



INTERNATIONAL

# WAR BREAKS OUT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

– HAMAS LAUNCHES SURPRISE ATTACK ON ISRAEL



War broke out in the Middle East in October. The violence was centred in and around the Gaza Strip. That's a thin ribbon of Palestinian territory 41 kilometres long and 10 kilometres wide.

Gaza is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Egypt to the south, and Israel to the north and east. It is home to 2.2 million people. That makes it one of the most densely populated regions in the world.

## A SURPRISE ATTACK

The Gaza Strip is controlled by Hamas, a political and military group. Hamas is considered a terrorist group by Canada, the United States, the European Union and many other nations because it has pledged to destroy Israel.

On October 7, Hamas launched thousands of deadly rockets

into Israel. Israel was caught off guard by the attack. Next, Hamas gunmen breached a fence surrounding Gaza, then rolled into southern Israeli towns and **kibbutzes**. There, they slaughtered 1400 civilians and soldiers, including 260 young people attending a music festival. At least five Canadians died in the surprise assault. The militants also took over 200 people **hostage**. Children and the elderly were among them.

## THE WORLD REACTS

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau strongly condemned Hamas's actions. Germany, Japan, Ukraine and other nations also denounced Hamas and supported Israel's right to defend itself. U.S. President Joe Biden said the raid was "sheer evil."

## ISRAEL RESPONDS

Israel immediately declared war on Hamas. The Israeli

Defense Forces (IDF) called up 360,000 **reservists**. Then Israel bombarded Gaza with airstrikes. The objective was to destroy Hamas military targets. However, hundreds of residential buildings were also damaged or destroyed. Photos show whole swaths of Gaza reduced to rubble and ash.

On October 17, the violence escalated. A bomb landed near a hospital in Gaza. It killed at least 100 civilians. Hamas blamed Israel for the incident. U.S. and Israeli officials said that evidence showed a rocket launched against Israel had malfunctioned. However, that hasn't been confirmed by impartial sources.

By October 22, over 5000 Palestinians had been killed. Another 13,561 had been injured. Many were women and children. Israeli casualties were mostly

## DEFINITIONS

**HOSTAGE:** a person captured and held prisoner who may be harmed if people do not do what the captor demands

**KIBBUTZ:** a type of farm or factory in Israel where people live together and share all the work, decisions, and income

**RESERVIST:** part-time soldier who returns to active duty on command





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limited to those killed in the initial raid. Another 4600 were wounded during the attack.

## NO WAY OUT!

Soon after the bombing campaign began, the IDF signalled it intended to mount a **ground offensive** in Gaza.

Israeli troops and military equipment began massing at the Gaza border in mid-October. Israeli officials warned one million Palestinians in northern Gaza to evacuate.

But the Gazans had nowhere to go. Israel has **blockaded** the Palestinian territory since 2007. The reason? It says Hamas poses a constant threat. For the same reason, Egypt maintains a blockade along the border it shares with Gaza, too. Some people call the Gaza Strip the world's largest open-air prison, since every exit is closed.

## GAZA'S GROWING CRISIS

After declaring war, Israel took the blockade a step further, and cut off Gaza's access to food, fuel, water, and aid. It said that it didn't want supplies diverted to Hamas, and warned it wouldn't restore access until all the hostages were freed.

These new restrictions added to the desperation that many Gazans were already facing. Even before the war broke out, over 80 percent of people in Gaza were living in poverty. Some 95 percent didn't have access to clean water. Half the population consists of **refugees** living in overcrowded camps. Their families were displaced when Israel was created in 1948.

## A GLIMMER OF HELP

Now the humanitarian crisis is worsening. Gaza hospitals were running dangerously low on the fuel needed to keep lifesaving machines going. Crucial drugs like insulin and heart pills were running out.

Then, on October 21, trucks filled with critical supplies began to trickle across Egypt's Rafah border into Gaza after U.S. diplomats struck an agreement with Israel. However, much more aid was needed. The United Nations (UN) warned that a public health catastrophe was taking place.

## WILL THE WAR SPREAD?

On October 27, IDF soldiers entered northern Gaza. They fought Hamas gunmen inside the tunnel network the militants

had built to counter the blockade and move weapons. Outside, bombing continued from the air.

Meanwhile, concern grew that the war could spill over into other nations. The reason? **Hezbollah** has been shelling towns on Israel's northern border from Lebanon, and Israel has been firing back.

