Arab-Israeli Conflict
1949-1967
The Suez crisis and the Six-day War
Introduction.

• In the 19th and 20th centuries Jewish refugees had spread all over the world fleeing hatred, prejudice and persecution.

• In particular they had reached Palestine, in the Middle East, and formed a new country “Israel”. They had also formed sizeable communities in the USA and in Britain.

• The consequence was that although Israel looked a small and vulnerable nation, she in fact had very powerful and influential friends who could help defend her.
The best form of defence is attack?

- The new Israel was by no means safe. There were regular attacks on Jewish settlers by Arabs, and many settlers understandably fought back.

- This ‘tit for tat’ fighting kept tensions high.

- The Gaza Strip was one particularly unstable area where Arab ‘Fedeyeen’ fighters were sponsored by Egypt.

- Israel suspected this Egyptian support for Gaza Arabs and looked for a way to diminish their influence.

- The Lavon Affair (1954) was an Israeli secret plot to bomb Egyptian targets thereby making Nasser look less powerful and convincing Britain to stay put in Egypt. It was a total failure in both respects.
Egypt

- Her military was angry at being defeated by Israel and sought revenge.

- Egypt closed the Suez canal and the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli ships in 1949, and continued to try to strangle Israeli trade this way.

- She supported Arab Palestinians in the Gaza strip and enabled them to launch attacks into Israel.
Traditionally the Canal had been important as the trade link between Britain, (Europe) and India. By 1949 however India had become independent of Britain.

The Canal found a new role in oil transportation between Europe and the Middle East. This made it hugely important for developed countries-like Britain- who were dependent on oil.
The Suez canal- closed to Israeli ships, important for oil.
King Farouk I—ruler of Egypt (1936-52)

Farouk ‘incognito’. Can you tell a person’s character by their appearance? He was called the ‘thief of Cairo’ because he used to steal things on state visits, notably Churchill’s pocket watch!

King Farouk with Arab friends. In fact he was more friendly with the European powers—a fact many Arabs disliked.
The Suez Crisis. 1956

- 1952 Army officers ‘The Free Officers Movement’ in Egypt overthrew the King (Farouk) and put Gamal Nasser in power.

- Nasser was anti-colonialist, and Arab nationalist. He also had ideas of pan-Arabism which won him much support from other Arab countries. Britain, and others, initially regarded him as a possible strong leader who might help to solve the Arab-Israeli crisis.

- He managed to remove British influence over the Suez canal and won huge loans from Britain and America for the building of a dam (the Aswan High Dam).

- He then, however, began arms trading with Communist countries. Britain and the USA were furious and cut his funding.

- In retaliation Nasser promptly nationalized (took control of) the Suez Canal (1956) precipitating a crisis between Europe and Egypt.
Gamal Abdel Nasser. 1918-1970

President of Egypt and a leader of the Free Officer Movement.
The Aswan dam. In holding back one of the world’s longest rivers (the Nile) it created the world’s biggest reservoir at the time –Lake Nasser.
The United Arab Republic
1958-1971

- The U.A.R was the idea of Gamal Nasser. It was to join Syria and Egypt into one nation, as a preliminary to creating a massive pan-Arab world led by him (of course).

- The idea won much approval, at first, from Arabs. It proved more difficult to keep all the diverse groups of Arabic people together, however, in the long run.

- Syria left the union in 1961

- Egypt continued to call itself UAR until 1971, just after Nasser’s death.
Petrol shortages caused by the Canal closure caused problems in the West.
The war plan.

- Britain and France were quick to respond to the Egyptian moves to nationalise the canal.

- Britain was already angry that Nasser had already influenced policy in Jordan.

- France was convinced that Nasser was funding terrorists in the French colony of Algeria.

- Israel was concerned with powerful Communist support for Syria on her Northern border. Another Arab nation (ie Egypt) also with Communist support would make life difficult.

- France approached Israel for military assistance against the Egyptians. Whilst Britain and France would capture the canal, Israel would sweep across the Sinai peninsula pushing Arab people even further back from her borders.

- Israel saw a chance to demonstrate her independence, and might, to all her enemies.
The Suez Campaign: A test of might for the young nation of Israel.
An Anglo-French task force heads towards Suez.

British Aircraft carriers head to the Suez canal.

British ‘V’ bombers follow the ships.
New American ‘sabre’ jets are provided for the young Israeli air force.
Egyptian soldiers defend the canal zone.

The Egyptians sink ships to block the canal completely.
French and British paratroopers land from the air.

Israeli tanks hurl themselves across the Sinai desert.
Israel expands at Egyptian expense.
But the United Nations is called in by the USA to stop the war.

The USA found itself unable to support Britain and France. With Soviet (USSR) support the United Nations was allowed to act.

Watchful of the Soviet advance into Hungary the USA couldn’t take a moral defence of Hungary and allow its own allies to walk into Egypt. Cold War brinkmanship took precedence over the Middle East.

