Arab Israeli Conflict

Players

Israel's responsibility **Israel, as a country, can be held responsible for the absence of peace in the Middle East insofar as its role in combination with other key players of the conflict is considered.**
Israel's fault

1. Israel is the main culprit of the politics of dispossession
   a. Israel has consistently denied Palestinians the right to return.
      i. This is best exemplified by how Israel, in its **Declaration of Independence of 1948**, declared that it is a "Jewish and Democratic state", an active effort on their part to exclude and alienate both Jews and Arabs from their state.
   b. Most importantly however, would be Israel's seemingly **hypocritical** stance. Israel affirms the right of Jews to come to Israel, but not the right of Palestinian return **despite the UNSCR 194 in 1948.**
      i. The rationale was that of Israel being **unwilling to lose the Jewish character** of the state, given that the permanent return of **3.5 million** Palestinians in a state of **6 million** Jews would lead to a demographic shift that the Jewish government did not want to contend with.
   c. As a result, any peace settlements aimed at settling the Middle East situation and bringing peace to the region has been impeded by this **fundamental denial of Palestinian rights**.
   d. Even the most arguably successful peace settlement, the Oslo Accords of 1993, was only successful by avoiding addressing this issue. A United Nations General Assembly Resolution passed in 1969 states that the "problem of Palestinian Arab refugees arises from the **denial of their inalienable rights** under the charter of the United Nations and the United Declaration of Human Rights".
   e. The Israeli denial of the Palestinian right of return has displaced an entire population, and has resulted in the rise of Palestinian and Arab opposition – all a result and manifestation of the crux of the issue.
2. Israel has also consistently refused to compromise, most notably on a 2-state solution.
   a. Israel has wanted to **increase the size of her country** to the point that a 2-state solution is virtually impossible, so much so that **they refused to hand over the Occupied Territories (OTs) even with UNSCR 242.**
   b. However, it should be noted that the resolution fails to include the word all, implying that Israel could possibly have the option of not returning the OTs at all.
   c. Arab states have, however, **continually interpreted the resolution as the return of all territories, resulting in a stalemate**.
   d. Israel's main parties and their inability to stand up to them has also contributed to their refusal to compromise due to Israel being a **hung parliament**.
   e. **Gush Emunim**, a right-wing activist movement that was **highly influential** in the National Religious Party, even issued a **Jewish Law** for settlers to **resist evacuation** and IDF withdrawal orders, contributing to the **ultimate failure of the Oslo Accords**.
   f. Prominent Israeli politicians who have seemingly enabled a compromise to be reached with the Palestinians have also faced massive backlash, as evidenced by **Yitzak Rabin's assassination due to him signing the Oslo Accords**.
   g. Israel's refusal to compromise can be seen on two levels – internally and externally. With this staunch refusal, the Middle East has been marked by instability and conflict.

However, Israel is not alone in prolonging this conflict. John Kennedy once said that "the removal of Israel would not alter the basic crisis in the area… the **basic rivalries within the Arab world**, the quarrels over boundaries, the tensions involved in lifting their economies from stagnation, the cross pressures of nationalism – all of these factors would still be there, even if there was no Israel". Ultimately, any argument must acknowledge the **alternative forces at play, and acknowledge that Israel is not solely to blame**.

