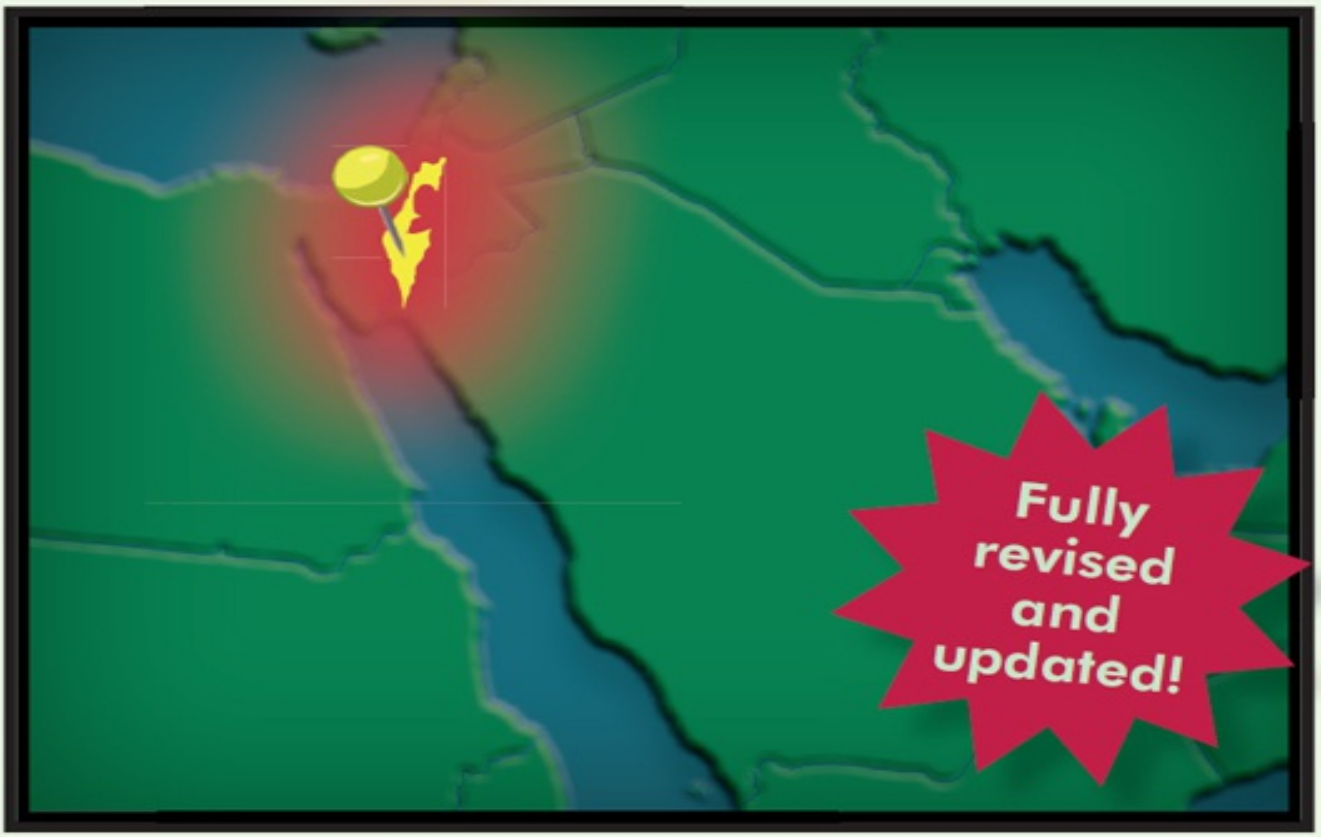
MYTHS and FACTS

A Guide to the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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1. Israel's Roots

The Jews have no claim to the land they call Israel.
Palestine was always an Arab country.
The Palestinians are descendants of the Canaanites.
The Palestinians have aboriginal rights to Palestine.
The Balfour Declaration did not give Jews a right to a homeland in Palestine.
Arabs in Palestine suffered because of Jewish settlement.
Zionism is racism.
The Zionists could have chosen another country besides Palestine.
The Zionists were colonialist tools of Western imperialism.
The British promised the Arabs independence in Palestine.

MYTH

***The Jews have no claim to the land they call Israel*.**

FACT

A common misperception is that all the Jews were forced into the Diaspora by the Romans after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE, and then, 1,800 years later, the Jews suddenly returned to Palestine demanding their country back. In reality, the Jewish people have maintained ties to their historic homeland for more than 3,700 years.

