The 1990 Arab League Emergency Summit Baghdad

PRESIDENT RESEARCH PACKET

President: Mutaz Fakhouri

Rising Soviet Jewish Immigration into Occupied Palestinian Territories

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President's Letter:

Dear Delegates of the 1990 Arab League Emergency Summit Baghdad,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to KAMUN's 26, 1990 Arab League Emergency Summit – Baghdad. This is not just any committee — this is a committee set in one of the Arab world's most decisive moments, where diplomacy was measured in hours, and every choice deeply affected the future.

I am Mutaz Fakhouri, a twelfth-grader at King's Academy, and I have the honor of serving as your President this year. The Baghdad Summit was a meeting where leaders faced enormous pressure and no easy answers. As a special committee, we will recreate that urgency. You will need to think quickly, defend your positions fiercely, and adapt to shifting alliances. What you say, or don't say, will change the outcome.

Our first topic, "Managing the Arab Response to Intra-Regional Disputes and Border Tensions," will take you into the months before the invasion of Kuwait, where disputes over oil production, war debt, and influence threatened unity in the Gulf.

 Our second topic, "Rising Soviet Jewish Immigration into Occupied Palestinian Territories," will challenge you to respond to a demographic and political shift actively encouraged by Israel's Law of Return, and to address its significant consequences for the Palestinian cause and the region.

This committee will not be slow or forgiving. Expect a war room atmosphere. Tense, fast, and unpredictable. Every statement will be tested, every alliance questioned. In 1990, leaders in Baghdad had no luxury of looking back, and neither will you. When you walk into this room, you are stepping into history, and in this history, hesitation can cost you everything.

See you soon,

Mutaz Fakhouri

President of The 1990 Arab League Emergency Summit Baghdad

Introduction:

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The collapse of the Soviet Union created one of the largest migrations in modern Middle Eastern history: the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews to Israel.

Between 1989 and 1995, over 700,000 people left the former USSR. Many had faced antisemitism, job discrimination, and limits on practicing their faith. Israel, through the Law of Return, offered them a new beginning. This law promised automatic citizenship to every Jew, regardless of origin, and it became the backbone of Israel's immigration strategy.

Yet this wave of migration did not simply fill neighborhoods in Tel Aviv or Haifa. Many of the new arrivals were encouraged, and sometimes incentivized, to live in occupied territories — especially the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This was not just resettlement; it was demographic engineering. Each new apartment built in these areas carried political weight, tightening Israel's control and reducing the chance of Palestinian independence.

For Palestinians, the wave of immigration meant more than new neighbors. It meant more checkpoints, more settlements, more displacement, and a shrinking map for their future state. For Arab states, it was another sign that Israel was not only winning through military power, but through population numbers that could not be easily reversed.

The Baghdad Summit brought this issue forward because it was urgent. It was not only about who lived where, but about who would define the land, the culture, and the very future of Palestine.

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Definition of Key Terms:

Soviet Jewish Immigration :

The large-scale movement of Jews from the collapsing Soviet Union to Israel, peaking between 1989–1995. While it was presented as a humanitarian project, it also became a tool for Israel to strengthen control over contested land.

Law of Return :

An Israeli law passed in 1950, which gives every Jew in the world the right to move to Israel and become a citizen. This law was the foundation of the Soviet immigration wave.

Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) :

Lands seized by Israel in 1967, including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. These areas remain internationally recognized as occupied, yet were often used to house new immigrants.

Demographic Balance :

The shifting ratio of Jews to Palestinians in historic Palestine. Immigration was seen as a way to ensure Jewish majority and weaken Palestinian claims.

Settlement Expansion :

The building of new Israeli neighborhoods in occupied areas. The Soviet immigration wave accelerated this process, as thousands of new families needed homes.

Arab League Response :

The position of Arab states, which condemned the settlement of immigrants in occupied territories and called it an act that undermined Palestinian rights.

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Major Parties Involved:

Israel – Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir (1989–1992) :

His government pushed hard for Soviet Jewish immigration, framing it as both a moral duty and a strategic advantage. He encouraged many of these immigrants to live in contested areas.

Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) – Yasser Arafat :

The PLO saw the immigration as a direct attack on the Palestinian cause. Every new settlement weakened the chances of statehood.

Soviet Jewish Immigrants :

Individuals and families who left behind discrimination in the USSR. For many, Israel was a place of safety. However, their arrival also made them part of a larger political struggle they did not always choose.

Jordan – King Hussein :

With deep ties to the West Bank and a large Palestinian population already within its borders, Jordan worried that new waves of displacement would spill into its territory, destabilizing its society.

Arab League :

A collective body of Arab states that attempted to resist Israel's demographic strategy. Though united in their concern, divisions between members often weakened their response.

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Timeline:

1988 :

Palestinians declare independence; Arab states reaffirm support for the PLO.

1989 :

The Iran-Iraq War ends. Iraq is left bankrupt and in debt to Gulf states, fueling tension.

Late 1989–1990 :

Jewish immigration from the collapsing Soviet Union to Israel raises Arab fears over Palestine.

Early 1990 :

 Iraq accuses Kuwait of overproducing oil, worsening its financial crisis.