1. Palestinians bear some responsibility
   a. The Palestinians themselves are not purely victims.
   b. They have long held onto uncompromising goals, including the **ultimate destruction of Israel.**
   c. Even moderate secular groups, the **PLO**, **refuse to accept and negotiate with Israel**, what more the hardline groups surfacing.
   d. The **Palestine National Charter of 1968** states that the **"Partition of Palestine in 1947 and the establishment of Israel are entirely illegal".**
   e. Islamic fundamentalists, even more so, refuse to accept and negotiate with the state of Israel, with their ultimate goal to destroy Israel as a state.
      i. **The Hamas Covenant of 1988** states that Israel will exist and continue to exist **until Islam will obliterate it**.
      ii. Ultimately, this level of **extreme hostility** can be seen as a **justification of Israel's denial of the right to return**, given that Palestinian organisations, as they are now, might constitute security threats.
   f. Palestinian's obstinacy in achieving their end goal, eliminating Israel, is undoubtedly a strong factor in the lack of peace in the Middle East**.**
2. The Arab World is also not without blame.
   a. The Arabs have continually maintained an **aggressive** and **almost inflexible stance** with regard to the state of Israel, with the constant attacking of the state, be it rhetorical or literal.
   b. The best example of this would be Arab leaders having an aggressive stance, with **Nasser even stating "the State of Israel is Satan's offspring".**
   c. This translates into the **concrete refusal** to negotiate and accept Israel, as seen in the **Khartoum Resolution of 1967**, which declared that the Arab states would have **'no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel'**.
   d. This results in little chance for proper negotiations and agreements to bring peace to the Middle East.
   e. Furthermore, this has resulted in **extensive violence**, with the **1973 Yom Kippur war** a prime example of this, **with Arab states viewing war as the only legitimate way to regain territory**. Ultimately, this makes peaceful compromise almost impossible with the overwhelming hostility of the Arab States.
3. The role external factors, Cold War factions especially, into consideration. The Cold War superpowers notoriously **placed strategic interest before peace**, **militarizing** the area, and thus increasing tensions.
   a. The USSR provided **arms and military support** to Egypt and Syria, as well as **intelligence** in 1967, which **led to the Six Day War.**
   b. The USA armed and funded Israel, ensuring its survival, and strengthening its resolve to not compromise. The USA has frequently **vetoed UN resolutions that criticise and pressurize Israel, especially so in the 1980s**.
      i. This not only **prevented the UN from acting as an effective peace bro**ker, but also limited any chances of a successful peace agreement.
4. However, external forces have also been a force for stability and peace.
   a. The **1956 Suez Canal Crisis** was stopped due to external pressures applied by both the USA and the USSR, with the **USA threatening to sell British bonds**, forcing them to end the crisis.
   b. In the **War of Attrition in the 1970s** as well, the U**S and USSR met for two power and four power talks** that **culminated in Israel and Egypt coming together in a ceasefire**.
   c. Other notable external players would be **Norway, who brokered the Oslo Accords of 1993** that led to a formal acknowledgement of the authority of both Israel and Palestinian governments.

External powers have definitely played a heavy hand in the dealings of the Middle East, and a contradictory one at that – escalating the conflict, but at other times being a force for compromise and peace.

Conclusion

Ultimately, placing the blame solely on Israel would be blind and narrow-minded. The lack of peace in the Middle East should be seen as the **interplay of hostilities and anger from multiple parties**. Arguably, Israel has good reason to be worried due to the hostility of the Arab world and the unpredictability of the Palestinians. Furthermore, the **overlay of external powers** makes the Middle East even more instable. The Arab-Israeli problem is **fundamentally political**, and a **political compromise between all parties is required that addresses the root issues** instead of fringe issues and manifestations. Whilst Israel is undoubtedly responsible for the lack of peace in the middle east, solely blaming Israel without examining other players would be naïve and overly simplistic.

Who was more to blame: Arabs or Israelis?

In pursuing their **uncompromising agendas** through equally uncompromising means, both Israel and the Arabs engaged in a **vicious cycle of action and reaction** that made the conflict all the more **intractable** and brought about immense regional and international implications.

While the Arabs can be blamed for **directly instigating** the four wars in the Middle East and for their later participation in religious militant movements, ultimately, **Israel's siege mentality** and being **unremittingly unwilling to give up land** for the prospect of peace had eliminated any possibility of conflict resolution by 2000.

Both uncompromising in territorial claim over Palestine

1. Israel uncompromising
   a. First, the **very creation of Israel in 1948** was the **catalyst** for conflict in the Middle East.
   b. After World War II, the Jewish diaspora finally realized the **Zionist** dream of a secular Jewish homeland – defined in both religious and ethnic terms – with the United Nations' partition of British-occupied Palestine into Jewish and Arab sections in 1947.
   c. However, this caused the **dispossession of 3.5 million Palestinians**; this issue was arguably the central, fundamental problem that, left unaddressed, formed a basis for other layers of conflict that emerged later.
   d. By making an **uncompromising claim to lands that formed *Eretz* Israel, which included Palestine**, and affirming the right of Jews to claim Israeli citizenship through the *Law of Return*, **Israel had undermined the Palestinians'** *Right of Return* to their homeland and tangibly alienated the Palestinians in a phenomenon dubbed *al nakhba*.
      i. These people lived as refugees within Israel, such as in the contentious Occupied Territories of Gaza and the West Bank.
      ii. Until 1993, Israel continued to denounce Palestinian resistance groups and political organisations such as the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as 'terrorists', making conflict resolution through negotiation all the more impossible.
2. Arab equally uncompromising claim to the same piece of land
   a. In addition to feeling sympathetic towards the plight of the Palestinians, the **Arabs viewed Israel through religious lenses** and were hostile towards the new state.
   b. Created by the West and dubbed **a 'satanic offspring'**, Israel was culturally and historically disparate from its Arab neighbours – **an alien intrusion in a largely Islamic region**.
   c. If Israel could be blamed for not recognising the Palestinians, Arab states can also be blamed for refusing to recognise Israel diplomatically.
   d. The First Arab-Israeli War of 1948 began with **invasion of Israel by armies** from states such as Egypt and Syria, and Arab acrimony would continue to manifest itself in armed conflict in 1967 and 1973 and through military and financial support to anti-Israel groups such as the PLO. The **Khartoum Resolution (1967),** agreed upon by the Arab states, contained "Three No's": no peace, no recognition and no negotiation with Israel.
   e. Until 1993, Palestinian nationalists such as the **PLO** affirmed **constitutionally** that they **sought to destroy Israel** and refused to renounce their use of violence.
   f. Beyond creating more conflict, the **violent means and uncompromising stance** of the Arabs themselves reduced the chances of conflict resolution by **contributing to Israeli insecurity**.
      i. Israel's unwillingness to give up any territory they occupied for any prospect of peace could be partially justified under these **extenuating circumstances**; Israel's existence as a sovereign state was threatened by the states surrounding it.

