INTRODUCTION
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West Asia or the Middle East is the expression used for the Asian countries South of Soviet Union and West of Pakistan. It contains principally all the Arab countries from Syria to Egypt as well as Israel. This area has been transformed into a dangerous cockpit of international politics since World War II because the people of almost all ideologies are making efforts to win over the people of this area to their side. This keen interest in the region has been due to its unique geographical position. The strategic importance of the region lays in the fact that it is a land bridge which links continents- Asia, Africa and Europe, and thus gives to the occupant not only a great land advantage but also a favourable position to defy the sea power. It is also the centre of international communication because some of the shortest sea and air routes between Europe and Africa and Asia lie through the region. The two most important waterways of the world, viz. the straits connecting the Red sea with the Mediterranean are also located here. In short, the region is the "global centre of gravity".

Probably the most important factor, which has contributed to the world importance of this region, is the presence of large deposits of oil reserves, practically 60% of the world's oil deposits. In view of oil as a source of energy almost all the leading powers such as U.S.A., U.K., Russia and France have been taking keen interest in this region. During the cold war period U.S.A. and offer Western powers poured huge amounts as aid to secure the region against communist expansion.
Apart from the oil, another factor, which has made this region crucial, is the persistent hostility between the Arabs and the Jews. It is a matter of common knowledge that the problem of Palestine continued to elude a solution during the inter-war period.

After the Second World War the Middle East has become the storm centre of international relations. It has become the Balkans of the pre-world war I era. The creation of the Jewish state of Israel and three wars, which Arabs waged with Israel in which they were worsted, have made West Asia a cockpit of world politics. Political tension has been constant in an area, driven by Arab-Israeli conflict, which has been localized by a tacit agreement between the two super powers, the then Soviet Union and the United States.

The struggle to establish an Arab state in Palestine has bedeviled Middle Eastern Politics - and international diplomacy - for much of the 20th century and since the founding of Israel in 1948. The demand by Palestinians for state of their own has been endorsed by much of the international community. Their fate, however, remains unresolved.

**History of Palestine Problem (1917-1947)**

The Palestine problem became an international issue towards the end of the First World War with the disintegration of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Palestine was among the several former Ottoman Arab territories, which were placed under the administration of Great Britain under the Mandates System adopted by the League of Nations pursuant to the League's Covenant (Articles 22).
All but one of these Mandated Territories became fully independent states, as anticipated. The exception was Palestine where, instead of being limited to "the rendering of administrative assistance and advice" the Mandate had as a primary objective, the implementation of the "Balfour Declaration" issued by the British Government in 1917, expressing support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people".

During the years of the Palestine Mandate, from 1922 to 1947, large-scale Jewish immigration from abroad, mainly from Eastern Europe took place, the numbers swelling in the 1930s with the notorious Nazi persecution of Jewish populations. Palestinian demands for independence and resistance to Jewish immigration led to a rebellion in 1937, followed by continuing terrorism and violence from both sides during and immediately after World War II. Great Britain tried to implement various formulas to bring independence to a land ravaged by violence. In 1947, Great Britain in frustration turned the problem over the United Nations.


After looking at various alternatives, the UN proposed the partitioning of Palestine into two independent states, one Palestinian Arab and the other Jewish, with Jerusalem internationalized (Resolution 181 (II) of 1947). One of the two states envisaged in the partition plan proclaimed its independence as Israel and in the 1948 war expanded to occupy 77 per cent of the territory of Palestine. Israel also occupied the larger part of Jerusalem. Over half the indigenous Palestinian populations fled or were expelled. Jordan and Egypt occupied the other parts of
the territory assigned by the partition resolution to the Palestinian Arab state, which did not come into being.

In the 1967 war, Israel occupied the remaining territory of Palestine, until then under Jordanian and Egyptian control (the West Bank and Gaza Strip). This included the remaining part of Jerusalem, which was subsequently annexed by Israel. The war brought about a second exodus of Palestinians, estimated at half a million. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 called on Israel to withdraw from territories it had occupied in the 1967 conflict.

In 1974, the General Assembly reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and to return. The following year, the General Assembly established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The General Assembly conferred on the PLO the status of observer in the Assembly and in other international conferences held under United Nations auspices.


