

Evolution of the Region

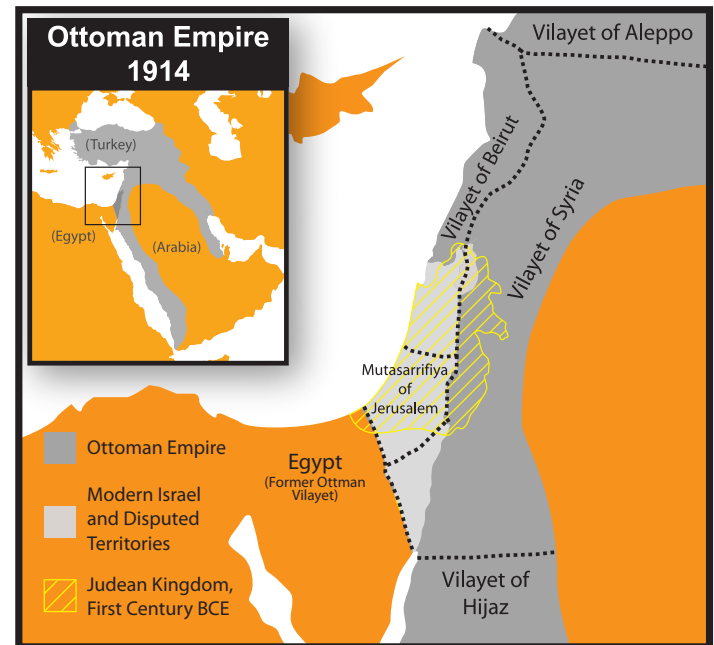
The Rise and Fall of Empires

In the first century, the Roman Empire defeated the over 1,000-year-old nation of Judea, destroyed its Holy Temple in Jerusalem and exiled hundreds of thousands of Jews. To erase all memory of Judea, Rome renamed it “Palestine” after the Jews’ biblical enemy, the Philistines, an Aegean people who had once settled along the coast.¹ Afterward, Westerners referred to the Jewish-Christian Holy Land as Palestine. Arab peoples did not widely adopt the name “Palestinian” until the 20th century. Though the name had always been associated with Jews, in the 1960s it became associated with the Arab Palestinian nationalist movement.

For the two millennia after the Roman conquest, no other state or unique national group developed in Palestine, and no ruler chose Jerusalem as its capital. Instead, different empires and peoples came, colonized, ruled, and disappeared. Jews remained throughout these changes. Their numbers grew as exiled Jews returned in periodic waves of immigration; their numbers fell when the area’s rulers persecuted them.

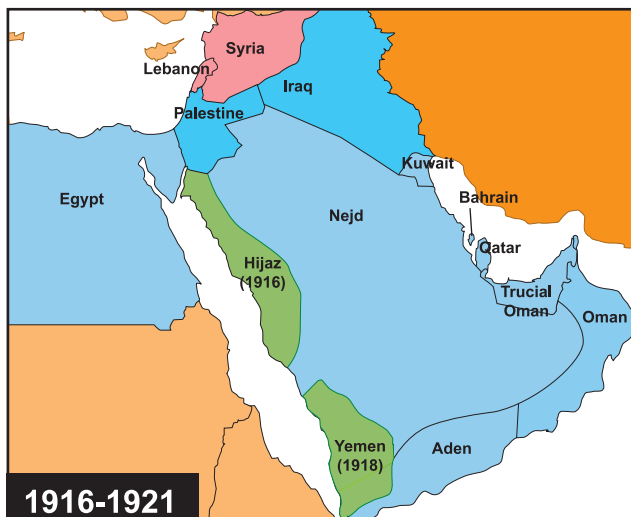
Between 1517 and 1917, Palestine was an unimportant backwater of the sprawling Ottoman Empire, which, at its height in 1683, covered vast parts of the Middle East, North Africa, and Eastern Europe. It was separated into small subdistricts within the large province of Syria (and later Beirut). The Palestine region initially prospered under the Ottomans, but, during the Empire’s decline, it was reduced to a sparsely populated, impoverished, barren area.²

When the Ottoman Empire was defeated in World War I (1914-1918), its lands were ceded to the victorious Allies. Just as the Allies carved new nations out of Europe’s defeated empires, so too they carved nations out of the former Ottoman Empire and created most of the Middle Eastern states we know today, including Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria. They also drew Palestine’s boundaries and officially recognized it as the Jewish national home.



The former lands of the Judean kingdom did not constitute a single “Palestine” entity during 400 years of Ottoman rule. Instead, it was broken up and placed under various administrators by the Ottoman Empire.

The Middle East: A neighborhood of young countries



- British Mandate
- British Protectorate
- French Mandate
- Independent From Foreign Power (Date of Independence)

The newly established League of Nations set up “mandates” to be administered by France and England until the new states were ready for self-government. The boundaries established at the end of World War I would be changed several times before assuming their current form.



- Israel (1948 Independence)
- Land Disputed with Palestinian Arabs*
- Decolonization of Arab States (Date of Independence)

The independence of most of the Middle East’s modern nation-states is relatively recent, although the region is home to many ancient cultures. Several of these states, such as Bahrain and Kuwait, are younger than Israel.

*Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005.