**The Great Debate**

**Briefing Materials**

This packet includes briefing materials for facilitators (staff and/or campers) for the following 8 issues:

1. The threat posed by Iran
2. Territorial compromise
3. Religion and state
4. Who is a Jew
5. Citizenship and rights
6. Security/civil liberties
7. Army and society
8. Israel-Diaspora relations
9. **The threat posed by Iran**

* Iran has been a fundamentalist Islamic state since the 1979 Iranian Revolution overthrew the U.S.-allied secular government
* Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has repeatedly said that Israel must be wiped off the map
* Iran acknowledges that it has been developing nuclear capabilities, but says that the focus is on non-military uses. The U.S., U.N., E.U. and Israel all have expressed doubt about these claims. Experts say all indications are that Iran's efforts are aimed at achieving the capability to build nuclear weapons
* Iran calls the U.S. "the Great Satan" and Israel "the Little Satan." It also has tense relations with many countries throughout the Arab world
* Iran is the main supporter of Hezbollah and Hamas, both groups that use terror against Israel and are recognized by the international community as terror groups
* In 1981, Israel launched an airstrike that destroyed an Iraqi nuclear plant that Israel believed was going to be used to develop nuclear weapons
* The Iranian project is located in many sites around the country, many of which are buried deep underground. Destroying the plants is not necessarily possible
* If anyone attacks Iran, its military may retaliate and this could escalate into an all-out war
* The U.S. has led global efforts to impose sanctions on Iran, hoping to convince the country to rethink its nuclear plans.
* The U.S. has said that a military strike is an option, but it prefers to use sanctions to stop Iran

For a detailed overview of the issue, see The New York Times:  http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iran/nuclear\_program/index.html

2**. Territorial compromise**

* See Map (supplied by Israel's Foreign Ministry below and in the PDF available on the database.) Judea and Samaria are the Biblical names for the areas commonly referred to today as the West Bank.
* In the 1967 Six Day War, Israel conquered the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria.
* Israel immediately offered to return most of these territories to its neighbors in return for peace, but the response was "no." The Arab world refused to recognize Israel's right to exist.
* In 1977, Egypt offered to make peace with Israel if Israel returned the Sinai. The deal was signed in 1979 and the two countries have had peace since then.
* In the late 1980s, Jordan gave up its claim to the West Bank and East Jerusalem, saying the territories should go to the Palestinians.
* In 1994, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel.
* Israeli-Palestinian negotiations began in 1993, but they have not gone well.
* Currently, the Palestinians have autonomy (limited self rule) in much of the West Bank and all of the Gaza Strip. Negotiations have stalled, but at times it has seemed as if the two sides were close to achieving a deal that would result in two states.
* A few numbers: Israel is home to 8 million people, of whom about 80% are Jewish and 20% are non -Jews. Most of the non-Jews are Arabs. The West Bank is home to about 2.5 million Palestinians, and Gaza is home to about 1.5 million Palestinians.
* Arabs who live in Israel are citizens and participate in the democratic process of the country, including voting in elections.
* Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are not citizens of Israel and do not vote in Israeli elections.
* In the past, Israel has offered to give the Palestinians most of the West Bank, and all of Gaza, for a Palestinian state. The negotiations have not resulted in an agreement.

Map  
 See I[srael's Story in Maps](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/Israel+in+Maps/)) and the attachments below.

**3. Religion and state**

* Israel calls itself a Jewish state. It is the only country in the world with a Jewish majority
* Israel's Declaration of Independence guarantees full rights and equality for all citizens, regardless of their religion or race
* Orthodox Judaism is the recognized form of Judaism in Israel. Weddings, for instance, must be conducted by Orthodox rabbis, and conversions to Judaism must be carried out by Orthodox rabbis.
* Laws limit businesses that can operate on Shabbat. Most stores and businesses are closed, and most public transportation stops on Shabbat.
* While Orthodox Judaism is the "official" religion, most Israelis are not strictly observant and they are free to observe -- or not -- as they wish in most aspects of their daily lives.
* The Reform and Conservative movements are small and not officially recognized in Israel, although there are synagogues and communities that identify with these groups.
* Orthodox synagogues receive state funding. Non-Orthodox synagogues do not.

