

**THE  
LAST  
WAR?**



IS THE BATTLE AGAINST TERRORISM A  
PRELUDE TO . . .

# THE LAST WAR?

DAVID ALLEN LEWIS  
WITH JIM FLETCHER



**New Leaf Press**

*A Division of New Leaf Publishing Group*

First printing: March 2001  
Second printing: June 2001  
Third printing: November 2001

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New Leaf Press, P.O. Box 726, Green Forest, AR 72638

ISBN-13: 978-0-89221-503-4

ISBN-10: 0-89221-503-8

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 00-110219

**Printed in the United States of America**

Please visit our website for other great titles:  
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For information regarding author interviews,  
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**DEDICATED**  
**TO**  
**ALAN SHAWN FEINSTEIN**  
**PATRON OF THE POOR AND NEEDY**

**IN APPRECIATION**

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to October Curtis, Chuck Heidle, Mary Hitchcock, Rita Ingebritson, Ramona Lewis, Jenny and Jeremiah Mustered, Connie Ramsey, Jennifer Strohm, and Miriam and Shawn Wamsley for all of their assistance in bringing this book project to a conclusion.

Also, thanks to all of those who helped us in Israel, Moshe Auman, David Bar-Illan, Thomas and Becky Brimmer, Ron Cantrell, Jim Fletcher, Ra'anan Gissim, Michael Glatzner, Neil and Sandy Howell, Harry Hurvitz, Yakov Kirschen, Rani Levy, Yehuda Levy, Avi Lipkin, Johann Luckhoff, Ron Nachman, Armando Nuñez, Ehud Olmert, Yehuda Oppenheim, Avigdor Rosenberg, Gershon Salomon, Ariel Sharon, Eleanora Shifrin, Ed Smelser, Rose Stott, Clarence Wagner, and Bob Zassler.

And finally, to my gracious publisher, Tim Dudley, who is a great inspiration to us all.



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## PREFACE

A light rain fell as I watched the drops splashing on the ancient paving stones of the Temple Mount, Jerusalem's holiest site for Jews. It is also revered by the Muslims, to whom the area is known as the Haram el al Sharif, the Most Noble Sanctuary. Behind me stood the golden Dome of the Rock, sometimes mistakenly called the Mosque of Omar. As Palestinians streamed past me into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, I thought of the Jewish worshippers I had been standing with only moments before, just beyond and below a retaining wall — the Western Wall.

On my 64th trip to Israel, I pondered the great things that had happened here on the Temple Mount. Here, the Patriarch Abraham had come, prepared to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. King David had purchased this mountain, and here his son, King Solomon, erected the most magnificent temple of all time. I realized that even today it is the most desired piece of land on earth — the Jews, the Vatican, the Muslims, all claiming right of ownership. One would think that this should be a peaceful spot, but not so! I sensed that I was in the eye of the storm. Somehow the whole world seems to have a gut feeling that here the last war could break out at any moment.

On this particular journey to the Holy Land, I had come for the express purpose of finding out why the peace process seemed to be bogged down. Why couldn't these

two brothers, Isaac and Ishmael, Jews and Arabs, solve their deepest problems? Is this just a family feud, or as some ponder, does what happen here really have an impact on world peace? Trouble, trouble, trouble! Not only the Middle East is bogged down in a quagmire of unrest, but the whole world is beset with wars and rumors of wars. Dire circumstances command our attention today. On one hand, terrorists wreak havoc; on the other, regular armies clash on the field of battle.

If ever in the history of mankind we could hear the hoofbeats of the red horseman of the Apocalypse, it is today as he rides roughshod across the earth, and following him is the ominous black horse of famine. I was truly saddened that, five months after the release of this book, the terror attacks on New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania made this effort not only relevant, but timely. Perhaps it is not too late to educate ourselves and see clearly who our enemies are. It is not exaggerating to say that we haven't a second to lose.

Technological advances have opened tantalizing vistas, and we seem to glimpse good things on the horizon of tomorrow. Like an unseen hand, however, it's the problems that pull at us, always keeping real progress just out of reach. While coping with all of our domestic problems, it's hard to realize that the world's most vexing trouble today blows across the sands of the Middle East. I think that it is imperative that we begin now to educate ourselves and force our understanding to reach across the cultural and geographical divides, not only for the accumulation of knowledge, but to insure our own survival.

