

# 14 Common Myths about the Palestine/ Israel Conflict



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## Myth #1: The Problem is “Insoluble”

**Fact:** The problem is far from insoluble. As President Carter’s two books (Peace, Not Apartheid, and We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land) and other sources make clear:

- Majorities on both sides want peace.
- Peace has been very close at times and the main points of a solution have long been agreed on.
- Those points of agreement center on UN resolution 194 –the right of Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war to return to their homes and land in what is now Israel (or receive just compensation) and UN resolution 242, which describes a 2 state solution, with Israel withdrawing to its pre-1967 borders.
- The PLO and the other Arab states have clearly shown their willingness to meet their obligations under those resolutions.
- Hamas has also shown its willingness to abide by a just and comprehensive peace settlement based on those resolutions.
- Only Israel still balks and delays as the Likud government of Israel backs away from honoring Israel's previous commitments
- What is lacking is political will in the US to enforce implementation of UN 194 and 242 by *Israel*.

## Myth #2: The Problem is “Ancient”

**Fact:** The problem is not ancient. It began in the 1880’s when Jewish settlers began buying and settling on Palestinian land.

- Prior to 1881 the Jews in Palestine (about 10% of the total population) lived in relative peace with their Arab/Muslim neighbors. They were mostly urban tradesmen.
- Similar Jewish minorities lived relatively peacefully in almost every Muslim state.
- Palestinian unrest was caused by the fact that when Jews bought land they evicted the Palestinian tenant farmers who had no place else to go.
- Zionist settlers were not merely becoming an innocent part of the community; they wanted a Jewish state and had agreed never to sell land back to Arabs.
- When Israel was founded in 1948, after 68 years of immigration and land buying, Jews owned less than 8% of the land
- Jewish efforts to take SOLE CONTROL of Palestine are still not finished. They continue today in the form of house demolitions, land confiscation, illegal settlements and a “security” wall.

## Myth #3: The Problem is “Complex”

**Fact:** The problem is not complex, the problem is Zionism, a 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnic/ nationalist ideology which preaches the creation of an exclusively “Jewish State” on land that has been the homeland of Arab/ Palestinians since roughly the 7<sup>th</sup> century. A just and comprehensive solution simply requires:

- An immediate freeze on Israeli settlements and withdrawal of Israeli settlers from existing settlements. All settlements are illegal under international law.
- Implementation of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and land in what is now Israel or receive just compensation (UN 194).
- A 2 state solution with Israel withdrawing (totally) to its pre-1967 borders (UN 242, 338).
- Israel has long agreed to UN 194 and 242, *but has refused to implement them.* \* What is needed now is the political will in the US to pressure Israel to implement UN 194 and UN 242 NOW!
- The appearance of complexity is largely due to a longstanding Israeli strategy of linking other issues (Arab states, Iranian rhetoric, the Holocaust, etc.) to a resolution of the Palestinian issue.  
\* Israel promised to abide by UN 194 as a condition for being admitted into the UN.

#### Myth # 4: The Problem is a Muslim vs. Jew Religious Struggle

**Fact:** The roots of the problem are not religious. They lie in the fact that Israel was created by displacing Palestinian people from their land.

- The Muslim holy book (the Quran) gives explicit special protection and privilege to both Jews and Christians.
- When the Arabs took Jerusalem in 642 there was no massacre of Jews. When the Christian Crusaders took Jerusalem they massacred Muslims and Jews. When Arabs under Saladin took Jerusalem back in 11— there were no massacres and the Arabs intentionally restored a Jewish population.
- Jews created the brilliant “Jewish Renaissance” under Muslim rule in Spain.
- When they were expelled from Christian Spain, many Jews moved into the Muslim/Ottoman empire.
- From 1880- 1918 all Jewish emigration into Palestine represents Jews moving FROM Christian lands INTO a Muslim state.
- From 1880-1948 there is almost no record of Jewish immigrants into Palestine *from other Muslim countries*—they came almost entirely from Europe.

#### Myth #5. The Problem is Arab/Muslim anti-Semitism

**Fact:** This is simply untrue.

- Zionism was a reaction to the treatment of Jews in Europe.
- The current use of the term “Anti- Semitic” clearly shows the European roots of the problem. The term “anti Semitic is synonymous with “Anti-Jewish” only because of the Jewish experience in Europe. As there were hardly any Arabs in Europe, “Anti-Semitic” came to simply mean anti-Jewish.
- Arabs are the largest group of Semitic people and their language is the most widely spoken Semitic language. How can a defense of Arab rights be anti-Semitic?
- Early Zionists often argued they would cause no trouble in Palestine precisely because Arabs and Jews were cousins in both ethnicity and religion
- From 1880 on Zionist immigration into Palestine has been the cause of rising anti-Jewish sentiment in the Middle East.
- Modern Anti-Jewish sentiment across the Middle East is almost solely the result of the behavior of Zionists in Palestine since 1880—mostly the ongoing theft of land and the violence that goes with it.