## PLEADING FOR CALM

In response, the U.S. – Israel's top trading partner and ally – stationed military resources nearby. The move was meant to deter the war from spreading. The U.S. also wanted to emphasize its commitment to providing security assistance for Israel.

At the same time, the U.S. and other nations called for a break in the fighting so more aid could reach Gaza.

"Without...humanitarian relief, the conflict is much more likely to spread, suffering will grow, and Hamas and its sponsors will benefit by fashioning themselves as the saviours of the very desperation they created," stated U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. ★

## DEFINITIONS

**BLOCKADE:** the action of surrounding or closing a place in order to stop people or goods from coming in or out

**GROUND OFFENSIVE:** military action on land, using troops

**HEZBOLLAH:** a political and militant group based in Lebanon, considered to be a terrorist group by many western nations

**REFUGEE:** a person forced to leave their country or home because of war or for political, religious, or social reasons



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## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which territory did Hamas take control of in 2007? How many people live there?

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2. What type of organization do Canada and many other countries consider Hamas to be?

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3. What has Hamas pledged to do?

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4. Describe conditions in the Gaza Strip before the current war broke out.

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5. Describe the surprise attack Hamas launched against Israel in early October.

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6. How did Israel first respond to this attack?

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7. Describe the impact of Israel's initial response on Palestinians.

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8. What other measures did Israel take against Hamas?

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9. What did Israel advise residents living in northern Gaza to do?

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10. What is the purpose of the tunnel maze that Hamas has built in Gaza?

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## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. A group of experts from the United Nations has stated, *“There is no justification for violence that indiscriminately targets innocent civilians, whether by Hamas or Israeli forces. This is absolutely prohibited under international law and amounts to a war crime.”* What is your understanding of this statement? Respond to this quote. What thoughts does it provoke and what feelings does it evoke? Explain.

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2. The article explains that the Israeli and Egyptian blockades of Gaza since 2007 have led some observers to refer to the Gaza Strip as *“the world’s largest open-air prison”*. What do you imagine that life is like for Palestinians living under this blockade? Give reasons to support your ideas. What questions do you have about this situation?

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## QUESTIONS FOR ONLINE EXPLORATION

*Note:* The links below are listed at [www.lesplan.com/links](http://www.lesplan.com/links) for easy access.

1. Learn more about Hamas's attack and Israel's response:

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/frontburner/hamas-attacks-israel-declares-war-1.6991111> [20:11] (podcast)

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/israel-retaliates-after-surprise-attack-by-hamas-1.6990683>  
(photojournal)

What new information did you learn?

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2. Learn more about how the hostages taken during this conflict may impact the war's outcome and hear from one of the hostages who was released:

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2271408195652> [9:43]

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2276443715942> [8:00]

What did you find the most interesting?

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3. How are Hamas's tunnels being used during this conflict?

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2276469315752> [4:03]

What did you learn?

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4. Where is Gaza and what is life like there?

<https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=WChPpImsBxo> [7:49]

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5. News can be traumatizing. Here's how to cope:

[https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=moPv\\_SVwe1k](https://www.yout-ube.com/watch?v=moPv_SVwe1k) [7:04]

<https://kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/how-to-cope-with-upsetting-news-stories/>



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## YOUR TASK:

Examine the editorial cartoon, then answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper:

1. What do you *already know* about the cycle of violence in the Middle East involving Israelis and Palestinians, and the current war between Hamas and Israel? Explain.
2. Describe what you *see* and *read* in the cartoon.
3. As you see it, what might the cartoonist be saying about the current war between Hamas and Israel? Explain.
4. For what reasons do you agree with the cartoonist? For what reasons do you disagree? Explain. ★





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### INSTRUCTIONS

1. There are about 14.3 million Palestinians scattered across the globe but most live in the Middle East. About half reside in the territory of the former Mandatory Palestine (1920 - 1948). Some six million Palestinians are refugees and their descendants. Most live in camps and communities in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Visit: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinians#>

2. Use the link above to complete the two tables below to show where the largest number of Palestinians live.

Palestinian Territories and Israel

Location	Population
West Bank	
	2.2 million
Israel	
<b>Total</b>	

Palestinians Living Outside Israel

Location	Population	Location	Population
	2.2 million	Qatar	
Syria			
	500,000		200,000
		Lebanon	
		<b>Total</b>	

3. Plot a bar graph to show the number of Palestinians who live in the former Mandatory Palestine. Shade these three columns blue.

4. Plot a bar graph to show where other large numbers of Palestinians live. Shade Middle East countries red. Shade all others pink.