Events on the ground, however, remained on a negative course. In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon with the declared intention to eliminate the PLO. A cease-fire was arranged. PLO troops withdrew from Beirut and were transferred to neighbouring countries after guarantees of safety were provided for thousands of Palestinian refugees left behind. Subsequently, a large-scale massacre of refugees took place in the camps of Sabra and Shatila.
In September 1983, the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, which was widely attended, adopted inter alia the Geneva Declaration containing the following principles: the need to oppose and reject the establishment of settlements in the occupied territory and actions taken by Israel to change the status of Jerusalem, the right of all states in the region to existence within secure and internationally recognized boundaries, with justice and security for all the people, and the attainment of the legitimate, inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

In December 1987, a mass uprising against the Israeli occupation began in the occupied Palestinian territory (the intifadah). Methods used by the Israeli forces during the uprising resulted in mass injuries and heavy loss of life among the civilian Palestinian population.

The Peace Process

A Peace Conferences on the Middle East was convened in Madrid on 30 October 1991, with the aim of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement through direct negotiations along 2 tracks: among the Arab states, and between Israel and the Palestinians, based on Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) (the "land for peace" formula). A series of subsequent negotiations culminated in the mutual recognition between the Government of the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the representative of the Palestinian people, and the signing by the two parties of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in Washington, D.C., on 13 September 1993, as well as the subsequent implementation agreements, which
led to several other positive developments, such as the partial withdrawal of
Israeli forces, the elections to the Palestinian Council and the presidency of the
Palestinian Authority, the partial release of prisoners and the establishment of a
functioning administration in the area under Palestinian self-rule. The
involvement of the United Nations has been essential to the peace process, both
as the guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization and provision
of international assistance.

Apart from the United Nations, powers such as United States of America,
European Union, Russia and countries in the Middle East region were also
making concreted efforts to find an amicable settlement to the Palestine problem.

The UN General Assembly welcomed the Declaration of Principles as an
important step forward. The Assembly also reaffirmed that "the United Nations
has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until the
question is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with
international legitimacy". During the past years, there has been increasing
concern at the stalemate in the peace negotiations. The General Assembly,
particularly the Assembly's Tenth Emergency Special Session, was called upon to
deal with the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. There
has been increasing alarm of late, at acts of violence against civilians, the position
and actions of the Government of Israel with regard to Jerusalem, the expansion
of settlements, land confiscation and punitive collective measures, which were
seriously undermining the peace efforts.
Review of Literature

The researcher has made an extensive survey of literature to gain a comprehensive knowledge on the subject. Some of the important literatures reviewed are given below.

Henry Cattan's work "Palestine Question" deals with one of the most explosive and least understood problems of modern times and the causes of several wars in the last four decades. He has revealed the fundamental fact that the conflict is not restricted to the territories seized by Israel in 1967.

Samuel F. Wells, Jr. and Mark A. Bruzonsky (Ed.) in their work "Security in the Middle East: Regional Change and Great Power Strategies" explains the course of Middle Eastern politics, stability and change within the region, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran etc. The work explains the oil and strategic location of the Middle East, which are one of the reasons why this region is still attracting world attention. It also analyses the industrial democracies, conflict and cooperation in the aftermath of the oil shocks in late 1985 and early 1986, arms for oil etc. The conclusion brings to light a substantive framework for the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Arum Kumar Banerji (Ed.) in his work "Conflict Resolution in the Post-Cold War Era" analyses the conflict, its resolution and PLO, peace diplomacy and Arab response. He concludes by identifying major hurdles, such as Israeli withdrawal from parts of West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jewish settlements, the status of East Jerusalem, the issue of military areas, the question of sovereignty and final borders, the Palestinians right of return and the theory of issue of final status, which are still ahead.
Lawrence Ziring in his work "The Middle East Political Dictionary" emphasizes much on political geography and geopolitics, Islam, ethnicity and political culture, political movement, Israelis and Palestinians, etc. His contribution to the study of the Middle East politics is highly commendable.

Don Peretz in his work "The Middle East Today" analyses Islam: Past and Present, the Middle East and the West before World War I, Arab nationalism, Zionism and the state of Israel. He has made an attempt to introduce the area as a whole and each of the specific countries and has tried to simplify many of the complicated background factors.

