



Origins of conflict

Independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem. . . shall come into existence in Palestine two months after the evacuation of the armed forces of the mandatory Power has been completed but in any case not later than 1 October 1948.

—U.N. General Assembly
Resolution 181 (II)
Concerning the Future Government
of Palestine, 20 November 1947

The origins of today's Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be extricated from the early decades of this century, the 1920s and '30s. At that time, most people understood that there were two

Arab states. The Palestinians were left demoralized, scattered, and without a voice.

Political Zionism, greatly aided by sympathies stemming from the horrors of Hitler's Holocaust and Western colonial attitudes, had triumphed in a larger part of Palestine than specified under the 1947 partition plan. Essentially, delayed civil war had erupted in Palestine after World War II and has flared up repeatedly ever since.

An uneasy diplomatic accommodation brought a shaky armistice in 1949. Through complex and secret negotiations with the Jews, the Hashemite throne—then in control of the area east of the Jordan River—annexed what was to become known as the West Bank; and Egypt found itself in control of what was to be called the Gaza Strip, an area already teeming with camps of destitute refugees who had fled their villages in Palestine.

During the 1950s, under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt showed signs of wanting to strike a deal with Israel, as long as a reasonable arrangement could be found for the Palestinian people. At that time, a deal,

delusive, Pan-Arabism, and the notion of compromise between two national movements was replaced by a seemingly zero-sum outlook allowing for only one victor. Both Jews and Palestinians now feared more than they dreamed.

For the Jews, there were recurring nightmares of a repetition of the Nazi era, as well as aspirations for more territory. Yet there also was Judah Magnes's moral admonition, a kind of open psychological wound gnawing at Zionism's roots. For the Arab states, there was the humiliation born of the existence of a sovereign Jewish state that had humbled and alienated them. And for the Palestinian refugees—displaced and numbed by the loss of their homes—there was the expected "Return" for which they longed and to which they have continued to cling in an expectation of eventual justice.

With U.N. Security Council resolution 242, coming in the aftermath of the Six-Day War in June 1967, the Palestinian national question remained submerged, while the inter-state aspects of the struggle climaxed. Leaderless, the Palestinians were left hoping that the Arab world would somehow, someday,



Mark Bruzonsky with Anwar Sadat, November 14, 1977, arranging for the first telegram ever sent from the Arab world to Israel. This picture appeared on the front page of most Egyptian newspapers.