5. Label your graph with a proper title.

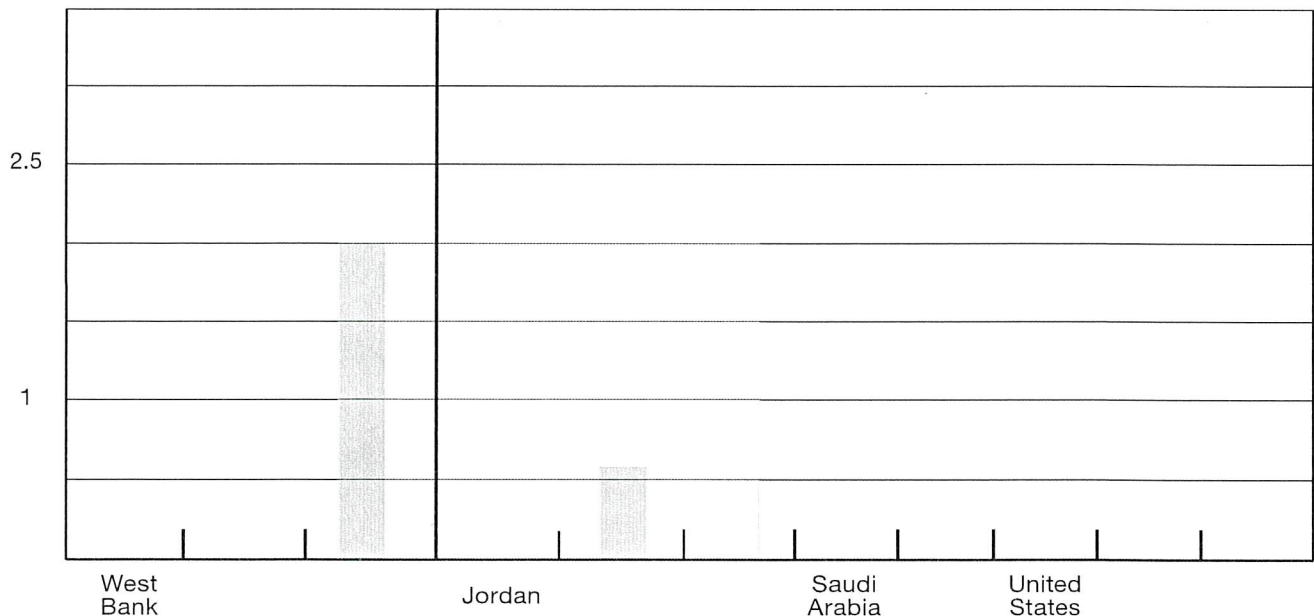
6. Carefully examine your graph. What observations can you make and what conclusions can you draw? ★