28–30 May 1990 :

Arab leaders meet in Baghdad at Saddam Hussein's invitation. Nineteen states attend (Syria and Lebanon absent). The summit focuses on Arab disputes, border tensions, and the dangers of Soviet Jewish immigration. The final statement reaffirms Jerusalem as Palestine's capital and warns of demographic threats, but divisions remain.

June–July 1990 :

Iraq's dispute with Kuwait escalates.

2 August 1990 :

Iraq invades Kuwait, triggering regional crisis.

10 August 1990 :

An emergency summit in Cairo condemns the invasion, calls for withdrawal, and agrees to send Arab peacekeepers, though states are split in their loyalties.

12 August 1990 :

Saddam proposes linking Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait to Israel leaving occupied lands, but offers no unconditional exit.

January–February 1991 :

The Gulf War begins; a US-led coalition with Arab support forces Iraq out of Kuwait.

Implications:

The Soviet Jewish immigration wave reshaped the conflict in ways that were immediate and long-lasting.

For Palestinians, the demographic shift meant more pressure on land and resources. Settlements grew quickly, especially in sensitive areas near Jerusalem. This expansion made it harder to imagine a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem, or a contiguous Palestinian state. The immigration also brought new military-aged populations into the conflict, strengthening Israel's ability to secure contested zones.

Economically, the arrival of skilled professionals from the Soviet Union boosted Israel's economy. Doctors, engineers, and scientists helped strengthen industries, while Palestinians continued to face restrictions, unemployment, and declining opportunities. The gap between the two societies widened further.

Regionally, Arab states feared what this meant for the balance of power. If Israel could alter the population map so drastically, then even the strongest Arab declarations might lose meaning. Immigration was not just a humanitarian issue; it was a quiet but powerful weapon.

The biggest fear was permanence. Wars could be won or lost, but once populations settled and built families, they rarely left. This meant that every Soviet immigrant who arrived could change the conflict forever, one household at a time.

Proposed Solutions:

1. Calls upon the Arab League to present a united stance rejecting settlement of immigrants in the occupied Palestinian territories;

    i. Israel should be pressured to confine new arrivals to its 1967 borders.

2. Encourages international organizations such as the United Nations to address immigration-linked settlement growth;

    i. Movement of new immigrants into occupied land should be declared illegal.

3. Stresses Arab economic measures to highlight opposition;

    i. Boycotts and restrictions may be used against companies or states supporting settlement activity.

4. Supports Palestinian resilience through Arab financial assistance in housing, education, and job creation.

"Food for Thought":

- Was Soviet Jewish immigration primarily about protecting people, or about advancing Israel's political goals?

- Could Arab states have done more to prevent immigrants from being directed into settlements?

- How should Palestinians resist a strategy that changes demographics instead of borders?

- If population numbers are as important as military strength, what strategies should Arab states use to respond?

- How can the Arab League address immigration without appearing to oppose humanitarian protection?

- If Palestinians become a permanent minority, what happens to their hope for independence?

Citations:

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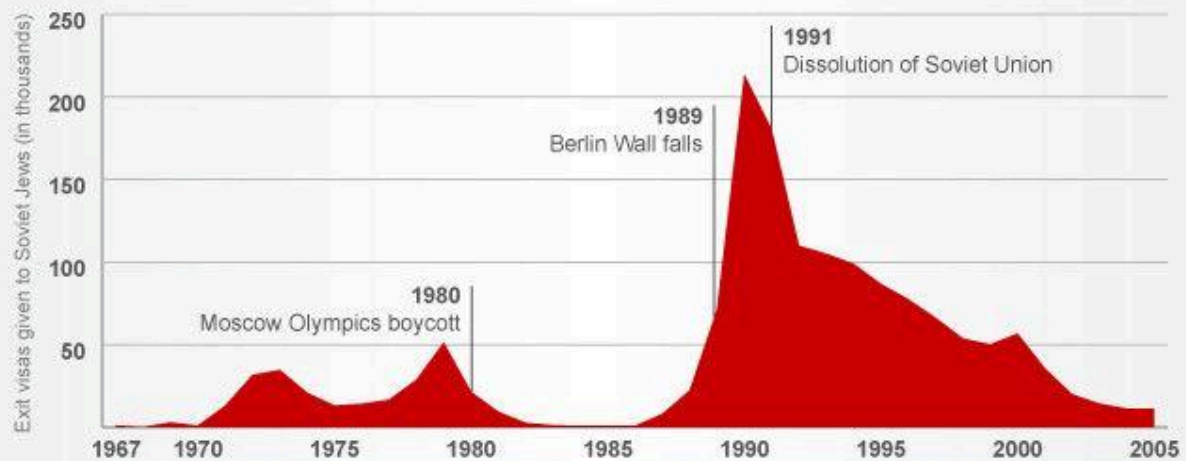
Appendix:

Appendix A

Ravitz, Jessica. "Defying the KGB: How a Forgotten Movement Freed a People." CNN, 30 Dec. 2012.

Emigration of Soviet Jews, 1967-2005

After Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, Soviet Jews began to increasingly apply for visas to emigrate. Exit visas were given sparingly and sporadically until the fall of the Soviet Union. More than 1.5 million Jews would leave. About a million headed to Israel; most of the others found a new home in the U.S.

Sources: Government of Israel, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Note: Figures from 1990 onward include emigrations to the U.S. and Israel only; prior years include all emigrations.

Appendix B

"Law of Return." Wikipedia, 5 Sept. 2025,
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_of_Return.