A review of work done by K.R.Singh on "The Persian Gulf: Arms and Arms Control" exclusively explains the gulf region in the light of threat perceptions and politico-military responses of various countries in the region. He deals with real and perceived threats to regime and systematic security, to territorial integrity and national sovereignty and to international security. He also analyses the arms acquisition policy of these countries as well as the constraints faced by them in achieving their objectives.

Steven L.Spiegel (Ed.) in his work, "The Middle East and Western Alliance", analysed the problems affecting the interest of the Western alliance-the North America, the Europeans and Japanese, the Middle East States, and the Soviet Union. He brought together different and distinctive perspectives on such central issues as the Arab-Israeli dispute, the dynamics of the energy crisis, alliance unity and the role of Soviet Union, and the effect of growing Middle East instability on the interest of individual allied countries. He, therefore, addressed the major issues both historically and in terms of current events both from the perspective of the various countries and of the Alliance as a whole.
Gerald Butt's work, "The Arab World", deals on a shared language, a common culture, unity and division, the Palestinians a people in search of a home, Jordan and Syria, a kingdom looking west, a republic looking east, the Gulf states, ancient traditions, modern wealth etc. He concluded that the Arabs are the inheritors of a rich and multifaceted culture. Yet stereotyped images of them as desert sheikhs, oil magnates or ruthless terrorists abound. Therefore, in his book, he offered a fresh and accurate perspective on this fascinating people.

George Lenczowski's work, "The Middle East in World Affairs", aimed to give a comprehensive account of the political developments in the region since 1914, including those in international relations, regional affairs, and domestic politics on individual countries. He has given a definition of the Middle East as an area stretching from Egypt in the West to Afghanistan in the East. The North African Arab Maghreb is not discussed, except as its member states have participated in the broader Arab Unity schemes. He deals with the importance of this region in World Affairs, and emphasized by the fact that the two world wars have had their Middle Eastern theaters, and events there. Therefore, his book presents a history and analysis of the region as a whole and of its component parts, including the background focusing on the Ottoman and Persian empires, World War I, and the peace settlement.

Dr. Benjamin Kavery, in his book titled, "American Strategic Interest in Persian Gulf" says that the strategic interests of the United States are closely linked with the Gulf region. Besides, U.S. dependence on oil from the region and the issue of supporting regional stability of the Gulf States, even geographical closeness of the Gulf to the Soviet Union makes stability in Gulf a matter of great
concern to the U.S. His work is also on Persian Gulf scenario in world politics which highlights the geo-strategic importance of Persian Gulf in international politics, relations among the Gulf states and implication of 1973 Arab-Israeli war. In essence, his work had brought to light the Gulf and Palestine conflict, its perceptions and policies, and the impact of Palestinian conflict on U.S. interest in the Gulf.

Warren Christopher, in his work, "In the Stream of History - Shaping Foreign Policy for a New Era", stressed among other things, on building peace in the Middle East, American's commitment to Human rights, the promise of peace in the Middle East, the Middle East opens for Business, the war against terrorism, Americans military force and its readiness etc. Therefore, his work is a unique window into the inner working of US diplomacy in president Bill Clinton's first term, as it equally highlights the major foreign policy challenges faced and decision making in a turbulent era vis-à-vis, the Middle East.

James P.Warburg, in his work "Cross Currents in the Middle East", says that three times within the last five decades the Arab States and Israel have been at war. He laid stress on the early background as well as the beginning of the Western intrusion, about Zionism as an ancient hope became a political force. The work also deals with World War I in the Middle East and a look into the future. He has concluded his work with a warning that, in many ways the Middle East is a laboratory in which most of the problems of the twentieth, twenty first century world may be observed and in which solution to,these problems may be found.
Abdul Rahman A. Al-fwwaz, in his work "Jordan, USA and Israel, a Golden Triangle" has critically evaluated a triangular relationship between Jordan, USA and Israel. His work has tremendous significance especially from the angle of peace in the Middle East. He says that for the past fifty years the countries of the Middle East have resisted the existence of Israel, resulting into the death of several thousand people. He also says that apart from this, that there was unaccountable loss of money and property. He deals also on the rivalry between the Arab States and Israel, which is so deep rooted and complicated that it would be difficult to find solutions to it. Therefore, his work is modest in the sense that it takes just one aspect into account that is peace and nonexistence of conflict between Jordan and Israel for considerable period of time. The problem serves two objectives of throwing some light on the essence and benefits of triangular relationship between the three important factors, Jordan, USA and Israel from the point of view of peace in the region.

