On October 07, 2023, the country of Israel suffered one of the worst attacks in its history. The Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas launched a large-scale assault across the border of Gaza into Israel. The attack resulted in the deaths of more than 1,400 civilians, most of whom were Israeli and some of whom were foreign nationals. Hamas also kidnapped hundreds of Israelis and foreign nationals to be used as hostages. This violence has a long and complicated history, and its origins can be traced back to 1917 when the British became the first nation to formally support a national home for the Jewish people.

This formal support, now known as the Balfour Declaration, was issued by the British government during World War I. At the time, the Ottoman Empire, an enemy of Great Britain, controlled the territory known as Palestine, which had a mixed population of Arab Muslims, Christians, and a small population of Jews. The Jews had been in the area since the days of ancient Israel, and the Arab community had been there for a long time as well. In Europe, as in other areas of the world, the Jewish community had long been dealing with rising anti-Semitism (or hatred of Jews). Many Jews, called Zionists, sought a Jewish homeland where Jews would be free to live without worry.

Since then, Israel has never known long-lasting peace. In its 75-year history, it has continued fighting wars against neighboring countries, who believed they had no right to exist. Victory in these wars has led to the expansion of Israel’s control over the West Bank and Gaza. These areas have ignited extreme conflicts between Israeli settlers and Palestinian residents.

The Israeli government has since declared war on Hamas. The conflicts in Israel are ongoing. The terror attack in October 2023 is the latest example of the ramifications of the Balfour Declaration. Its failure to provide evenly divided lands that allow for co-existence continues to fuel violence with no solutions in sight.

The war in Israel highlights the geopolitical challenges that continue to exist in the region. Historically, the United States has always been an advocate for Israel. The actions taken by U.S. presidents, from Harry Truman’s recognition of Israel as a nation, Richard Nixon’s “shuttle diplomacy,” Jimmy Carter’s Camp David Accords, Bill Clinton’s Oslo Accords, Donald Trump’s Abraham Accords, and now Joe Biden’s recent visit to the country and his attempted meeting with Arab leaders in Jordan, highlight the United States’ continued aims of supporting democratic principles and protecting human rights around the world.

To Think and To Do:
In response to the explosion at the Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, President Biden stated, “The United States stands unequivocally for the protection of civilian life during conflict, and we mourn the patients, medical staff, and other innocents killed or wounded in this tragedy.” Given the president’s statement, examine any of the aforementioned events and explain how U.S. foreign policy has contributed to the U.S.’ longstanding relationship with Israel and its commitment to peace in the region.

Learn more:
- Arab- Israel Conflict Timeline, from the Institute for Curriculum Services
- History of Yom Kippur 1973 War, from the Institute for Curriculum Services
- The Question of Palestine, from the United Nations