For more than 40 years, I have immersed myself in the intricacies of relations between Jews and Arabs in the "Holy Land." I sadly conclude that, except for brief respites, it has been anything but holy. In 1982, I found myself in Lebanon during the war, as a journalist seeking answers. The bombs were falling on Beirut and artillery fired

all around us. Along the front lines in the Lebanon War, I saw for myself the bloodlust in men's hearts. In that same year, I set my hands on the Rubik's cube of peace, and for a while it seemed that meetings between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, convened in the town of Ramalla, might bear fruit; but, alas, this was not to be. The fighting continues until today, when we find Israel and the Palestinians engaged in Intifada II. Our efforts simply failed like those of other, more well-known seekers of peace.

Now everyone is concerned with peace. All of us have a stake in this pursuit. The destruction of the World Trade Center, anthrax scares, and American military intervention have shown us, in a grotesque way, that, as Benjamin Netanyahu has said, "We are all targets." This is no longer the speculations of a few, but the reality for many. The study of potential dangers to my country has shaped my life, and while I pray earnestly for my friends in the Holy Land, so too do I realize that my fellow citizens need access to critical information that will help us make good decisions in the coming days. We can't afford to ignore present circumstances.

In this book, I hope to show you two things: the basic information about the conflict you perhaps have wondered about from time to time, as Walter Cronkite, Peter Jennings, and others have reported through the decades, and, more importantly, why the issue should be much higher on your list of things to think about.

In the pages that follow, I will do my level best to blend quite a lot of basic information with a dash of insight. I invite you to study and pay attention. Think of this as a handbook of historical, religious, and political realities in the Middle East — a primer of sorts.

Come with me and we will travel to Israel and her neighbors: Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon. Find out what it all means.

Come stand with me in the rain.



## INTRODUCTION

In his 1869 travelogue *Innocents Abroad*, Mark Twain gave a detailed account of his visit to the Holy Land. In describing the arid, desolate scenes, the alter-ego of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn remarked on the biblical pronouncements that the land would one day flower again.

Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land? Palestine is no more of this workaday world. It is sacred to poetry and tradition – it is dreamland.

Twain once thought that a plan for the Middle East belonged in never-never land. It seemed so far-fetched. The desert, all its lizards and sparse trees and rocks, would remain a haunt of jackals.

But the Jews came back. Were the old prophets right after all? To be fair, there was an Arab population in the land as well. This is one of the sources of conflict to this day.

Today, in contrast to Twain's colorful description, the land is bursting with color and lush vegetation. It is also witness to another crazy idea, quite separate from the Bible. Can men fashion peace out of a wilderness of violence?

The current plan for peace in the Middle East, between

agitated Jews and angry Arabs, is a dream to many. The idea that ancient feuds can disappear is dismissed quickly by those weary of war and missed chances.

Few believe this literally means the end of all things, but the chances remain for a major regional conflict to escalate. In years past, Israel, long thought to possess nuclear capabilities, has officially declared that the state would simply “not be the first to use nuclear weapons,” a veiled reference that, indeed, the Jewish state has developed a quite lethal arsenal.

In fact, perhaps the most worrisome scenario for international onlookers — particularly those in the West — is that if Israel finds its back to the wall, the “Samson Option” might be utilized. This apocalypse would be played out on a far wider scale than the biblical story of Samson, he of the superhuman strength who was finally taken prisoner by the Philistines. In the final act of his life, on display at a pagan festival, the Jewish hero toppled the pillars he was chained to, bringing the house down, as it were, on his tormenters. The idea that Israel might use its nuclear weaponry in such a modern-day scene is almost too frightening to contemplate.

In any event, even with the peace talks at a terrible impasse, peace itself doesn’t have to be a dream. Those who have pursued peace know that a peace that works, such as the two-decade “cold peace” between Egypt and Israel, is a good thing.

It might be, though, that the formula mixed by the world community since the end of the Gulf War is fatally flawed. We shall see if the land-for-peace initiative is realistic or not.