3. Both
   a. As the issue of **two opposing claims** to the same piece of land went unresolved, conflict in the Middle East continued to the fault of both the Israelis and Arabs, who were **equally uncompromising** in their **aims and methods** used to achieve these aims.
   b. Both parties can be blamed for their **failure to engage in diplomatic negotiations** that would resolve the conflict.
   c. The 1978 Camp David Accords was, significantly, the first diplomatic recognition between Israel and an Arab state – **Egypt**, no less, considered to be the leader of the Arab world – but **achieved little in real term**s as it only saw the **return of Sinai**, one of many territories that Israel occupied, to Egypt.

Both perpetuated regional conflict in pursuit of domestic political, security and economic agendas

1. Arabs' domestic political agenda: Arab nationalism and 'Nasserism' as a force against Israel
   a. In the 1940s and 1950s, many Arab states were **undemocratic**, authoritarian security states.
   b. Being hostile towards Israel was a **convenient way** of deflecting criticism towards unpopular regimes and **rallying the masses' support**.
   c. In particular, Gamal Nasser, who became the President of Egypt in 1956, **used anti-Israel sentiment as part of his plans for self-aggrandisement** in a bid for his own leadership of the Arab world.
      i. Nasser's leadership after he helmed the 1952 Egyptian Revolution represented the **promise of Arab renewal**, revival and resurgence after years of humiliating colonial rule.
      ii. Nasser vilified Israel, which benefited from being politically and militarily supported by the West, while taking steps to create a **united pan-Arab front** through signing military pacts with Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen.
2. Pan-Arabism
   a. In 1956, Nasser sparked off another armed conflict with the Suez Crisis.
   b. Feeling that **Arab sovereignty was being undermined** by foreign control over the Suez Canal, Nasser **nationalised** these shipping lanes, which incited Israel, Britain and France to invade Egypt.
   c. Though the Suez Crisis had little to do with two conflicting claims to the same piece of land and largely concerned Nasser's nationalist ambitions, it **created more armed conflict** in the Middle East that had **great regional and international implications**.
   d. The two subsequent wars – the **Six Day War (1967)** and **Yom Kippur War (1973)** – can also be seen as **manifestations of Arab nationalist sentiment**, as they wanted to **regain the territory** that had been lost to the Israelis and **make up for the humiliation of defeat** in the previous war.
      i. Notably, the **Arabs had launched the first offensive** in 1967 and 1973, feeling confident both about the growing pan- Arab movement and the fact that they were equipped with Soviet military hardware.

As such, it can be argued that the **Arabs were to blame for perpetuating armed conflict in pursuit of their own agendas** and, specifically, accounted for when and how the wars broke out.

However, the Israelis were arguably **more responsible for why the wars broke** out and ultimately, why the conflict still **persisted**. Israel's greatest contribution to the perpetuation of conflict was prioritising its own security concerns over conflict resolution, as seen through its **refusal to return land** captured during the wars. Not only did the Israelis **leave little room for a two-state compromise**, they also **motivated** the Arabs to continue waging armed conflict and **precipitated the emergence of militant Islam**.