The USA put financial pressure on Britain to quit. Saudi Arabia meanwhile cut back Britain’s oil supplies.
1956-7

- Britain, France and Israel all withdrew from the Canal Zone and Israel had to give back the Gaza strip to Egyptian control.
- The United Nations put a peacekeeping force in to cover the Sinai Peninsula, and to keep the enemies apart.
- Egypt reopened the Straits of Tiran.
- It had been a diplomatic victory for Egypt, and a humiliation for Israel, Britain and France.
- It showed the world that real power lay with the super-powers USA and Communist USSR. No-one could act without their approval.
- Maybe it was the last fling of British Imperialism.
- For a while, peace.....
1967 and the Six Day War.

• The Arab nations once again began reforming to attack Israel. In Muslim terms to see an injustice, and not fight to correct it, is a sin.

• Constant Arab Palestinian complaints couldn’t, therefore, be ignored by Arab Muslim nations.

• Gamal Nasser of Egypt was becoming more warlike again and and Syria was looking for an opportunity to deflect home unrest. As the UAR nations they stood together.

• King Hussein of Jordan was supported by the USA. He alone wanted some compromise with Israel- probably encouraged by the US.
Preliminaries

• 1964 Israel started to drain off water from the Jordan river- the boundary between Arabs and Jews- with the National Water Carrier scheme.

• 1965 The Arabs set up the Headwater Diversion Scheme, aimed at diverting the Jordan away from Israel.

• Israel’s forces (IDF) attacked and destroyed the Arab works.

• Syria now sponsored terrorist raids into Israel, working alongside existing terrorist violence. Supported with Soviet weaponry Syria was a real threat to the young Israel.
Israel’s National Water Carrier.

In a very hot land, water is the most valuable resource.

Arguments over water had been prevalent in the Middle East since Biblical times.
The Palestinians (Arabs) set up a more efficient organisation to promote itself in 1964- with the assistance of the Arab League (all the Arab nations).

This was the **PLO** – or Palestinian Liberation Organisation, based originally on the West Bank

Flag of the PLO-Palestinian Liberation Organisation.

By Arabs the PLO were seen as freedom fighters.
By Jewish settlers the PLO were seen as terrorists.

**Yasser Arafat**- leader of the PLO from 1968 onwards.
Es Samu

- 1966 some Israeli soldiers were killed by a road-side bomb.
- Israel blamed the newly formed PLO for this terrorist outrage and mobilised a large force of men and tanks.
- The target was a Palestinian refugee camp at Es Samu thought to harbour terrorists. This camp was on Jordanian land.
- The IDF attacked the camp, and also Jordanian soldiers who were nearby, before withdrawing.
Israeli tank of 1967 Samu raid.
The ruler of Jordan, King Hussein, now had a problem.

He would lose face, and possibly his crown, if he did not respond to the Israeli invasion.

He had many Palestinian refugees camped on his land. They could rebel and split his country with civil war if they disagreed with his decisions.

He duly ordered a mobilisation of his troops.
Syria.

• Syria began to shell Israel from the Golan heights.

• Syria also signed, at Soviet Russia’s request, a mutual defence pact with Egypt.

• Israel’s fears about complete Communist backing of the Arab nations looked like being realised.
Resources

• Israel’s forces were being equipped with the latest US technology- and this was much superior to Arab forces’.

• They had new French Dassault Mirage III jets against old Russian Mig 17s. They had modern British Centurion tanks against Arab ex-German panzers, and ex-Russian T34 tanks, from World War II.
Israeli Syrian/Arab

Centurion tank v. Russian T34

Israeli Mirage v. Mig 17.
Resources..

- The Arab nations had greater reserves of manpower however, and they also had some modern equipment.

- The Egyptians had modern Russian ‘Badger’ bombers, and the Jordanians modern US ‘Paton’ tanks. Syria had later models of the MIG fighters-MIG 21s.

A modern Egyptian bomber bought from the USSR. Code-name TU 16 ‘Badger’.

A Jordanian owned Patton tank bought from the USA.
Syria had some new Mig 21s similar to these.

Being equipped by the USSR meant that Syria posed a much greater threat to Israel. The Mig 21 was still inferior to the Israeli ‘Mirage’ however.
The Golan Heights- air war.

• Israel tried to pick off the main Arab opposition one at a time. They began with Syria.

• They armoured a tractor and began ploughing land in a neutral area. The Syrians eventually shelled the tractor when it got too close.

• Israel responded-retaliated-with massive air and artillery barrages each time. It was an excuse to pound Syrian gun positions.

• A major air war then took place. On one occasion a single Israeli jet shot down 5 Syrian jets. On another Syria destroyed an Israeli village by bombing.

• Both sides ignored United Nations calls to stop.

• Neither side actually escalated the violence further however.
Border incidents

- Border incidents now multiplied- raid and reprisal.

- Egypt presented plans to remilitarise the Sinai, and Syria became more vocally aggressive. UN troops were not allowed to take up positions in the Sinai, and large numbers of Egyptian troops began digging in opposite Israel’s Southern border.

- Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran (again) to Israeli ships. This was alarming because it had been the cause of an earlier war.

- Israel sought US backing but the US was reluctant to antagonise the USSR and offered diplomacy only.

- Equally the USSR, aware of the possible cost of supplying 2 nations at war, backed away with its support for the Arab nations.