**, human wave attacks, and trench warfare leading to major casualties

The **1st Gulf War** (1991) marked a **significant turning point** in the Middle East, with the **invasion of Kuwait** triggering a major international conflict. The subsequent **intervention by global powers** reshaped the region's **security dynamics**.

Iraq's **invasion** and **annexation** of **Kuwait** triggered major international response:

- Saddam Hussein sought to capture **Kuwait's oil reserves** and erase **Iraqi war debts.**
- UN condemned the invasion and imposed economic sanctions on Iraq
- **U.S.** assembled **massive coalition force** to push Iraqi army out of Kuwait
- Aerial bombardment and ground invasion known as "**Operation Desert Storm**"
- Iraq was defeated rapidly but **Saddam retained control**, **uprisings** of **Kurds** and **Shia** ensued

2nd Gulf War (2003)

The 2nd **Gulf War** based on a **false** premise of Weapons of mass destruction and a major **plunder** by the **U.S. and allies** lead to the invasion of Iraq

Controversial U.S.-led **invasion** to overthrow **Saddam Hussein**'s regime on charges of possessing **weapons of mass destruction**:

- **U.S. and allies** claimed Saddam was developing nuclear, chemical, biological weapons.
- Allegations were based on **faulty intelligenc**e and Saddam's weapons programs were **non-existent.**
- Invasion faced **global criticism** as **public justification** shifted to "**liberating**" Iraqi people.
- Toppling of Saddam led to **years of insurgency**, **sectarian conflict**, and chaos in Iraq eventually causing the **rise of ISIS** and the near complete **devastation** of both **Iraq and Syria**

The **Syrian Civil War** (2011-20xx) has been a devastating conflict with profound **humanitarian implications**. It has drawn in regional and international **actors**, exacerbating the **complexity** of the conflict.

Anti-government protests in Syria during the **Arab Spring** turned into full blown extremely devestating **civil war**:

- Uprising demanded **reforms** from **Bashar al-Assad**'s authoritarian regime.
- Regime's violent crackdown on demonstrators spurred nationwide **armed rebellion.**
- Opposition fractured into rival **moderate and Islamist factions.**
- Intervention by international backers like **Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, U.S.**
- **Power vacuum** led to rise of **ISIS** occupying **large swaths of Syria and Iraq.**
- **Russia** and **Iran** using **Hezbollah** and other **regional actors** plus army units from both countries extended the war & **gained influence** over the whole region including **Lebanon** and **Gaza.**

Yemeni Civil War (2014-20xx)

The **Yemeni Civil War** has created a dire **humanitarian crisis** and has become a focal point for **proxy conflicts**. The involvement of **external powers** has further complicated efforts to resolve the conflict.

Conflict between the **government** and **Houthi rebel** factions:

- Houthis took control of the capital forcing **Saudi**-backed **President Hadi** to flee.
- **Saudi Arabia** assembled coalition to conduct **airstrikes** against Houthis.
- UAE, Iran, and other powers involved backing proxies with intelligence and arms.
- **Mass** civilian **casualties**, **starvation**, **disease**, humanitarian disaster.
- **Iran** increased influence on the region and **subverted the Houthis** into another **Iranian proxy army** more like **Hezbollah** and the ever expanding **Iran regional armed network** in Iraq, Syria, and Gaza.

The **Arab-Israeli conflict** has been a defining feature of the Middle East, leading to multiple wars and ongoing **tensions**. The **dispute over land** and **sovereignty** has been a major source of regional instability. The Arab-Israeli conflict has been ongoing since the **early 20th century** when **Jewish immigration** to British-ruled Palestine increased, conflicting with local Arab populations.

Key dynamics include:

- Jewish nationalism (**Zionism**) seeking self-determination vs. **Palestinian Arab nationalism.**
- Long-standing religious and ethnic tensions between Jews and Arabs
- Territory and land disputes over the region of Palestine/Israel
- Numerous wars and military conflicts between Israel and neighboring Arab states
- "**Right of return**" debate around Palestinian refugees displaced by 1948 war
- Palestinian uprising (**intifadas**) against Israeli occupation
- Role of outside powers like U.S., Soviet Union, UN in peace processes

The **Israeli-Palestinian** conflict is one of the most **complex** and controversial conflicts in the modern world. At its heart is a dispute over land and existence between two peoples, the **Israelis** and the **Palestinians**.

- The roots of the conflict can be traced back to the late **19th** century with the **rise of Zionism**, the movement to establish a **Jewish homeland** in the territory then known as Palestine. This land was also inhabited by Arab Palestinians, setting the stage for future clashes.
- In the late **1940s** following **World War II** and the **Holocaust**, the **United Nations** proposed dividing the territory into **separate Jewish and Palestinian states**. Jewish leaders accepted the plan, while Palestinian leaders rejected it.

- In 1948, Israel declared **independence** as the **state of Israel**, triggering the first **Arab-Israeli War**. Israel won the war and expanded its territorial control.
- **Hundreds of thousands** of Palestinians fled or were forced from their homes in what they call "**Al Nakba**" (**The Catastrophe**). They became refugees in neighboring lands. This created an ongoing dispute about Palestinian refugees' **right of return**.
- In **1967**, Israel occupied the **remaining Palestinian territories** of the West Bank and Gaza Strip after the **Six Day War**. It left Israel in control of the **entire historical region of Palestine**.
- Competing claims to the land and a **lack of trust** between the parties have led to repeated violence and failed peace processes. Issues like **Israeli settlements**, **Palestinian refugees**, and **control of Jerusalem** remain **core disputes**.

