2.3 Tensions in Southwest Asia

Maps and Graphs

Main Idea Israelis and Palestinians have struggled over issues of land, self-rule, and security for many years.

Current tensions in Southwest Asia have a long history. Complicated matters of land, security, and **self-rule**, or the government of a country by its own people, are critical issues for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Founding Modern Israel

After World War I, many territories once ruled by the Ottomans became spheres of European rule. The area of present-day Jordan, Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip was placed under British control and named the British Mandate. Many Jews immigrated there, joining already established Jewish communities. An increased Jewish presence caused resentment among Palestinian Arabs.

The experience of the Holocaust during World War II prompted the United Nations (UN) to create a state for the Jewish people. In 1947, the UN voted to divide the British Mandate into two states: Arab and Jewish. Surrounding Arab countries and the Palestinian Arabs rejected the state offered by the UN. The Jews accepted the UN plan and in 1948 declared Israel an independent state.

Immediately, six Arab countries—Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon—declared war against Israel. Before the war, many Palestinian Arabs fled to neighboring countries or to Arab towns in the West Bank. Israel won the war, and Egypt and Jordan took control of much of what the UN had proposed for an Arab state.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders meet to negotiate peace in 1993.

A series of Arab-Israeli wars followed for the next several decades. During these wars, the Arab states threatened or attacked Israel, and Israel defended itself. During the 1960s, Palestinian leaders created the **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)**. At the time, the PLO wanted to create a Palestinian state in place of Israel.

Israelis and Palestinians Today

In 1987, Palestinians launched an **intifada**, or mass uprising. Palestinians protested—sometimes violently—against Israeli control of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In the 1990s, leaders of Israel, Arab countries, and the Palestinians began peace talks. Israel agreed to give the Palestinians self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Palestinians agreed to recognize Israel's right to exist and to renounce terrorism and violence. However, Palestinian terrorism against Israelis increased. Israel withdrew completely from the Gaza Strip and turned over control of much of the West Bank to the Palestinians.

Efforts toward peace stalled, however. Israelis and Palestinians could not agree on several issues—especially **Jerusalem**. Israel's capital is Jerusalem, but Palestinians also want to establish East Jerusalem as their capital. Tensions over the collapse of the peace process led to a second intifada in 2000. In response to the violence, in 2002, Israel began building a security barrier along the boundary between Israel and the West Bank. Permits are required to pass through the checkpoints along the barrier, which divides many workers from their workplaces and people from basic services. In ten years, the barrier had reduced, but not ended, violence.

ISRAEL POLITICAL

MAP TIP Palestinians have self-rule in the Gaza Strip and limited rule in the West Bank. The permanent status of these areas is undecided.

Palestinians still desire a state. Israelis still desire security. World leaders are helping work toward a peaceful solution but progress is slow.

Before You Move On
Make Inferences What issues divide Israelis and Palestinians?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

MAP LAB   GeoJournal

1. **Interpret Maps** Locate Israel on the map. Explain the significance of its location.
2. **Make Inferences** Find the Gaza Strip and the West Bank on the map. How might the location of these territories present challenges for Palestinian self-rule?
3. **Movement** In what ways is movement restricted among people who live in Israel and the West Bank?