### Myth # 6: Arabs Turned Down a “Fair Partition Deal” in 1948

**Fact:** The 1948 partition plan was never fair.

- In 1880 the Palestinians owned the land and had peace, religious freedom and their way of life. Indigenous Jews in Palestine also had their way of life. Under the British Mandate (1920-1948), Zionist’s were allowed to create a shadow state and military that have gradually taken all that away.
- The 1948 UN partition plan (UN 181) was a two state solution which gave 56% of Palestine to the Jews (who only owned 6% of the land and had only 30% of the population).
- The Arab 70 percent of the population got only 43% of the land.
- In the 48 war Israel took 78% of the land and forcibly expelled 700,000+ Palestinians.
- In 1967 Israel occupied the last 22% of Palestinian land.
- Palestinians are now fighting for self-determination in that last 22% of their land. They are still waiting for their state...

### Myth # 7: The Zionists have always sincerely wanted to live in peace with their neighbors

**Fact:** Actually, Zionism was always about one thing— founding a Jewish state. That could only be done in the following ways:

- By obtaining land by gift, purchase, or conquest
- By changing demographics through the immigration of Jews **into** Palestine or by expulsion or transfer of non Jews **from** Palestine.
- Today Israel continues to take land by demolition, confiscation, illegal settlements, a rigged legal system and military force.
- Israel continues to deny full rights to Arab citizens within Israel.
- Israel continues to deprive Palestinians in the occupied territories of any significant rights at all.
- Various Israeli political parties still openly advocate further expulsions of Arabs from Israel, from occupied territory as well as further annexation of Palestinian land.
- The current Foreign Minister of Israel (Avigdor Lieberman) belongs to a party that openly promotes the expulsion of Israeli-Arabs (Palestinians who are Israeli citizens) from Israel.

**Myth #8: There is an Existential Threat to Israel (so they need continued unconditional US support)**

**Fact:** Any real military threat to Israel's existence ended long ago. There is no existential threat to Israel.

- Israel has had vast superiority in conventional military force over its neighbours since 1948 (Martin van Creveld). Currently, Israel can easily defeat any combination of Arab armies.
- Israel also has 200+ nukes. They are believed to have had the A-bomb since the late 1960's.
- No Arab country has a single nuclear weapon.
- Israel has attacked its neighbours with overwhelming force a number of times since 1973. (Lebanon 1978, 1982, 2006, Gaza 2006, 2008) In each case, Arab militants in those areas became stronger.
- In other words, the main danger to Israel is the backlash created by its own militant policies.
- Unconditional US support for Israel only encourages Israel to persist in those misguided policies.
- In this way, US support for Israel directly damages the prospects for peace.

**Myth # 9: The Israeli Policy of “Massive Retaliation” is Effective (...and therefore Excusable)**

**Fact:** The kind of massive retaliation or “disproportionate response” that was just used by Israel in Gaza in 2008 ( in Lebanon in 1982 and 2006, and in Gaza in 2006) was started by Israel in 1949. It has never worked. Some examples:

- 1953, Ariel Sharon, in response to the killing of an Israeli man and wounding of a woman and “failing to find the man they thought responsible, killed some 40 Palestinian civilians.”
- Later that year Sharon's men “stormed the Jordanian village of Kibiya and killed no fewer than 69 people, mostly women and children” (no provocation cited)
- As early as the mid-1950's, Moshe Dayan, a leading Israeli general, called this kind of retaliation, “unjustified and immoral,” but claimed it was the only “effective” way to put an end to infiltration.” “Dayan would argue---- without a shred of evidence ...the measures only prevented the situation from getting worse.”
- To date, there is no evidence “massive retaliation” is effective. It is simply unjustified and immoral. (van Creveld, The Sword and the Olive Tree, p.130-35)

## Myth # 10: The Arab Side Stands in the Way of a Peace that Israel has Always Wanted

**Fact:** It is true that over the years the Palestinians have turned down many peace proposals that involved a voluntary surrender of their land and their civil and political rights within that land.

It is also true that over the years the Zionists rejected many peace proposals that limited their ability to take possession of Palestinian land and constrained their ability to make Palestinians a minority in their own land.

There is quite a difference.

At present, however, Israel itself (and US support for Israel) are the main obstacles to peace. At any moment Israel could unilaterally meet its legal obligations under UN 194 and UN 242. Yet Israel's actual policy has been to delay peace negotiations while creating new obstacles to peace.

- They continue to build settlements and the "security" wall.
- They continue to use a policy of "massive retaliation" (which doesn't work and makes things worse).

