The Colonies Become New Nations, 1945-Present

**The Indian Subcontinent Gains Independence**

KEY IDEA: A number of new nations emerged from the British colony of India

Many Asians served in the armies of the colonial powers during World War II. The fight for freedom from Nazi tyranny deepened their desire for independence from colonial control. At the same time, people in Europe began to wonder if it was right for one nation to have another as a colony.

In the 1920s, Mohandas Gandhi led a campaign for independence for India. Two groups worked in this effort. The Indian National Congress, also called the Congress Party, said that it represented all of India. Most of its members were Hindu, though. Muhammad Ali Jinnah formed the Muslim League in 1906 because he said that the Congress Party did not care for the rights of Indian Muslims. The British encouraged the division of Hindus and Muslims into two opposing groups. By doing so, they helped ensure their own control of the country.

After World War II, Britain was prepared to grant independence to India. The British Parliament passed a law granting independence in July 1947. It created the separate Hindu and Muslim nations of India and Pakistan. The law gave people only one month to decide which country they wanted to live in and to move there. As millions of people began to move, violence broke out. Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs—another religious group—killed each other. Gandhi pleaded to end all violence. A Hindu extremist assassinated him for protecting Muslims.

Jawaharlal Nehru became the first prime minister of India, and he led the country for 17 years. His new nation and Pakistan, however, quickly fell to war over the state of Kashmir. It bordered both countries, with a Hindu ruler and large Muslim population. Conflict over this state continues today.

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**Conflicts in the Middle East**

**KEY IDEA** *Postwar division of Palestine made the Middle East a hotbed of nationalist movement.*

The movement to settle Jews in Palestine began in the late 1800s and early 1900s. These Jews believed that Palestine belonged to them because it was their home 5,000 years ago. Muslims had lived there for 1,300 years, however. After World War I, Britain gained control of the area. The British found that Jews and Muslims did not live together peacefully. At the end of World War II, the British withdrew. The United Nations divided the land in two. It left part for the Palestinian people and set aside part for Jews. Islamic countries voted against the plan, and the Palestinians opposed it. Many countries, seeing the suffering Jews had experienced in World War II, backed the idea of a separate Jewish state. On May 14, 1948, Jews declared the existence of the Jewish nation of Israel.

The next day, six Islamic neighbors invaded Israel. With strong support from the United States, Israel won the war in a few months. It also won three later wars. The first, in 1956, began when a group of Egyptian army officers seized control of the government of Egypt from Britain. The British —and the French—had kept control of the Suez Canal. In 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the new leader of Egypt, attacked the canal. The Israeli army helped the British and French keep control. The peace settlement that followed, though, gave the canal to Egypt. The 1967 war broke out when Egypt and other nations threatened Israel. Israel defeated Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and Syria in just a week. Its success brought new areas under its control. The next war, in 1973, began with a surprise attack by Egypt and its allies. Israel fought off early defeats to win this war as well.

In 1977, Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat signed a peace agreement with Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin. In it, Begin agreed to give the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt. In return, Egypt recognized Israel as a nation. It was the first Islamic country to give this recognition. This enraged many Arabs, and Sadat was assassinated in 1981. His successor, though, kept peace with Israel.

Despite many efforts, though, Israel and the Palestinian people have not made peace. Palestinians living in Israel dislike Israeli rule. They want a nation of their own. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), led by Yasir Arafat, became a leading group in the struggle for self-rule. During the 1970s and 1980s, the military arm of the PLO made many attacks on Israel. That nation responded by invading Lebanon to attack bases of the PLO. In the late 1980s, many Palestinian people in Israel began a revolt called the intifada, or “uprising.” It lasted for years. In the early 1990s, the two sides made some progress toward peace. Israel agreed to give Palestinians control of an area called the Gaza Strip and of the town of Jericho. The Israeli leader who signed this agreement, Yitzhak Rabin, was assassinated by a Jewish extremist who opposed giving in to Palestinians. The two sides have yet to achieve final peace.