

Optimised Study Guide — Origins of the Conflict & the Creation of Israel

Optimised, exam-focused study guide for the origins of the conflict and the creation of Israel (Unit 4, Elective 3, Component C01-U4E3). Grounded in the 2020–2025 SCSA exams and marking keys, especially the 2021 Q18 on the reasons behind the Arab-Israeli War of 1948–49. Covers the long-term causes (Zionism, the Balfour Declaration, the British Mandate, the Peel Commission) and immediate causes (the Holocaust, the collapse of British rule, UN Partition Resolution 181), the 1948 Foundation War, the Nakba and the Palestinian refugee problem, and the competing national narratives. Leads with exam priorities and marking-key expectations.

The conflict over Palestine begins with two national movements claiming one land. Understanding the origins — Zionism, the British Mandate, the Holocaust, UN partition and the 1948 Foundation War — is essential, because every later flashpoint and peace attempt traces back to 1948. This is the foundational topic of the elective.

The marking-key steer. The 2021 essay — *"Analyse the reasons behind the Arab-Israeli War of 1948–1949"* — establishes that **the establishment of the state of Israel was the key cause**, and that candidates should weigh **longer-term causes** (19th-century Zionism, the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the 1937 Peel Commission) against **immediate causes** (WWII and the Holocaust, terrorism like the King David Hotel bombing, Britain referring Palestine to the UN, and the 1947 Partition vote). Build your answer on that long-term/immediate structure.

How this content is examined

- **Essays.** Reasons for the 1948 war / the creation of Israel; the role of various factors in the foundation of the conflict.
- **Source analysis (Section One, Unit 4).** The Israeli Declaration of Independence, Truman's 1948 recognition statement, and UN documents recur — you need precise contextual knowledge.

Answer the verb. Analyse the reasons = identify the causes, organise them (long-term vs immediate), and show how they combined. Use precise, neutral language on this sensitive topic — the exam rewards balanced historical analysis, not advocacy.

1. Long-term causes

- **Zionism.** The 19th-century movement to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine, driven by European antisemitism; early land purchases and Jewish migration began before WWI.
- **The Balfour Declaration (1917).** Britain expressed support for "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine — while it was also making conflicting promises to Arabs. After WWI, Britain governed Palestine under a **League of Nations Mandate**.
- **Mandate tensions.** Rising Jewish immigration and Arab resistance produced mounting violence; the **Peel Commission (1937)** recommended partition into separate Arab and Jewish states.

2. Immediate causes

- **WWII and the Holocaust.** The murder of six million Jews created overwhelming moral and political pressure for a Jewish state and a surge of survivors seeking refuge.
- **The collapse of British rule.** Caught between Arab and Jewish demands and facing **Jewish insurgent violence** (e.g. the 1946 King David Hotel bombing by the Irgun), Britain referred the problem to the **United Nations (1947)**.
- **UN Partition (Resolution 181, 1947).** The UN voted (33–13, 10 abstentions) to partition Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. Jewish leaders accepted; Arab leaders rejected it as unjust.

3. The Foundation War (1948–49)

- On **14 May 1948** Israel declared independence; the surrounding Arab states (Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon) invaded.
- Israeli forces (the **Haganah**, with the Irgun and LEHI) prevailed; Israel survived and expanded beyond the partition borders.
- **The Nakba ("catastrophe"):** the war created the enduring problem of **hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees** displaced from their land — the root grievance of the entire conflict.

4. Historical perspectives

- **Two competing national narratives:** Israeli (a war of independence and survival against invasion) vs Palestinian (dispossession and the Nakba). The exam rewards understanding *both* without taking sides.
- **Who bears responsibility?** British mismanagement of the Mandate and conflicting promises; the international community; or the irreconcilability of two national movements over one territory.

5. Recurring exam question patterns & what high answers do

- **"Analyse the reasons for the 1948 war / the creation of Israel."** High answers: split causes into long-term (Zionism, Balfour, Mandate, Peel) and immediate (Holocaust, British withdrawal, Partition), and weigh them.

- **Source questions** on the Declaration of Independence or Truman's recognition: explain context, purpose and what the source omits (especially the Palestinian Arab perspective).

Recall self-test. Can you:

- Define Zionism and explain its 19th-century origins?
- Explain the significance of the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate?
- Explain the Peel Commission and why partition was proposed?
- Explain the role of the Holocaust and the collapse of British rule?
- Explain UN Resolution 181 and the different Jewish and Arab responses?
- Describe the 1948 Foundation War and the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem (the Nakba)?
- Present both the Israeli and Palestinian narratives of 1948 in neutral terms?