3. Israel's siege mentality, refusal to give up territories
   a. Israel's siege mentality could have been justified by the fact that their hostile Arab neighbours had consistently showed that they were willing to act on their antipathy.
   b. However, since the Six Day War in 1967, the **Israeli state had already captured a large majority of disputed territories; that the Israeli state's existence was truly under threat from 1967 onwards ought to be questioned**.

c. In 1948, Israel **increased its territory 55%** of Historic Palestine **to 78%** in the First Arab-Israeli War at the expense of the Palestinian state, in spite of the UN's earlier delineations.

d. Additionally, after the 1967 War, Israel had **captured East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza Strip and refused to return it despite UN Resolution 242** that called for the 'withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied'.

e. In so doing, Israel had further **pushed the Arabs to engage in more armed conflict**. It must be noted that in 1956, 1967 and 1973, the **outcome of the previous war had laid the foundations for the next;** though the Arabs were at fault for instigating these wars, **Israel's unremitting refusal to return Arab land** that they captured made conflict resolution difficult.

f. Though Israel did **return Sinai to Egypt after signing the 1978 Camp David Accords**, the Israelis had, from the onset, expanded their state to a point where a two-state compromise was all but impossible.

g. Even with the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords that called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from parts of the Occupied Territories**, Israel still maintained a military presence and made only partial concessions to the Palestinians.**

h. Israel's retention of these Occupied Territories **prolonged Palestinian dispossession**, which partially accounted for the **rise of militant Islam in the 1980s** with the emergence of groups such as **Hamas** in response to the p**erceived failure of secular organisations to fight for the Palestinian cause**.

   i. The **radical, uncompromising** stance adopted by these groups made conflict increasingly **insoluble** as they employed **violence** and extreme measures such as suicide bombings and Molotov cocktails to achieve their religious aims, as seen during the **First Intifada in 1987**.

   ii. The new generation of Palestinians who had lived as refugees in Israeli-occupied lands viewed the conflict primarily through a religious lens; they were fighting a *jihad* (holy war) and the **Israeli occupation was a form of oppression against Islam**.

i. While the Arabs can be blamed for perpetuating conflict in the Middle East through direct participation in these movements and supporting their development, it can be argued that the **protracted dispossession of Palestinian refugees** brought about by **Israel's refusal to give up the Occupied Territories** had facilitated the emergence of this layer of conflict.

4. Israel's heavy-handed reprisals to security threats

   a. Beyond contributing to existing armed conflict, Israel had **fuelled Arab insecurity** and caused greater anti-Israeli sentiment.

      i. In 1982, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin used an **alleged attempt to assassinate Israeli's ambassador to the United Kingdom as the pretext for an invasion of Lebanon**.

      ii. Israeli forces occupied Southern Lebanon until **1990**, establishing a **pro-Israeli Christian government** after attac**king the PLO and Lebanese and Syrian Muslim forces**.

      iii. This incident hardened Arab attitudes towards the Israelis and, once again, precipitated the emergence of militant Islamist groups, most notably the *Hezbollah*.

      iv. During the **1987 Intifada**, Israel deployed some **80,000 soldiers** to suppress the militant Islamist groups, over **300 Palestinian lives** were lost, while only **12** Israelis were killed. The **disproportionately harsh methods** employed by Israel to deter aggressors made them difficult to trust and work with and had a destabilising effect on the Middle East.

5. Israel's prioritization of domestic economic and political interests

   a. The West Bank and Gaza Strip have provided a **pool of cheap labour** for the Israeli economy, and Israel receives **more than half of its water** – a **scarce commodity in the Middle East** – from occupied Arab territories.

   b. Furthermore, Israeli politicians have taken a **hardline stance against Palestine** in a bid for political stability. With a proportional representation system of voting, the larger parties

| | would have been unable to form governments without the support of smaller right-wing religious parties, who felt strongly for the Jewish cause. |

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the Arabs account for **when and how major armed conflict broke out** in the region during the wars of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 due to **Arab leaders' pursuit of domestic political agendas** and can be held responsible for their support towards militant religious movements, Israel remains largely responsible for **why** conflict in the Middle East was **unresolved by 2000**. As the party that **retained most of the disputed territories since 1967**, the ball was in Israel's court. Its **refusal to return the Occupied Territories in the interest of security, heavy-handed responses to potential threats and failure to fulfill the terms of agreements** such as the 1993 Oslo Accords made a two-state compromise or conflict resolution all but impossible, and even contributed towards the rise of militant religious movements. On another note, it must also be acknowledged that other powers such as the United States and Soviet Union had also **interfered in the conflict to suit their own interests** and can be criticised for not doing enough to conclude it.