Million

Palestinian Territories and Israel blue

Middle East red

Other regions pink



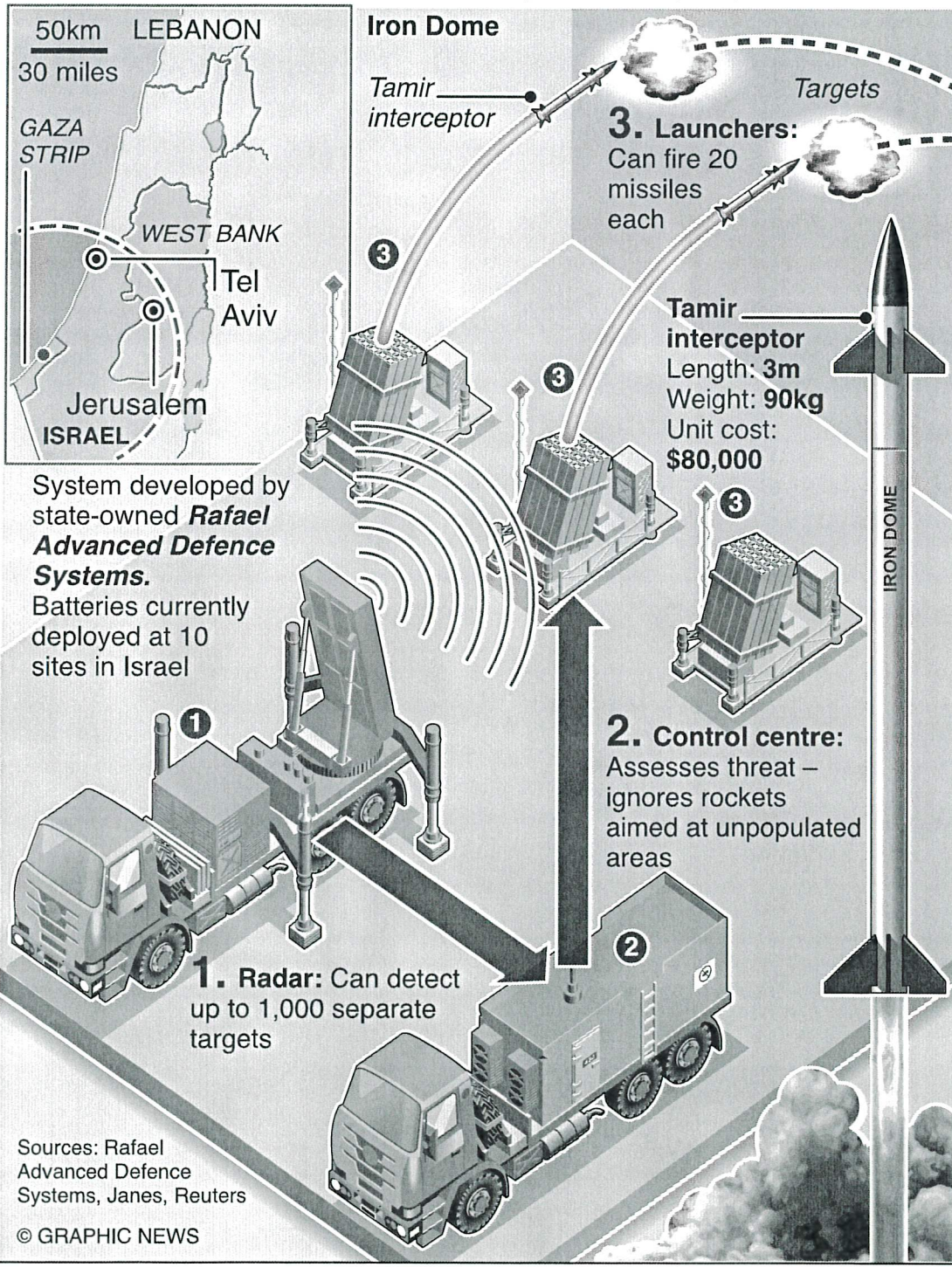




## INFOGRAPHIC

### Israel's Iron Dome air defence system

Designed to intercept short-range rockets fired from up to 70km away, mortars, artillery shells, and drones, Iron Dome consists of a radar, control centre and launchers, and costs \$50 million