For millenia, millions of Jews the world over have whispered to each other, “Next year in Jerusalem.” The longing to return, en masse, from forced exile, has sustained this peculiar people. The story is told that former Soviet dissident Nathan Sharansky, when led away to prison,

turned to his judges in the courtroom and said, “Next year in Jerusalem.” This panting to return is difficult to understand, yet there it is.

Too, many Arabs have a connection to the land. These children of Ishmael have been here in some numbers much longer than the United States has been alive and thriving.

Today, a half-century after declaring statehood, the Jews of Israel find themselves in bitter negotiations with Palestinian Arabs seeking to establish their own state in that strip of land on the eastern Mediterranean.

The current attempts at bargaining are at once harrowing and tantalizing. The opportunities for peace are coldly clear to an entire planet thirsting for a respite from war.

As late as the week before Christmas 2000, with Bethlehem a virtual ghost town after months of clashes, the Palestinian National Authority’s Minister of Jerusalem Affairs, Faisal Husseini, felt that a comprehensive peace agreement was near. The heightened bitter feelings between Jews and Arabs, brought on by daily skirmishes and terrorist acts, make this quest for a peace deal seem like a fairy tale.

Who are these two clans vying for supremacy in the Holy Land? This book aims to provide factual information for anyone confused by the issues between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. We will deal with basic issues such as the identity of the Palestinian people, analyze Israel’s neighbors and their history, review Jewish and Arab complaints of each other, peruse documents relevant to the peace process, and examine regional personalities.

It is a most fascinating story. The winds of history have never stopped blowing in this place, so far removed from the everyday experiences of Americans.

Let us hope, as one Israeli writer recently put it, that “the dogs of war” will go on sleeping. Peacefully.





**ISRAEL**





## CHAPTER ONE

# THE PLAYERS

Don't be embarrassed if you know little about the history of the conflict between Arabs and Jews; guilt over that is not useful to our discussion, so let's move on and start learning.

The modern nations in the Middle East are best understood initially by looking at a simple map (see preceding pages). Israel's size is much smaller than her neighbor's. All told, Israel's present landmass is approximately 10,000 square miles, compared to 5,414,000 square miles for the 22 Arab states.<sup>1</sup>

All the borders of these 23 nations were set within the last century. In antiquity, of course, the regional civilizations rose from the Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans. All of these powers were burdened by an ancient Jewish presence, which the biblical records tell us settled in the area in the second millennium B.C., forcing the Canaanites, for the most part, out of what is today the Mediterranean coastal regions, as well as mountainous areas of central Israel.

From that time to this, the land area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River has proven to be a popular travel and trade route between the Near East and the Far East. Countless armies have fought all through the



*Present-day Middle East*

region, from Egyptian pharaohs to the present-day participants of what is called the new *intifada* (Arabic for “liberation,” or “shaking off”).

Byzantine rule followed Rome, and then the burgeoning Islamic empire birthed by Mohammed in the early part of the sixth century fell on the region for several hundred years before being replaced by the Ottoman Turkish empire for four hundred years. In 1917, British field commander Lord Allenby took the storied city of Jerusalem



from the Turks without firing a shot and the Holy Land, or Palestine, came under British rule.

After 30 years of attempting to mediate continuous fighting among Arabs and a growing Jewish population, the British effectively abandoned the area to the administration of the newly formed United Nations.

Much confusion exists regarding the name “Palestine.” For Arabs, modern Israel is Palestine; for Israelis, the name is obsolete, except in a future peace treaty with the Palestinians as outlined in the Oslo accords.

The word “Palestine” derives from *Philistia*, the name given to the land of the Philistines. *Philistia* derives from the Hebrew term for the region.

For the Romans, who ruled the region for almost 400 years, the final Jewish rebellion under Roman occupation ended in A.D. 135. Henceforth, the emperor Hadrian renamed the country *Palestina* (in contrast to *Judea*), in order to wipe the last traces of Jewish influence from this hotly contested place.

From that date until 1948 the land was universally known as Palestine. On May 14, 1948, Jewish leader David Ben Gurion declared the establishment of the state of Israel.