History of the Conflict - **Pre Israeli independence**(19xx-1947)

- **Jewish migration** to Palestine accelerated in the **late 19th** century due to growing **Zionism** and **persecution** in Europe. This increased tensions with Arab Palestinians living in the region.
- The **1917 Balfour Declaration** endorsed the establishment of a "**national home for the Jewish people**" in Palestine. Arabs opposed this perceived **violation of self-determination**.
- In the **1920s-1930s**, **violence** erupted including riots, revolts, and militant attacks as Arabs protested **Jewish immigration** and **land purchases**.
- The **British proposed dividing the land** between Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The Jewish side accepted the **1937 Peel Commission plan**, while Arabs rejected it.
- In **1947**, the UN approved a **partition plan** to divide Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. Jewish leaders accepted the plan, Arab leaders **declared war**.

History of the Conflict - 1967 **Six Day War and Aftermath**

- After the **1948 war**, **Gaza** was under **Egyptian** control and the **West Bank** was annexed by **Jordan.** Palestinian national identity grew during this time.
- **Border clashes and terrorist attacks** increased Israeli-Arab tensions in the 1960s. In **1967**, **Egypt, Jordan and Syria** massed troops on Israel's borders.
- **Israel** launched **preemptive strikes** in June 1967, starting the **Six Day War**. Israel **captured** the **West Bank, Gaza, Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula.**
- **UN Resolution 242** called for Israeli withdrawal from **occupied territories** in exchange for peace. **Israel** began establishing **settlements in the occupied zones**.
- Palestinian nationalist groups like the **PLO** conducted **high-profile terror** attacks against Israel in the **1970s-1980s**. Israel invaded **Lebanon** to counter the PLO.

History of the Conflict - **First Intifada and Oslo Accords** (1987-2000)

- In **1987**, simmering tensions **exploded** with the start of the **First Intifada** - a Palestinian mass uprising against Israeli rule in the territories.
- The uprising included **civil disobedience**, **strikes**, boycotts of Israeli products. Israel responded with **military force**, arrests and **crackdowns**.
- In **1993**, secret negotiations led to the **Oslo Accords** between **Israel** and the **PLO**. This established the **Palestinian Authority** with **limited** self-governance.
- A **framework** was laid out for future **negotiations** on final status issues like borders, **settlements** and **Jerusalem**. But the issues remained **unresolved**.
- Oslo intended as an **interim** agreement, but **failed** to bring about a **comprehensive** final **peace** agreement. **Violence** resumed in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

History of the Conflict - **Second Intifada and Hamas** (2000-2024)

- The **Second Intifada** erupted in **2000** after the **failure** of the **Camp David** peace talks. This included **suicide bombings**, **rocket attacks**, and clashes.
- Israel **re-occupied** much of the West Bank, began constructing a **separation barrier**, and imposed **strict security** measures.
- **Hamas** grew out of **Muslim Brotherhood** in 1987 during First Intifada, dedicated to **Israel's destruction**, grew in popularity . In 2007, Hamas **forcibly** took full control of Gaza from Fatah in a **quasi-civil war**, splitting Palestinian leadership geographically. It engaged in militant activities and rocket attacks on Israel.
- **In response**, Israel imposed a **blockade** on Gaza and conducted **military operations** there in 2008-2009, 2012, and 2014. **Numerous** civilian deaths occurred.

History of the Conflict - Second Intifada and Hamas (2000-2024)

- Israel **withdrew** settlements and **troops** from **Gaza** in 2005, but maintained control of its **airspace and coastline**, essentially **imposing an ongoing blockade**.
- **Israeli settlement** growth **continued** in the **West Bank** during the 2000s-2010s, establishing "**facts on the ground**" and **complicating** potential peace deals.
- The Palestinian Authority pursued international recognition of statehood and diplomatic pressure against Israel's occupation policies.
- **Various peace talks** have failed to produce agreements (**Annapolis** in 2007, **Kerry talks** 2013-2014).
- The **terrorist** attack by **Hamas** on **October 7th 2023** and subsequent **invasion** of Gaza to **destroy** Hamas will definitely reduce the chances of agreement and peace for the foreseeable future.

Gaza War 2023-2024

As of **January 27, 2024**, the war between Israel and Gaza has resulted in over **26,000** deaths, more than **64,400** injuries, and many missing people. Israeli military officials have reported that at least **220** soldiers have died during the ground invasion of Gaza. This is not counting the **1200+ victims** and countless **hostages** of Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on October 7 2023.

Israel has fought **15** wars/operations against the Gaza Strip since **1948**.

Israel–Hamas war

- Gaza Strip under Palestinian control
- Gaza Strip under Israeli control
- Evacuated areas inside Israel
- Areas inside Gaza Strip ordered to be evacuated by Israel
- Maximum extent of Palestinian advance

0   2.5   5   7.5   10   12.5   15 km

Gaza why?

- The **divided** Palestinian politics between **Fatah** and **Hamas** along with Israel's **restrictions** have left Gaza **isolated**.
- Fatah is committed in principle to a **two-state** solution, though with maximalist demands. Hamas **refuses** to recognize Israel and endorses **violence** against it. Lack of strategic unity undermines peace efforts.
- **Role of diaspora** - Millions of Palestinians live abroad, some espousing a "**right to return**." Their demands are sometimes more **uncompromising** than those living in the territories.
- **Loss of faith** in peace process - After years of failed negotiations and continued **settlement** growth, many **doubt** a two-state solution remains viable. But no appealing alternative has emerged.
- **Hamas** is a **proxy Iranain group** imposing **hardline Islamist** policies in Gaza, this has created a **failed state** on the border of Israel.