

Optimised Study Guide — Regional Forces & Leaders in the Middle East

Optimised, exam-focused study guide for the regional and external forces and key leaders shaping the Arab-Israeli conflict (Unit 4, Elective 3, Component C05-U4E3). Grounded in the 2020–2025 SCSA exams and marking keys, which stress the Cold War overlay, the limits of the UN, oil power, and the shift from Arab nationalism to Islamic fundamentalism. A synthesising guide covering the superpowers, oil, the UN, ideological forces and Lebanon, and the roles of Nasser, Sadat, Begin, Arafat and Rabin. Leads with exam priorities and marking-key expectations, using neutral language.

The Middle East conflict was never just Israel versus the Palestinians. It was shaped by powerful outside forces — the superpowers, oil, the United Nations, the rise of Islamism — and by a cast of decisive leaders. This synthesising topic asks you to weigh those forces and individuals, pulling together threads from across the elective.

How the markers frame it. Across the source questions, the marking keys stress the **Cold War overlay** (the US backing Israel, the USSR backing Egypt/Syria, "proxy wars"), the **relative impotence of the UN** when a superpower was involved, and the **shift of regional leadership and ideology** — from secular Arab nationalism (Nasser) toward Islamic fundamentalism. Strong answers treat the conflict as a system of interacting forces, not a two-player game.

How this content is examined

- **Essays.** The role of external forces (superpowers, oil, the UN) or of key leaders in shaping the region.
- **Source analysis.** Sources on US aid to Israel, superpower involvement or the UN's role require you to weigh these forces precisely.

Answer the verb. Evaluate/Assess the role of [force/leader] = judge how decisive it was relative to others. Synthesise across topics — this is where the wars, peace attempts and nationalism guides connect.

1. The superpowers and the Cold War overlay

- The conflict became a **Cold War proxy**: the **USA backed Israel** (recognition in 1948, growing military and financial aid) while the **USSR backed Egypt and Syria**.
- Superpower rivalry shaped every major war (1956, 1967, 1973) and the diplomacy that followed — US brokerage produced Camp David and Oslo.

2. Oil and economic power

- Arab states wielded **oil** as a weapon — the **1973 embargo** (after the Yom Kippur War) caused a global energy crisis and showed the region's leverage over the world economy, drawing in outside powers all the more.

3. The United Nations

- The UN was central at key moments — **Partition (Resolution 181), Resolution 242**, peacekeeping forces (UNEF after Suez) — but was often **impotent** when a superpower's interests were engaged (e.g. Israel ignoring withdrawal calls with US backing).

4. Ideological forces

- **Arab nationalism** (Nasserism) dominated the 1950s–60s but was discredited by the 1967 defeat.
- Its decline opened space for the **rise of Islamic fundamentalism** (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah) and for a distinctly **Palestinian nationalism** — a major shift in the character of the conflict.
- **Lebanon** became a key arena from the 1980s as the PLO relocated there, drawing in Israel and triggering wider regional impacts.

5. Key leaders (be able to assess their roles)

- **Nasser (Egypt)**: champion of Arab nationalism; Suez and the brinkmanship of 1967.
- **Sadat (Egypt)**: launched the 1973 war, then made peace at Camp David — assassinated for it.
- **Begin (Israel)**: Sadat's partner at Camp David.
- **Arafat (PLO)**: embodied the journey from armed struggle to diplomacy (Oslo).
- **Rabin (Israel)**: Oslo peacemaker, assassinated by an Israeli extremist — the classic example of a "spoiler."

6. Historical perspectives

- **External vs internal drivers**: was the conflict's course set mainly by outside forces (superpowers, oil), or by local actors and leaders?
- **Great men vs structural forces**: how far did individual leaders (Nasser, Sadat, Arafat, Rabin) change history, versus impersonal forces (nationalism, religion, the Cold War)?

7. Recurring exam question patterns & what high answers do

- **"Evaluate the role of [the superpowers / the UN / a leader] in shaping the region."** High answers: assess the named force/leader, weigh it against the others, and synthesise examples from across the elective.
- **Source questions** on US aid or superpower involvement: explain the Cold War overlay and judge the UN's effectiveness.

Recall self-test. Can you:

- Explain the Cold War overlay (US–Israel, USSR–Egypt/Syria) and the idea of proxy conflict?
- Explain how oil (the 1973 embargo) gave the region global leverage?
- Assess the UN's role and its limits when superpowers were involved?
- Explain the shift from Arab nationalism to Islamic fundamentalism and the role of Lebanon?
- Match each key leader (Nasser, Sadat, Begin, Arafat, Rabin) to their decisive contribution?
- Argue the "external vs internal" and "great men vs structural forces" interpretations?