



Educator's Guide

How did we get here? The roots of the Iran-Israel Conflict

Historically, Israel's wars were fought against its direct neighbors, and Iran is on the other side of the Arabian peninsula. And Palestinians are Arabs, so the Arab world has historically shown solidarity with them by opposing Israel. But Iranians are Persian, not Arab. Additionally, most of Israel's enemies are Sunni. But Iran is a Shi'a country and the Sunni and Shi'a have been at war for centuries. And lastly, Iran and Israel used to be close allies. So all this begs the question - why does Iran hate Israel so much?

Link to video: <https://unpacked.education/video/why-does-iran-hate-israel>

Essential Questions/Big Ideas:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Why are the roots of the Iran-Israel conflict? | 1. Iran views Western values as incompatible with Islamic values |
| 2. Why does Iran view Western values and culture as a global threat? | 2. Iran's hatred for Israel is deep, multifaceted, and dangerous |
| 3. Do the 2025 attacks mark a new chapter in the Iran-Israel conflict—or a continuation of old dynamics? | |

Review Questions

1. Iran's population is mainly:
 - a. Sunni Muslim
 - b. **Shi'ite Muslim**
 - c. non-Muslim
 - d. Christian



2. The Shah supported some Western values like:
 - a. education
 - b. women's rights
 - c. religious freedom
 - d. **all of the above**
3. In 1979, the _____ led to the ousting of the Shah, the rise of the Ayatollah, and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
 - a. **Islamic Revolution**
 - b. Arab Spring
 - c. Intifada
 - d. War of Independence
4. Ayatollah Khomeini viewed Israel as the frontline of the battle against Western _____.
 - a. globalization
 - b. **imperialism**
 - c. liberalism
 - d. democracy
5. True or false: Shia Muslims make up about 10% of Muslims around the world
 - a. **True**
 - b. False
6. According to Haviv Rettig Gur, in the Iranian narrative, the Jews are the:
 - a. Devil
 - b. **West's weakest element**
 - c. oppressors
 - d. richest people in the world
7. One of the pillars of faith for Shi'ite Muslims is "Adl", which means:
 - a. Life
 - b. Liberty
 - c. **Justice**
 - d. Revenge



- 8.** The current Iranian regime believes that Western values and culture and Islamic values:
- a. Could be mistaken for each other
 - b. Can learn from each other
 - c. Are based on the same core beliefs
 - d. **Are never compatible**

Discussion Questions

1. Zooming In and Out

Watch [\[12:17–16:28\]](#) of this podcast excerpt of a discussion between Dr. Noam Weissman and journalist and author [Yaakov Katz](#) about the 2025 Israel-Iran war.

- What are the three reasons given for why Israel chose to strike when it did?
- Which reason do you find most compelling, and why?
- When you zoom out and think about the broader story of Iran and Israel's relationship (as shown earlier in this [Unpacked video](#)), how does this moment fit into the bigger picture? Does it feel like a turning point, or part of a longer pattern?

2. Choosing alliances: An alliance is [defined](#) as “a union or association formed for mutual benefit, especially between countries or organizations.” For 30 years, Iran and Israel enjoyed a casual alliance, supporting each other and collaborating on trade (for more information, see this [Unpacked video](#)). However, after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran has turned against Israel and its biggest ally, the United States.

- Why do groups of people or nations form alliances? What is the advantage of having allies?
- How do people choose their allies? In what ways do you think the old adage, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” is accurate when it comes to forming strategic alliances?

- How has Israel's alliance with the United States impacted its relationship with Iran?

3. Iran's support of terror: The Iranian government supports terrorist organizations like [Hezbollah](#) and the [Houthis](#) across the Middle East.

- What do they hope to achieve by supporting terrorism, and how might this affect everyday life for people in Iran?
- From your perspective, how should other countries interact with Iran? Should they consider military threats, implement economic sanctions, diplomatic negotiations, or offer incentives for cooperation? Is there a way for the world to convince Iran to stop funding and supporting terrorism?
- How should Israel treat Iran when it continues to direct terror attacks on Israel directly and via proxies? Were the 2025 preemptive attacks justified?