A heavy influx of Jewish settlers into the area, beginning in the 19th century, began to have an effect on the local Arab population. Despite some pockets of cooperation and mutual goodwill (such as between Jewish and Arab leaders in 1919), outbreaks of violence began to occur. Finally, the 1948 declaration prompted an eruption when Israel’s Arab neighbors publicly announced plans to invade the fledgling country.

The very next day, May 15, five Arab nations poured across the fresh borders. Heavy fighting all over the country gave way to a prolonged struggle, which eventually resulted in a cease-fire of sorts.

Flare-ups continued until the summer of 1967, when



Israel, confronted with heavy Syrian and Egyptian forces massed on the northern and southern borders, launched a preemptive strike. The lightning operation caught the Arab armies off guard; Israel's sweeping victory came to be known as the Six Day War. Suddenly, many biblical lands were back in Jewish hands, including the Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and the West Bank (Judea/Samaria).

Interestingly, the term "West Bank" was coined by Jordan's King Hussein, in reference to a significant land area on the west side of the Jordan River. For more than 30 years, this has been disputed territory.

In 1973 the Syrians and Egyptians surprised the Israelis on the eve of the holiest day on the Jewish calendar — Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

Only a tenacious effort by the Israelis and a daring tank maneuver in the Sinai saved Israel from being overrun. Since that time, no full-scale war efforts have been aimed at Israel, although the Persian Gulf War threatened to sweep over the entire Middle East.

Today, terrorist activities, and the consistent Israeli response, blanket the country on a daily basis.

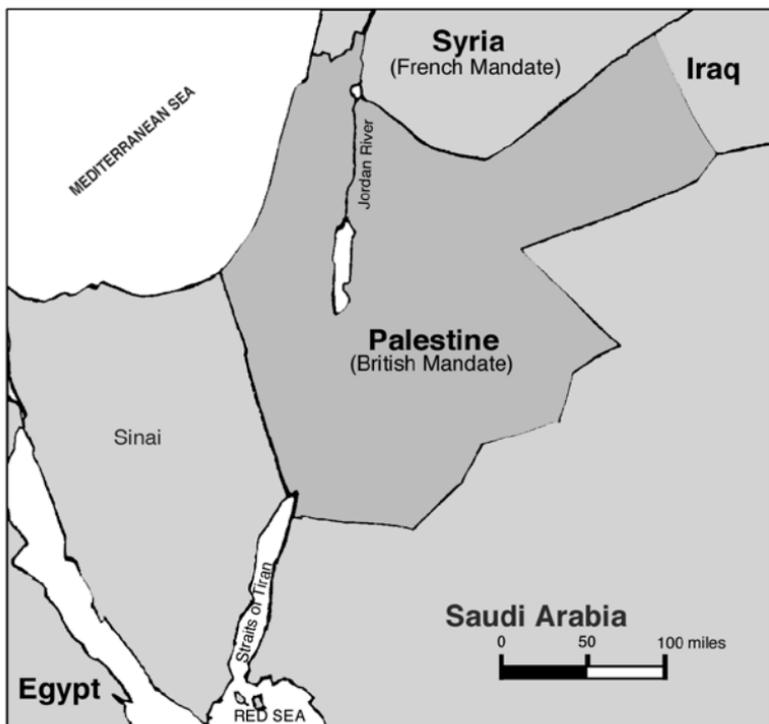
#### WHOSE LAND?

Even those with only passing interest in the cauldron of Middle East politics know that in the last decade intensive efforts have been made to secure a lasting peace between Israel and the Arabs. This process of negotiations has come to be known as the Oslo accords, so named for the initially secret talks held in Norway between Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

For all its complexities, the Arab-Israeli conflict is most famous for the most basic of land disputes. Arabs claim that the Jewish state is illegitimate, built on Islamic land. Jews counter that the founding of the state was in accordance with U.N. approval.

A framework for peace, developed by American and





*Palestine in 1920*

European diplomats, revolves around the idea of “land for peace.” Israel is to have final, secure, recognized borders, while the Palestinian Arabs are to be given the opportunity to establish their own state, ostensibly on land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with connecting roads to be built.

