



## Background Essay on Harry S. Truman and the Recognition of Israel

In 1917, the **Balfour Declaration** transferred rule of the middle-eastern region known as Palestine to the British Empire as a temporary national home for Jewish people. Between 1917 and 1948, Palestine was inhabited by Jewish immigrants who supported the idea of **Zionism** (the right of the Jewish people to return to the Holy Land) and Arab-speaking Muslims and Christians who had occupied the land for many centuries. Tension began to form between the Arab Palestinians and the Jewish immigrants as both groups tried to take claim over the same portions of religiously-significant land.

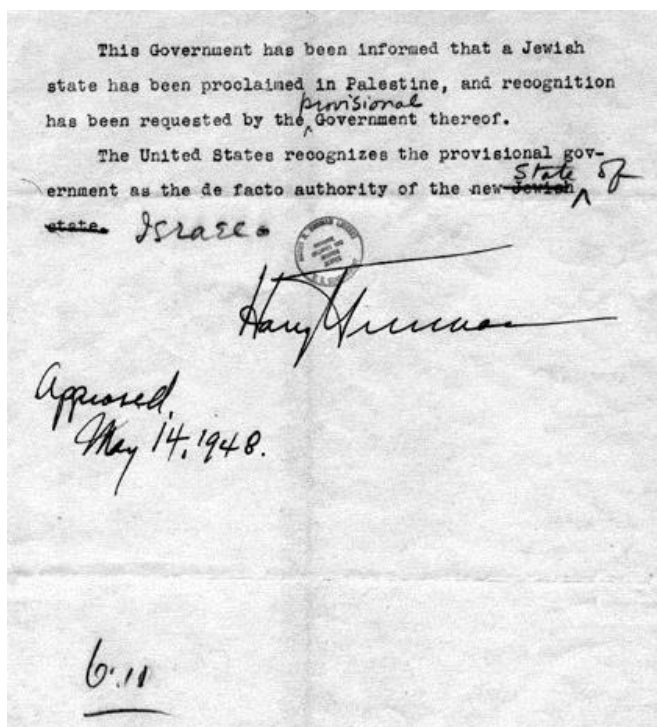
In 1948, the Balfour Declaration was scheduled to expire and Great Britain would no longer rule Palestine. The question over what to do with the tumultuous country was turned over to the United Nations who would eventually decide to create the new country of **Israel**, specifically as a promised homeland for Jewish people. The new country was to be located across the various holy

locations in which many events of the Old Testament occurred and, according to the Bible, was promised to the Jewish people by God.

U.S. President Harry Truman was the first world leader to officially recognize Israel as a legitimate Jewish state on May 14, 1948, only eleven minutes after its creation. His decision came after much discussion and advice from the White House staff who had differing viewpoints. Some advisors felt that creating a Jewish state was the only proper response to the holocaust and would benefit American interests. Others took the opposite view, concerned about that the creation of a Jewish state would create more conflict in an already tumultuous region.



*President Harry S. Truman with Israel's First President, Dr. Chaim Weizmann. May 25.*



*Official announcement of the United States recognition of the new government of Israel signed by President Harry S. Truman, May 14, 1948.*

### Key Question

*Based on the following documents, would you have recognized Israel as a new country in 1948? Why or why not?*



## Maps of Palestine and Surrounding Areas, before and after 1948

Truman Presidential  
Museum & Library