Learning Activities

1. [Lesson plan](#)

2. Create your own news show: Divide students into pairs and have them act as co-news anchors reporting on the aftermath of Israel's 2025 preemptive strike on Iran's nuclear facilities and Iran's retaliatory attacks on Israeli civilian areas. Students should select a short excerpt from [this Unpacked podcast](#) or from these Today Unpacked shorts ([here](#) and [here](#)) to include in their broadcast. Then, they'll "go live" creating a 5-minute video segment responding to the clip—explaining what happened, offering background context, and sharing what they think their audience needs to understand about the conflict.

Alternatively: After watching the videos about the 2025 Israel-Iran war listed above, ask students to connect one piece of news to a historical cause in the original "[Why does Iran hate Israel](#)" Unpacked video. Then, ask students to create a timeline of three historical moments (e.g., 1979 Islamic Revolution → Iran funds Hezbollah → June 2025 direct attack).



- 3. Speechwriting:** In an interview with Ari Shavit several years ago (referenced [here](#)), the former head of Israeli Military Intelligence, Amos Yadlin described the attitude of Iran towards Israel in the clearest of terms:

"They [the Iranians] are totally convinced that because our [Israeli/Western] civilization is spoiled and corrupt it cannot endure suffering, has no resilience, and is bound to rot. That's why they have no doubt that they will have the upper hand and eventually bring about the downfall of Israel, Europe, and America. The future is theirs, they believe. Their rising culture will topple ours."

Working in small groups, prepare a speech that counters this view from an Israeli perspective. Respond to at least three of Yadlin's points. After writing your speech, regroup as a class and discuss:

- How did it feel to consider how the Iranian regime views Israel and the West?
- How do you think your speech will make others feel? What was your goal?

- 4. Spectrum:** Designate one side of the room as "agree" and the other side "disagree". Ask students to respond to the following statements by standing on the place in the spectrum that best represents their view:

- Western values and Islamic values can never be compatible
- Israel is the west's "weakest link"
- Israel's allies should help with fighting Iran
- Iranian civilians are enemies of Israel

After the activity, debrief by asking:

- Which statement did you feel most strongly about?
- What did you learn about yourself from this activity?

- 5.** Give your students our [Kahoot](#) on Why does Iran hate Israel?

Reflection Questions

- 1. Reaching out:** Not all Iranians agree with the beliefs and strategies of the current regime. Unfortunately, many of these voices of dissent are afraid to speak, due to

the threat of severe punishment. What would you want to say to people in Iran who are quietly fighting against the current regime? What would you want them to know about Israel and about the Jewish people?

2. New Chapter or Old Pattern?

- Do the 2025 attacks mark a new chapter in the Iran–Israel conflict, or are they part of a pattern that’s been building for years? Why do you think that matters?
- What is it like to live through such a significant moment in Jewish history? What is one thing you think you’ll remember or share with your children or students in the future?

3. The Pesach Seder: Every year at the Pesach seder, we say the words *“Bechol dor vador omdim aleinu lechaloteinu”* – “In every generation, our enemies rise up against us to destroy us.”

- Does this text feel different this year after the October 7th attack and the recent war between Israel and Iran?
- The refrain ends with *“VehaKadosh Baruch Hu matzileinu miyadam”* – “And G-d saves us from their hands.”
 - i. Would you see Israel’s ability to successfully attack and significantly damage much of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure – and to continue functioning as a country despite missile attacks, casualties, and destruction – as a miraculous event, similar to different times when the Jewish people have experienced salvation? Or do you see this as having more of a natural explanation?
- How does that impact the way you understand this passage in the Haggadah today?



Further Learning

1. Unpacked for Educators:

- [Israel-Iran War Collection](#)
- [Unpacking the Israeli-Iran conflict through political cartoons](#) (program)
- [Facing an existential threat: Why Israel struck Iran now with journalist and author Yaakov Katz](#) (podcast)
- [Is Iran the biggest threat to peace in the Middle East?](#) (video)
- [Iran's surprise attack on Israel](#) (podcast)
- [From friends to foes: The story of Israel and Iran](#) (video)
- [Israel and Iran: From allies to archenemies](#) (article)
- [Israel, Iran and the US: What you need to know](#) (article)

2. Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution:

- [Approach to the Palestinian Israeli conflict](#) (article)
- [Iran's revolution](#) (article)

3. Western values:

- [Iran's war against western culture](#) (article)
- [Iran's anti-Western 'blueprint' for the next fifty years](#) (article)