It was at this point that negotiations broke down in July 2000 between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority and American mediators.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, willing to go much further than previous heads-of-state in offering a comprehensive package to the Palestinians, was stunned when Palestinian National Authority (PNA) Chairman Yasser



Arafat rejected the proposal at a Camp David summit. Arafat had demanded that the Palestinians be given total sovereignty over Jerusalem's Old City, claimed since 1980 as Israel's capital.

Intensive talks consumed the last months of the Clinton administration, as a final peace accord was thought to be within grasp, bringing a historic peace.

Beyond this, many religious Jews claim an inheritance that dates from the time of the biblical patriarch Abraham. As the Genesis account goes, Abraham and his wife, Sara, were unable to have children of their own, so an Egyptian concubine, Hagar, produced Abraham's male heir, Ishmael.

In a twist that eclipses any Hollywood plot, Sara became pregnant and Isaac was born. The Bible indicates that the offspring of these two boys would be in perpetual disagreement, even violently so (Gen. 16:12).

Even many secular scholars trace the roots of this present-day conflict between Palestinians and Jews to this event. The sons of Ishmael — the Arabs — are at odds with the sons of Isaac — the Jews. The key to this is the reference to Isaac being the “child of the promise,” that is, the land given to Abraham's seed by the Lord God would be a permanent gift to the Jewish people (Gen. 17:19). That the children of Ishmael were also given a rich inheritance (Gen. 17:20) is of little consolation to modern Arab nations.

Indeed, at the same time Jews lay eternal claims to the land, and in particular, the city of Jerusalem, the Palestinian Arabs make their own claims. A major effort is underway by Palestinian archaeologists to link this modern people with the Canaanites, Jebusites, and Philistines. Of course, this argument is based on a “we were here first” scenario.

A more modern dispute, however, has pushed the sacred story into an almost forgotten corner.

The question becomes this: was it just — even moral



— to establish a Jewish state in a sea of Arab countries?

Even before the Holocaust (Nazi Germany's plan to exterminate the Jews in Europe), numerous pogroms, or murderous vendettas, against Jewish populations in Russia and other places compelled key Jewish world figures to seek a safe haven for any Jew, anywhere in the world.

Theodore Herzl, a young Jewish journalist, covered the Dreyfus trial in Paris. The "Dreyfus Affair," as it came to be known, alarmed Herzl, who saw waves of anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews) wash over the trial and its aftermath. For the rest of his life, Herzl was a tireless champion of establishing a Jewish state, which would serve as a safe haven for Jews all over the world.

Thus was the movement known as Zionism born. Zionism, taking a cue from biblical references (Ezek. 37:25), is essentially the belief that the Holy Land is to be a Jewish possession forever.

Herzl was successful in obtaining some international support for his idea, although his premature death in 1904 prevented him from seeing the dream fulfilled.

As caretakers/occupiers after World War I, the British were at first sympathetic to the idea of a "Jewish national homeland." Leaders such as Lloyd George and Winston Churchill saw Palestine as the ideal place. Indeed, it is important to note that the Palestine of the early 20th century was a rather large landmass that eventually became the nations of Jordan and Israel (see map, page 23).

With the discovery and production of crude oil in largely Arab states, influential members of England's parliament and foreign service began to see the benefits of maintaining close contact with the Arabs. A shift in support from the Zionists to the Arab League was accomplished before the outbreak of World War II.

It is helpful, since this book aims to present basic facts, to identify just what Arabs and Jews are.

Although there have been attempts to link modern-



day Palestinians with the Canaanites (and thus give the Palestinians the earliest title-deed, as it were), no compelling archaeological or cultural evidence exists to support the theory. What is known is that the **Arabs** as a distinct people began to emerge just after the time of Christ, the nomadic peoples following their herds of sheep across vast expanses of desert in the Middle East.

The Arabs came into real prominence with the introduction into history of Mohammed, who founded the religion of **Islam** in the seventh century, in the area of what is today Saudi Arabia.

Although the people of Iran, Lebanon, and Egypt are thought in the West to be Arabs, in fact, they are not. What unites these cultures is Islam.

Egypt, of course, is a very old civilization, one of the great centers of human activity in antiquity.

Iran itself was, until the last century, known as **Persia**. This equally impressive civilization rose from the fog of the distant past. In 1979 an Islamic revolution swept the country and the initial leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, declared himself to be an implacable enemy of Israel.