From 1947-2000, have forces from outside the region been more a cause of stability than instability in the Middle East?
These foreign forces have caused more instability than stability and must take some degree of responsibility for perpetuating the conflict and making a resolution even more difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, it would be undeniable that at certain points of the conflict such powers were capable of providing stability and preventing further disputes in the region.

External forces have been a force of stability

1. United States has been an important peacekeeper at crucial points of the conflict, and therefore, at times, been a source of stability.
   a. Suez Crisis of 1956: US played an important role in resolving the conflict and enforcing a ceasefire.
      i. Eisenhower administration was critical of the actions of the British and French who felt threatened by Nasser's nationalization of the canal and in their bid to protect their shipping lanes, seized its immediate areas.
      ii. The US not only forced the British and the French to accept the ceasefire, but voted for UN resolutions publicly condemning the invasion, effectively ending the war.
   b. Camp David Accords 1978
      i. President, Jimmy Carter, invited the leaders of Egypt and Israel to Camp David to discuss a possible peace treaty – eventually materializing as the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty 1979.
      ii. The US crucially took the opportunity to **initiate** these talks as they sensed a change in attitude in Egypt towards the conflict and made such a peace treaty possible. It was the first time an Arab state (Egypt), especially one with such a huge army and influence, **had made an agreement with Israel and openly accepted its right to exist**, and this would impact the conflict in a major way. Peace between the two was established and persists to this day.
      iii. More importantly, without Egypt, the biggest Arab power, Syria and the rest of the Arab states were no longer able to fight for their lost territory and the Palestinian cause, putting a conclusive end to the violent wars fought in that period between the combined Arab states and Israel.
2. Norwegians must be credited for their role in initiating the 1993 Oslo Accords
   a. Rabin and Arafat reached an agreement that would involve the **withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and West Bank and the establishment of a Palestinian Authority**.
   b. The accords also pushed the **PLO to drop its principle point of charter: The denial of the right of Israel to exist**.
   c. The outside power here was certainly a cause of stability, one that sensed the change in attitudes of the respective leaders and pushed to see concrete outcomes of this shift.

However, the same events can be analyzed differently to prove otherwise – that external forces were, in fact, a force of instability.

1. Camp David Accords 1978 only brought peace to Egypt and Israel, but crux of conflict that involves Palestinians still remains unresolved – peace between Palestinians and Israelis still far from sight.
   a. Focus of conflict simply shifted from Arab-Israeli to Israeli-Palestinian one
   b. Egypt's actions seen as betrayal, cemented view of Palestinians that they could not rely on their Arab neighbours to champion their cause
2. Oslo Accords 1993 – agreement was flawed
   a. Despite committing itself to 'implement a total of three redeployments from West Bank by mid-1997, the second and third withdrawals have yet to take place a full year after the mutually agreed deadline' [Rubner].
   b. The accords therefore led to a decline in influence of the secular PLO as well as an increase in support for the radical Hamas that condemned them for signing the accords.

Both accords thus contributed to shift in mindset with Palestinians turning to more radical brand of politics – religious fundamentalism – after the failure of secular organizations to triumph their cause. Religious subtext has made peace harder to achieve, making them more uncompromising in their cause.

3. US peacekeeping role in 1956 Suez Crisis undeniable, but roles of British and French cannot be overlooked.
   a. British and French partly responsible for causing the war – sided with Israel in its confrontation with Nasser
   b. Sustained the conflict by perpetuating the view that Israel was a foreign presence (given its substantial foreign backing by UK, US, French)
4. Limited success of the UN
   a. Has passed many resolutions but has failed in getting Israel to adopt them → failed to be effective force of stability
   b. Resolution 194 after 1948 Arab-Israeli war
   c. Resolution 242 after 1967 Six Day War calling for withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories occupied in recent conflict → both resolutions failed to be implemented
5. Provision of arms and funding has exacerbated and escalated the conflict, militarizing it and making the conflict more violent
   a. In pursuit of Cold War interests – USSR has supported Arab states while US has backed Israel
   b. Arab states equipped with Soviet military hardware → confident enough to launch 1967 Six Day War; 300 surface-to-air missiles, 21,000 Soviet advisers
   c. Israel received substantial funding from US especially in Yom Kippur War 1973
   d. As a result of foreign aid, neither side saw the need for conflict resolution
6. Britain's role in allowing conflict to escalate
   a. Refusal to assume responsibility in implementing UN partition plan because it was unwilling to provide the necessary resources required to enforce it
   b. Withdrawal in 1948 meant that there would be no mediator to restrain the contending parties