The Jewish people base their claim to the land of Israel on at least four premises: 1) the Jewish people settled and developed the land, 2) the international community granted political sovereignty in Palestine to the Jewish people, 3) the territory was captured in defensive wars, and 4) God promised the land to the patriarch Abraham.

Even after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and the beginning of the exile, Jewish life in the land of Israel continued and often

flourished. Large communities were reestablished in Jerusalem and Tiberias by the ninth century. In the eleventh century, Jewish communities grew in Rafah, Gaza, Ashkelon, Jaffa, and Caesarea. The Crusaders massacred many Jews during the twelfth century, but the community rebounded in the next two centuries as large numbers of rabbis and Jewish pilgrims immigrated to Jerusalem and the Galilee. Prominent rabbis established communities in Safed, Jerusalem, and elsewhere during the following three hundred years.

By the early nineteenth century—years before the birth of the modern Zionist movement—more than ten thousand Jews lived throughout what is today Israel.[1] The seventy-eight years of nation-building, beginning in 1870, culminated in the reestablishment of the Jewish State.

Israel's international "birth certificate" was validated by the promise of the Bible; uninterrupted Jewish settlement from the time of Joshua onward; the Balfour Declaration of 1917; the League of Nations Mandate, which incorporated the Balfour Declaration; the United Nations partition resolution of 1947; Israel's admission to the UN in 1949; the recognition of Israel by most other states; and—most of all—the society created by Israel's people in decades of thriving, dynamic national existence.

> *Nobody does Israel any service by proclaiming its "right to exist." Israel's right to exist, like that of the United States, Saudi Arabia and 152 other states, is axiomatic and unreserved. Israel's legitimacy is not suspended in midair awaiting acknowledgement . . . There is certainly no other state, big or small, young or old, that would consider mere recognition of its "right to exist" a favor, or a negotiable concession.*
>
> **—Abba Eban[2]**

MYTH

Palestine was always an Arab country.

FACT

The term "Palestine" is believed to be derived from the Philistines, an Aegean people who, in the twelfth century BCE, settled along the

Mediterranean coastal plain—now Israel and the Gaza Strip. In the second century CE, after crushing the last Jewish revolt, the Romans first applied the name *Palaestina* to Judea (the southern portion of what is now called the West Bank) in an attempt to minimize Jewish identification with the land of Israel. The Arabic word *Filastin* is derived from this Latin name.[3]

The Hebrews entered the land of Israel about 1300 BCE, living under a tribal confederation until being united under the first monarch, King Saul. The second king, David, established Jerusalem as the capital around 1000 BCE. David's son, Solomon, built the Temple soon thereafter and consolidated the military, administrative, and religious functions of the kingdom. The nation was divided under Solomon's son, with the northern kingdom (Israel) lasting until 722 BCE, when the Assyrians destroyed it, and the southern kingdom (Judah) surviving until the Babylonian conquest in 586 BCE. The Jewish people enjoyed brief periods of sovereignty afterward until most Jews were finally driven from their homeland in 135 CE.

Jewish independence in the land of Israel lasted for more than four hundred years. This is much longer than Americans have enjoyed independence in what has become known as the United States.[4] In fact, if not for foreign conquerors, Israel would be more than three thousand years old today.

Palestine was never an exclusively Arab country, although Arabic gradually became the language of most of the population after the Muslim invasions of the seventh century. No independent Arab or Palestinian state ever existed in Palestine. When the distinguished Arab-American historian, Princeton University professor Philip Hitti, testified against partition before the Anglo-American Committee in 1946, he said, "There is no such thing as 'Palestine' in history, absolutely not."[5]

Prior to partition, Palestinian Arabs did not view themselves as having a separate identity. When the First Congress of Muslim-Christian Associations met in Jerusalem in February 1919 to choose Palestinian representatives for the Paris Peace Conference, they adopted the following resolution:

> We consider Palestine as part of Arab Syria, as it has never been separated from it at any time. We are connected with it by national, religious, linguistic, natural, economic, and geographical bonds.[6]