## Myth # 10: (cont.)

- Their political system lets small, extremist parties hold the rest of Israel hostage.
- They have consistently failed to meet basic obligations (UN 194, 242, Camp David, etc.)
- They have consistently made impossible demands and set impossible preconditions for peace and the US has supported them in this.
- As the Jewish historian Sylvain Cypel notes: "As early as 1961 Akiva Orr and Moshe Machover...published Peace, Peace, When There Is No Peace... Thus, thirty-six years before detailed studies by Israeli authors..(Flapan, 1987, Schlaim,2000, Enderlin, 1997, and Golani, 2002) [they] **showed the vacuity of the claim that Israel had never stopped desiring peace in the face of Arab hostility.** Orr and Machover, simply on the basis of consulting official articles and statements, **demonstrated how Israel had regularly closed the door to various possibilities for diplomatic progress with the Arab world.** (S. Cypel, Walled: Israeli Society at an Impasse)
- The Arab parties accepted the Quartet "Roadmap" as presented. Ariel Sharon laid out 14 amendments --demands which made nonsense out of the entire document.

## Myth # 11: Israel is a “Democracy”

**Fact:** Palestinians who have lived in Israel since the 48 partition (Israeli-Arabs) have always been second class citizens.

- Many Israeli-Arabs are “internal refugees” uprooted inside what is now Israel in 1948
- Expulsions of Arabs from Israel continued into the 1950’s
- Israeli-Arabs lived under military law from 1948-1966
- Their property has been subject to confiscation
- They have been subject to relocation
- They have been subject to arbitrary detention
- They don’t have equal rights or freedom of movement
- They continue to lose their land and homes
- They have been largely shut out of the political process
- Their marriage, land ownership, etc. are curtailed and controlled in a number of ways
- They are currently threatened with loyalty tests and expulsion (Israel Beitenu—2009)

## Myth # 12: Iran is a Big Part of the Problem in Palestine

**Fact:** For almost 100 years, Iran had nothing to do with the problem in Palestine (1880-1979)

- Under the former Shah, Israel supplied nuclear and military aid and information to Iran. Israel (and the US) helped train SAVAK, the Shah's dreaded secret police
- When Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in 1979, he used the issue of Palestine to vie for leadership in the wider Muslim world
- That was possible because the Sunni Arabs had never obtained a just settlement of the Palestine issue from Israel and the US
- Palestinians are Sunni, Iranians are Shia, but if Sunni states can’t help Palestine, Palestinians will go elsewhere for help
- A just peace would reduce Iran’s influence in Palestine/Israel to almost zero
- A just peace would prevent many other parties who are vying for power in the Middle East from hijacking the very real wrongs committed against the Palestinian people in the service of their own goals and ends. (Very often, those parties have their own interests, not the interests of the Palestinians, at heart.)

### Myth # 13: The Problem is about the Holocaust

**Fact:** The conflict in Palestine has very little to do with the Holocaust:

- The Zionist project had been underway for more than 50 years when the Holocaust began (around 1936).
- The Zionist institutions, policies, and people responsible for the “ethnic cleansing” of Palestine in 1948 were already firmly in place before 1936
- The Palestinian people personally had nothing to do with the Holocaust--and certainly had no influence over events in Europe or over German policy\*
- The Palestinian people were undeniably more ignorant of what was happening in Germany than most people in the west.
- The Holocaust was a terrible episode in the history of mankind, but it is simply not legitimate to punish the Palestinian people for it.

\*The charge that they did is based (like most gross stereotypes) on the actions of one man. The “Grand Mufti,” a man whose very position was created by the British and who cooperated with them for years, finally saw how much the British were helping the Zionists and fled house arrest in Palestine for asylum in Germany. He thought a German victory would help his people more than a British victory would. During WWII he endorsed Nazi policy. It was a tragically misguided decision, but not one that justifies depriving a whole people of their nationhood..

### Myth #14: Israel's fight Against the Palestinians is part of America's "War on Terror"

**Fact:** The problem in Palestine started almost 120 years before the 9/11 attacks of 2001—and long before the rise of “militant fundamentalist” versions of Islam. In large part, these developments have been caused by our failure to procure a just peace in Palestine.

- Armed resistance in defense of one’s home is not terror or a war crime. It is legitimate under international law.
- Arab violence in Palestine is basically nationalist (not religious) in motivation and is resistance to ethnic cleansing.
- Israel’s behavior has fueled Islamic radicalism
- Israel’s failure to make real concessions to Fatah and the PLO led to the rise of Hamas just as Israel’s invasion of Lebanon (1982) led to the creation of Hezbollah.
- America’s support of Israel has fueled anti-Americanism.
- The unresolved problem of Palestine/Israel has given real “militant fundamentalist” Islamist terrorists most of their ammunition and their most powerful recruiting tools and talking points.
- The platform of Hamas has actually been denounced by “militant fundamentalist” Islamists because it is a nationalist liberation movement. Real “militant fundamentalist” Islamists totally reject nationalism.