Right up to the present moment, Iran supplies radical Islamic terrorist organizations with money and other resources, and coordinates the activities of the Lebanon-based "Hizbollah" (the "party of God"). The Hizbollah is a terrorist group that has shelled communities in northern Israel for many years. In the summer of 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak made good on a campaign pledge to pull the Israel Defense Forces out of a "buffer zone" in southern Lebanon.

As for the **Jews** themselves, they are a distinct group also originating in the Middle East, with the Bible recording that God forged this nation from Abraham, sometime in the second millenium B.C.

After serving as slaves in Egypt for 400 years, the Bible says that the Israelites, under the direction of Moses and



later his successor, Joshua, prepared to enter the land of Canaan.

Upon conquering large swatches of territory in what is today Israel and the West Bank, the Israelites continued a strong presence in the land, culminating in the reigns of David and his son, Solomon, with their capitals in Jerusalem.

This zenith of Jewish power began to wane two hundred years later as the powerful Assyrian empire (located in present-day Iraq) conquered the area. They were followed by Babylonian and Roman powers centuries later.

It is important to note that the Palestinians deny any Jewish presence in what some call the Holy Land, and archaeological excavations continue under the auspices of both peoples.

Perhaps the key “hot spot” in the entire region is the Temple Mount, so called by the Jews because two Jewish temples stood there, the last one having been destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70.

The Arabs know this hill in the heart of Jerusalem’s Old City as Haram el al Sharif. Two Islamic shrines, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the famous Dome of the Rock, occupy the site now.

Several key figures have entered and exited the stage of the Middle East in the past 50 years. Among the most important is Yasser Arafat, known to Arabs as Abu Ammar.

In 1968, four years after the founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Arafat became the leader of the PLO. Reviled internationally as a terrorist, Arafat maintained contacts throughout the Arab world, lived briefly in Jordan and Lebanon, then in exile in Tunisia, where he solidified his leadership of all the Palestinian people.

In the 1990s, Arafat suddenly found himself courted by diplomats and governments, as the United States and other Western countries rode the momentum of the Gulf War triumph to seek a comprehensive,



lasting peace between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East.

By the time Israel officially recognized the PLO as the representative of Palestinian Arabs, Arafat had made the remarkable transformation into a statesman. Arafat's leap from leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (founded in 1964) to chairman of the new, quasi-government known as the Palestinian National Authority was complete.

A succession of Israeli prime ministers — Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and Benjamin Netanyahu — along with Barak, tried to finalize a permanent peace treaty with Arafat and his Palestinian National Authority.

All these leaders, and many others — on both sides of the dispute — have long believed that they would be the ones to lead the region down the path of peace. Sadly, each has found himself another stone in the pavement of a never-ending labyrinth of violence and social unrest.

Astonishingly, as Israel's early elections for prime minister loomed late in the year 2000, aging diplomatic veterans such as Peres and Ariel Sharon threw their hats into the campaign ring, underscoring the fluid state of Middle East politics.

Only months before, both Peres and Sharon, in their seventies, were thought to be too old to lead a changing nation into the future. Now they found themselves in viable positions.

Sharon, the military hero, and political pariah to some, visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on September 28, 2000, and media outlets the world over labeled the visit, following the lead of Arafat and the PNA, as a dangerous provocation.

Sharon, surrounded by a staggering number of Israeli security forces (1,000!) toured the site where two Jewish temples once stood. Now, two Islamic shrines, the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, draw thousands of worshippers.



The cauldron of violence that had already spilled over erupted a day later as Palestinian militants exploited Sharon's hour-long visit. Into this bubbling stew the Israeli political scene cooked, while outgoing U.S. President Bill Clinton saw his chances for a historic peace agreement slip away.

As Texas governor George W. Bush made the transition to president, he named a foreign policy team (retired General Colin Powell, Stanford professor Condoleeza Rice, and others) that will no doubt keep many U.S. policies in place, as the superpower continues to try and find ways to mediate the dispute.

#### NOTES

- 1 Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Durable Peace: Israel and Its Place Among the Nations* (New York: Warner Books, 1999).