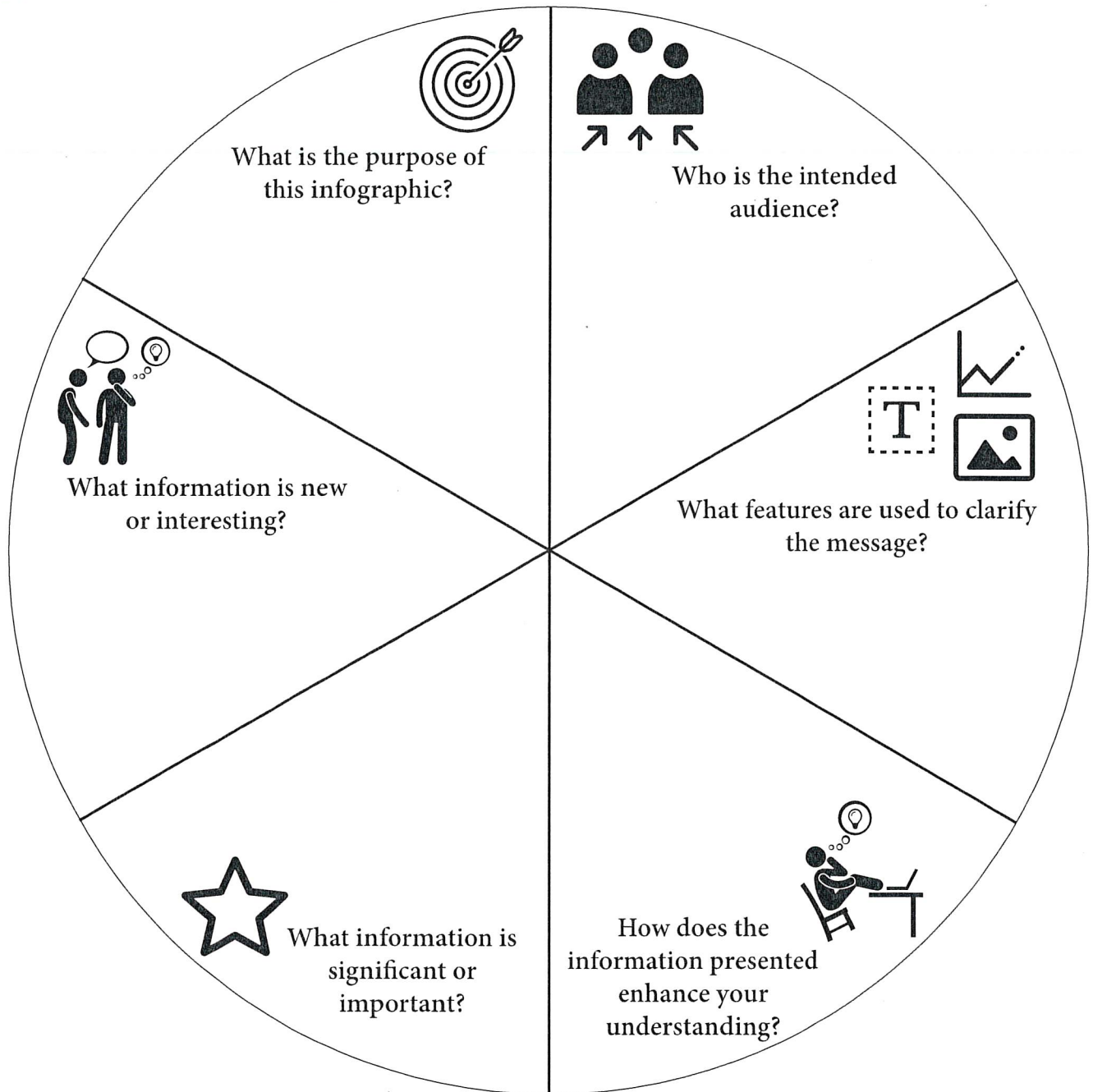


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## ANALYZING AN INFOGRAPHIC



What questions do you still have about the topic presented?

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## MAP ANALYSIS

Examine the accompanying map. Then, answer the following questions.

### A. Reading the map:

1. What is the title of this map?

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2. What is the purpose of this map?

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3. How are the cities, countries, and water bodies labelled?

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4. How are directions represented on the map? Give an example.

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5. How is distance shown on the map? Give an example.

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6. What is the capital of Israel?

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### B. Analyzing the map:

1. Describe the location of Israel relative to other features on the map. Aim for 5 to 10 descriptors. (E.g., *Israel is located to the south of Lebanon.*)

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2. In what ways does this map help you to better understand the context of the war between Hamas and Israel? Explain.

