Event A: The United Nations Plan for Palestine

When the Ottoman Empire fell after World War I, the region known as Palestine became a mandate (similar to a colony) of Britain. Jewish nationalists, called Zionists, planned to settle in Palestine and to eventually create a Jewish state there. In 1917, the British issued the Balfour Declaration, which supported the creation of a homeland for Jews in Palestine. Palestinian Arabs, who constituted over 90 percent of the population in 1916, strongly opposed the plan. As Jewish immigration increased, Palestinian Arabs feared Jews were an extension of European colonialism and came to rule Palestine with British support. In 1939, after three years of intense fighting among Arabs, Jews, and British soldiers, the British withdrew support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and planned to make further Jewish immigration subject to approval by the Arab majority by 1944. Zionists were outraged, and Arab leaders were upset that Jewish immigration was allowed to continue at all. After World War II, fighting among Arabs, Jews, and British soldiers escalated in the mandate. In 1947, the British, recognizing that they had lost control of the conflict that they helped to create, decided to turn over the mandate to the newly created United Nations. A United Nations committee found that Arabs outnumbered Jews two to one (1,269,000 to 608,000), though Jews owned 20 percent of the cultivable land.

Critical-Thinking Question A: You are a member of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. Which of the following responses do you think most fairly addresses the concerns of all groups involved?

A. Make Palestine one state, and hold democratic elections to set the foundation for a democratic, secular (nonreligious) state.

B. Make part of Palestine into a Jewish state, and annex the Arab part of Palestine to the neighboring nation of Transjordan (the king of Transjordan claimed that any part of Palestine allotted to Arabs should be part of Transjordan).

C. Divide Palestine into two states, an Arab state and a Jewish state.

D. Keep Palestine as a United Nations mandate until violence between Jews and Arabs ceases and peace is secure.
Event B: The 1948 War

In November 1947, the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish state, an Arab state, and a UN-administered international zone of Jerusalem. The Jewish state included 51 percent of Palestine, the Arab state 44 percent, and Jerusalem 5 percent. The Jews rejoiced over the creation of a state, while the Arabs expressed outrage at the division of their homeland. On May 14, 1948, the British left Palestine, and Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the independence of the state of Israel, the Jewish name for their new homeland. The next day, Arab troops from Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia invaded Palestine and attacked Israel. By the end of 1948, Israel had captured much of the UN-proposed Arab state. In all, over 900,000 Palestinian Arabs fled the fighting and became refugees. Many went to Gaza Strip, controlled by Egypt, while others escaped to West Bank (of the Jordan River), controlled by Jordan. Israel immediately began occupying former Palestinian villages and resettling them with Jews, thousands of whom were immigrating into Israel from other Middle Eastern countries and Europe. Palestinians demanded that they either be allowed to return to their homes or be compensated for lost land and property. Israel claimed that most Palestinians chose to leave the land and that the Israeli army had rightfully won the land in a war after the Arabs had attacked the state of Israel.

Critical-Thinking Question B: You are a member of the United Nations. Which of the following responses to the 1948 war do you think most fairly addresses the concerns of all groups involved?

A. Pass a resolution demanding that Israel, Egypt, and Jordan return land to Palestinian refugees so they can form a Palestinian state.

B. Do nothing, because the Israelis were attacked and simply struck back at the aggressor Arab nations. The Palestinians must suffer the consequences of losing.

C. Set up a fund to support Palestinian refugees with food and shelter.

D. Pass a resolution demanding that Israel compensate Palestinian refugees for lost land and property.
Event D: The 1967 War

In the spring of 1967, Nasser began to threaten to go to war with Israel. In May he demanded that the United Nations Emergency Force leave Sharm al-Shaykh, and Egyptian troops occupied the port town. Nasser then closed the strategic Straits of Tiran, cutting Israel off from the Red Sea. Israel considered these moves acts of war and prepared for combat. During the previous year, Israel had suffered increasing terrorist attacks by Palestinian groups in Syrian and Jordanian territories and had aggressively retaliated against Syria and Jordan. The Israeli government felt itself surrounded by hostile forces. On June 5, 1967, Israel launched a surprise attack against Egypt. Six days later, Israel had defeated Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and captured Gaza Strip, the Sinai peninsula, Golan Heights, and West Bank. Israel proclaimed a united Jerusalem as its capital, which outraged Arabs and Muslims, for whom Jerusalem is the third holiest city. More than 300,000 Palestinian refugees fled into neighboring Arab countries. Another 1.5 million remained in Gaza Strip and West Bank, known since as the Occupied Territories. Immediately after the war, Israel destroyed three Arab villages. Soon thereafter, Israel began confiscating Arab lands to build Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and Jewish settlements in the conquered areas.

Critical-Thinking Question D: You are a member of the United Nations. Which of the following responses to the 1967 war do you think most fairly addresses the concerns of all groups involved?

A. Support Israel against its hostile Arab neighbors by recognizing Israel’s capture of the Occupied Territories.

B. Pass a resolution condemning the acquisition of land through military conquest, refuse to acknowledge Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and demand the return of the Occupied Territories.

C. Send peacekeeping forces into the Occupied Territories to act as a buffer between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians, as well as to guard the borders against further fighting.

D. Establish an international commission to study the situation in Israel/Palestine, and devise a plan to bring peace to the region.
Event E: The Intifada

During the 1980s, Israeli forces in the Occupied Territories increased their harassment of Palestinians. Israel confiscated more land, deported many suspected Palestinian political activists, and increased the number of people arrested and jailed for six months without a warrant or charge. Palestinians were made to pay taxes but rarely benefited from the services—such as unemployment insurance and health care—that the taxes supported. In addition, they were forced to undergo extensive background checks to receive any sort of licenses or permits, a process which Jewish Israelis did not have to go through. This policy of repression did not break the Palestinians; instead, it led to increased unity and anti-Israeli activity. In December 1987, an Israeli military vehicle killed four Palestinians in a road accident in Gaza Strip. The protest that followed swelled into a huge demonstration throughout Gaza Strip, and quickly spread to West Bank. This uprising was called the intifada, which means a “shaking off” in Arabic. Soon after the intifada broke out, the United National Leadership of the Intifada, representing the main Palestinian political parties, was formed. Leaders planned strikes, boycotts, and marches and refused to pay taxes. Violent confrontations, largely confined to rock throwing for the first two years but escalating to include guns and hand grenades, became common with Israeli troops. Israel responded violently, following Prime Minister Rabin’s policy of “force, might, and beatings.” Israeli troops demolished homes and businesses and arrested tens of thousands of people. In the first three years of the Intifada, more than 1,000 Palestinians died and more than 37,000 were wounded. In addition, 56 Israelis were killed. The rate of violence increased in 1990.

**Critical-Thinking Question E:** You are a member of the United Nations. Which of the following responses to the Intifada do you think most fairly addresses the concerns of all groups involved?

A. Pass a resolution condemning Israeli human rights violations committed against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.

B. Send peacekeeping forces into the Occupied Territories to stop the violence.

C. Encourage Israeli and Palestinian leaders to meet and attempt to negotiate a diplomatic end to the Intifada.

D. Send a Special Commission into the Occupied Territories to study Palestinian living conditions as a first step to ending the Intifada.