**4. Who is a Jew**

* The Nazis identified anyone who had at least one Jewish grandparent or was married to someone with at least one Jewish grandparent as a Jew. Many of the people killed or persecuted by the Nazis had never practiced Judaism or identified as a Jew
* When Israel was founded it decided that anyone who could have been persecuted as a Jew by the Nazis deserved to be recognized as a Jew by the State of Israel
* According to Orthodox Jewish law, only someone whose mother is Jewish, or who converts to Judaism in an Orthodox conversion, is Jewish
* In order to get married in a Jewish ceremony in Israel, each partner must prove that they meet these requirements. (There is no civil marriage in Israel; if you don't want to be married by an Orthodox rabbi, you must get married outside the country.)
* Several decades ago, the Reform movement in the U/S/ decided that anyone born of a Jewish parent -- mother or father -- is a Jew. Conservative and Orthodox Jews do not recognize this decision.

**5. Citizenship and rights**

* About 80% of Israel's citizens are Jewish. Most of the rest are Arab.
* Israel's Declaration of Independence guarantees equal rights to all citizens, regardless of religion, race, sex or other factors
* Arab citizens of Israel can vote, and they can serve in the Knesset (Parliament)
* There are Arab members of Knesset, an Arab Supreme Court judge and non-Jews serving in many senior positions in Israel
* Arab citizens are not required to serve in the army, because it is thought to be unfair to ask them to, perhaps, fight against their brethren
* A small minority of Israeli Arabs volunteer for military service
* Veterans of the IDF get a variety of benefits, including discounts on university tuition and preferential treatment in applying for some jobs

**6. Security/civil liberties**

* The reality of terrorism has led Israel to draw lines that are different than America's when it comes to civil liberties
* While U.S. law prohibits the use of profiling in maintaining security (for example, at airport security), Israeli law permits it
* In Israel, the threat of terror is always felt, and most people are willing to be subjected to searches and questioning because they believe it helps keep them safe
* Some people say that, because nearly all terror threats come from Arabs, Arabs should be subjected to stricter surveillance than Jews

**7. Army and society**

* The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is led by a senior career army officer who reports to the Minister of Defense and the Prime Minister
* Military leaders take their orders from the country's political leaders, but it is the job of the senior officers to keep the country safe
* The Prime Minister and other senior government ministers deal with world leaders, including the U.S. President. They are responsible for coordinating Israel's military plans with other countries, as far as they see fit to do so
* If the IDF conducts an operation that foreign governments don't like, they will complain to the Israeli government, not directly to the IDF officers

**8. Israel-Diaspora relations**

* Under Israeli law, all Jews in the world have the right to move to Israel and receive automatic Israeli citizenship. This is called the Law of Return, and is based on the belief that all Jews trace their roots back to ancient Israel. Moving there is different than moving to Canada or France; it is literally a return to their place of origin
* Many Israelis believe that all Jews should move to Israel immediately
* In 1950, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion signed an agreement with the leader of the American Jewish Committee that said that Israel represents only the State of Israel -- not world Jewry. The agreement said that Israel would not pressure American Jews to move to Israel, and American Jews would not tell the Israeli government what policies it should adopt.
* For many years, Diaspora Jews agreed that they should support the policies of the democratic government of Israel. More recently, many Jews outside of Israel -- especially in the U.S. -- have become more outspoken in their criticism of specific Israeli policies that they do not like.
* Most Israelis say that their country's policies should be set by the people who live in Israel. They are, after all, the first to have to live with the consequences.
* Some Jews in Israel and around the world have called for a new system to allow world Jewry to have more of a say in Israeli policymaking, perhaps by establishing a second house in Israel's Knesset (Parliament) that would be chosen by Diaspora Jews. They say this reflects the close relationships that have developed between world Jewry and Israel