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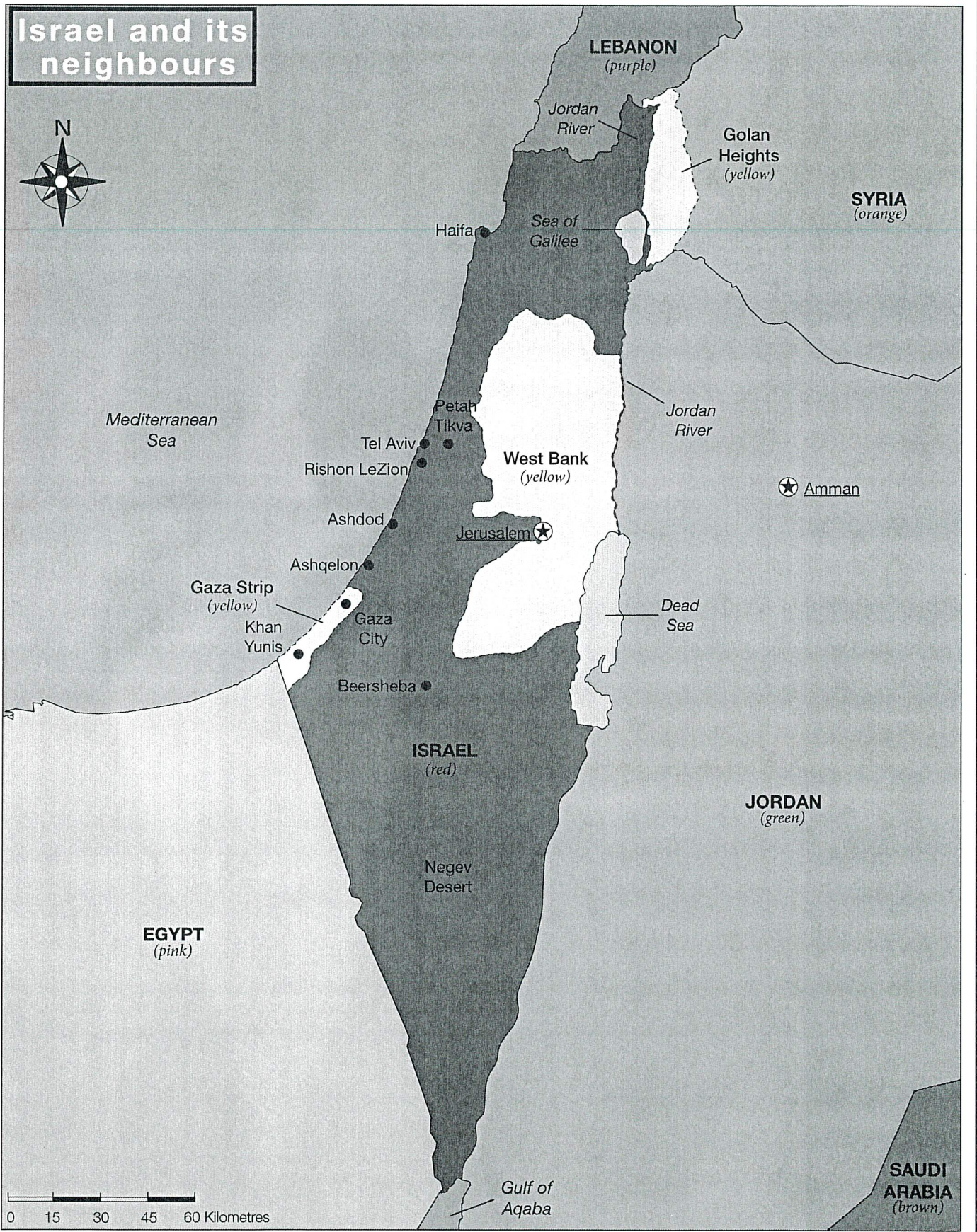
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# Israel and its neighbours



0 15 30 45 60 Kilometres







# A SHORT HISTORY OF A TROUBLED REGION

– BACKGROUND TO THE WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

## BEFORE READING

Please note: This article contains sensitive content. Please refer to the teacher resource page **Facilitating Discussions on Sensitive Topics** (pp. 50-51) before approaching this topic with your class.

Sensitive Content	At a Glance	Learning Outcomes
<p>This article is about <b>the complicated and troubled history of the Middle East</b>. Please note that the article details and the supporting resources are difficult and touch on the topics of <b>antisemitism, Nazism, and the Jewish plans for nationhood following WWI and the horrors of WWII</b>. The article also discusses the <b>hardship and challenges faced by Palestinian families who were displaced from their long-standing communities to live in refugee camps</b>. Additionally, the article discusses <b>the role of foreign countries and the United Nations in making decisions about the distribution of the land in what is now Israel and the Palestinian territories</b>. It is normal for some students to feel a range of emotions when confronted with these topics. Encourage students to express any concerns they have about the material and discuss accommodations with them as needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The animosity between Palestinians and Israelis dates back about 100 years;</li> <li>• Until the 20th century, the region that includes Israel and the Palestinian territories was part of the Ottoman Empire, controlled by Türkiye;</li> <li>• This empire crumbled after WWI, and the League of Nations directed Britain to oversee this territory, then known as Palestine and Transjordan;</li> <li>• Antisemitism was on the rise in Europe in the early 1900s and this gave rise to Zionism, the movement to establish a Jewish nation;</li> <li>• In 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour offered Jews a home in Palestine, to which they had a religious attachment, provided they respected the rights of non-Jews living there;</li> <li>• Palestinian Arabs were promised an independent state in the same region by Britain for their support in WWI;</li> <li>• After the horrors of WWII, Jewish plans for nationhood gained momentum, as did Palestinians' fears of displacement;</li> <li>• In 1947, the UN split British Mandated Palestine into two parts. The city of Jerusalem became international territory;</li> <li>• Disputes and wars over this split have continued since 1948. In total, there have been eight conflicts, including the current one.</li> </ul>	<p><i>After reading this article, students will...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand the origins of the animosity between Palestinians and Israelis;</li> <li>• explain the historical events that led to the division of the region;</li> <li>• explain the concerns and plight of both the Jewish and Palestinian people;</li> <li>• consider the role of international organizations in territorial conflicts.</li> </ul>