

Contemporary Conflicts *in light of the Cold War*

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eWorkshop on **Israel/Palestine and the Cold War**

Background Briefing by [Dr. Salim Yaqub](#), the University of Chicago:

In my presentation I will discuss the events leading up to the establishment of the state of Israel at the expense of an existing Palestinian Arab society. The relationship of these events to the Cold War is complicated and somewhat elusive. For the most part, the dispute over Palestine followed a logic of its own that had little to do with developments in the Cold War. On the other hand, the Palestine dispute came to a head just as the East-West conflict was crystallizing, and so the latter did have an impact on the former, especially where the actions of the superpowers were concerned. In the years immediately following the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union saw advantages and disadvantages in the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, though both superpowers ultimately decided to support Israel's creation. It was only later, in the early to mid-1950s, that the Soviets withdrew their support for Israel and began backing some of the Arab states.

The contemporary relevance of these events needs little explication. At least on paper, there is now widespread support (including among Israelis and Palestinians) for the proposition that Mandate Palestine should be divided between a Jewish and an Arab state. But most of the other contentious issues that emerged in the late 1940s--borders, refugees, the status of Jerusalem, and so on--remain unresolved. The one element from the earlier period that has completely disappeared is, of course, the Cold War.

This packet [the suggested readings] consists of six documents. The first is an excerpt from Charles D. Smith's *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, providing a general overview of the circumstances surrounding the creation of the state of Israel. The second document is a recent article by Gabriel Gorodetsky, "The Soviet Union's Role in the Creation of the State of Israel." The third is an excerpt from a 1946 telegram to Moscow sent by Soviet Ambassador to the United States Nikolai V. Novikov, who analyzes U.S. policy towards the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular. The fourth document is a 1947 speech on the Palestine issue, delivered in the UN General Assembly by Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations Andrei Gromyko. The fifth document is a 1948 report by the U.S. State Department Policy Planning Staff, recommending that the U.S. government withdraw its support for the UN's 1947 decision to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. The last document is a 1948 memorandum to President Harry Truman from White House Counsel Clark Clifford, who urges Truman to continue to support the partition decision.

Suggested Readings:

Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 4th ed., (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000): 181-211.

URL: <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/projects/ccws/conflicts/yaqub.html>

Gabriel Gorodetsky, "The Soviet Union's Role in the Creation of the State of Israel," *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Spring 2003): 4-20.

Telegram to Moscow by Soviet Ambassador to the United States Nikolai V. Novikov, 27 September 1946, at the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) Virtual Archive, http://wwics.si.edu/index.cfm?fuseaction=library.document&topic_id=1409&id=67.

Speech by Soviet Ambassador to the United Nations Andrei Gromyko, at the Seventy-Seventh Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly, 14 May 1947, at "Selected Documents on the Palestine Question," <http://www.princeton.edu/~xzhu/reading.html>.

"Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Kennan) to the Secretary of State, [Washington] 20 January 1948, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. V (1948): 545-554.

"Memorandum by the President's Special Counsel (Clifford) to President Truman, [Washington?] 8 March 1948, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, Vol. V (1948): 690-696.

Dr. Salim Yaqub is an assistant professor of history at the University of Chicago. His first book is *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East*, published by [the University of North Carolina Press](#).

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