Janet Wallace and John Wallace, on "Arafat - in the Eyes of the Beholder", deal with a mystery inside an Enigma, the Holy wall, Cairo youth, his commitment to fight and the birth of Fatah. Their work is also about Israel in fear, Fatah's first raids, the constant threat, terrorism escalation, the peace with Egypt and war in Lebanon, Jordan, brothers and foes and concluded it with the United States secret channels. Therefore, their work according to them is that the Israeli - Palestinian conflict is not between right and wrong but between two rights - and that is the points of departure not only for understanding but also eventually for peace.
Dr. Mohamed El-Hadi Afifi, in his book, "The Arabs and the United Nations" treats entirely, all the trends which United Arab Nationalism in its new phase to the principles of the United Nations. It deals with the historical, political, social and economical factors, which crystallized Arab issues in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and which was a test for the UN as well as a means for it to confirm its principles. The book also treats the principles of the UN and shows how they confirm to the principles embodied in the pact of the Arab league and the resolutions of Afro-Asian Conferences. The political problems, which have arisen, as a result of the Arab, struggle and which have been handled by the U.N. He finally analyses the role, which the UN plays in the economic and social field and gives examples of what is needed worthy of praise.

Michael Walzer, in his work, "The Four Wars of Israel - Palestine", brought to light that the four wars are wars of existence be it Israelis or Palestinians. There are wars of independence. He also deals with Jenin Massacre of 2002, and the distrust of UN by Israelis.

Thomas Homer-Dixon, in his work, "The Rise of Complex Terrorism", says that the modern societies face paradox, fast-faced technological and economic innovation that may deliver unrivalled prosperity, but they also render rich actions vulnerable to crippling, un anticipated attacks, and deals with the psychological and financial damage they can inflict.

Javed Ali, in his work, "Chemical Weapons and the Iran-Iraq War- A Case Study in Non Compliance", deals with weapons of proliferation in the region. He
draws analogy with the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq wars, which unfortunately led to both conventional and unconventional warfare.

Ladan Boroumand and Roya Boronmand, in their work, "Terror, Islam and Democracy", deal with the genealogy of Islamism, the Iranian connection, the Islamist Comintern and distorting Islam's history.

However, there is no attempt yet in the existing literatures to analyse different aspects of the Palestine issue as a whole. Hence the researcher has made a sincere attempt to get a holistic view of the Arab-Israeli conflict with special reference to Palestine.

Objectives

The broad objectives of the study are:

a. to provide a profile of the Middle East region, Israel and Palestine; a historical perspective of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process with special reference to Palestine, from the beginning to the year 2003.

b. to find out the causes of the conflict

c. to examine the political, economic, security and psychological implications of the conflict both at the regional and international levels

d. to analyse the interests of major actors in the region and their roles in the peace process.

e. to find out the obstacles affecting the peace process, and

f. to suggest measures for an early amicable settlement of the conflict.
Methodology

It is a descriptive analytical study based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data have been collected from various sources such as official documents published by the U.N. and Governments of U.S., Israel and Palestine.

Twenty students each from Israel and Palestine were selected by random sampling and two sets of questionnaires were formulated and administered in order to elicit their perspective on the problem. Two officials of Israeli Embassy and two officials of Palestinian Authority at New Delhi were selected as samples and two sets of interview schedules were administered to collect authentic information on the issue.

The observation technique has also been used for collection of primary data. Television coverage of the events that are going on in Israel and Palestine in particular and else where in general helped in understanding the reality and gravity of the Palestine issue.

Numbers of books, journals, articles, etc. were reviewed in order to collect secondary data. The data collected from both primary and secondary sources have been meticulously analysed and lucidly interpreted.

Chapterization

The study begins with an introduction. The first chapter provides a profile of the Middle East region, Israel and Palestine. The second chapter provides a historical perspective of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the peace process, with special reference to Palestine, from the beginning to the year 2003. The third chapter analyses the major causes of the conflict between the Jews and
Palestinians. The fourth chapter examines the political, economic, security and psychological implications of the conflict both at the regional and international levels. The fifth chapter analyses the interests of the major actors in the region and their roles in the peace process. The sixth chapter brings to light the obstacles hampering the peace process. The conclusion sums up the major findings of the study and suggests measures for an early amicable settlement of the Palestine issue.