Similarly, the King-Crane commission found that Christian and Muslim Arabs opposed any plan to create a country called "Palestine," because it was viewed as recognition of Zionist claims.[7] In 1937, a local Arab leader, Auni Bey Abdul Hadi, told the Peel Commission, which ultimately suggested the partition of Palestine: "There is no such country as Palestine! 'Palestine' is a term the Zionists invented! There is no Palestine in the Bible. Our country was for centuries part of Syria."[8]

The representative of the Arab Higher Committee to the United Nations echoed this view in a statement to the General Assembly in May 1947, which said Palestine was part of the Province of Syria and the Arabs of Palestine did not comprise a separate political entity. A few years later, Ahmed Shuqeiri, later the chairman of the PLO, told the Security Council: "It is common knowledge that Palestine is nothing but southern Syria."[9]

Palestinian Arab nationalism is largely a post–World War I phenomenon that did not become a significant political movement until after the 1967 Six-Day War. Today, the Palestinian people have international recognition and claim the rights to self-determination, independence, and territory. "Urgently required is a peaceful process that respects the dignity of both peoples," wrote Allen Hertz, a former Canadian government official, "and [that] effects a reconciliation of the subsequent rights of the newly emerged Palestinian people with the prior rights of the ancient Jewish people."[10]

MYTH

The Palestinians are descendants of the Canaanites.

FACT

Palestinian claims to be related to the Canaanites are a recent phenomenon and contrary to historical evidence. The Canaanites disappeared three millennia ago, and no one knows if any of their descendants survived or, if they did, who they would be.

Over the last two thousand years, there have been massive invasions (e.g., the Crusades), migrations, the plague, and other manmade or natural disasters that killed off most of the local people. The entire local population has been replaced many times over. During the British Mandate alone, more than one hundred thousand Arabs emigrated from neighboring countries and

are today considered Palestinians.

Sherif Hussein, the guardian of the Islamic Holy Places in Arabia, said the Palestinians' ancestors had only been in the area for one thousand years.[11] Even the Palestinians themselves have acknowledged their association with the region came long after the Jews. In testimony before the Anglo-American Committee in 1946, for example, they claimed a connection to Palestine of more than one thousand years, dating back no further than the conquest of Muhammad's followers in the seventh century.[12]

By contrast, no serious historian questions the more than three-thousand-year-old Jewish connection to the land of Israel, or the modern Jewish people's relation to the ancient Hebrews.

We know that some of those who live in our villages are Jews who converted to Islam after the Muslim conquests beginning in the 7th century, and most of us are the descendants of foreign workers who came to British Mandate of Palestine from the various Arab countries in the wake of the Zionist enterprise. By trying to trace our "ancestry" to the Canaanites, we lie to ourselves and demonstrate our silliness and self-deception to the world. And when we try to claim that Jesus was a Palestinian, we make ourselves an international laughing stock.

—Bassam Tawil[13]

MYTH

The Palestinians have aboriginal rights to Palestine.

FACT

The Jews are often depicted by Israel's detractors as newcomers to "Palestine" who are displacing the aboriginal Arab people. The truth is quite different, however, as it is the Jews who are the aboriginal tribe based on their presence in the Holy Land for more than two thousand years. Of all the people who lived in the area at that time, such as Phoenicians, Moabites, Philistines, only the Jews remain today.

The Arabs, however, are not native to "Palestine"; they are aboriginal to

Arabia. “Judaism, the Hebrew language, and the Jewish people were established in the Holy Land for about a thousand years” before the emergence of Islam. It is “the Arab people,” who are “the interloping settler[s] populating [the Holy Land], including newer waves of Arab immigration in the 19th and 20th centuries.”[14]

MYTH

The Balfour Declaration did not give Jews the right to a homeland in Palestine.

FACT

On November 2, 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration:

> His Majesty’s Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

Emir Faisal, son of Sherif Hussein, the leader of the Arab revolt against the Turks, signed an agreement with Chaim Weizmann and other Zionist leaders during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference supporting the implementation of Balfour. It acknowledged the “racial kinship and ancient bonds existing between the Arabs and the Jewish people” and concluded that “the surest means of working out the consummation of their national aspirations is through the closest possible collaboration in the development of the Arab states and Palestine.” Furthermore, the agreement called for all necessary measures “ . . . to encourage and stimulate immigration of Jews into Palestine on a large scale, and as quickly as possible to settle Jewish immigrants upon the land through closer settlement and intensive cultivation of the soil.”[15]

Faisal had conditioned his acceptance of the Balfour Declaration on the fulfillment of British wartime promises of independence to the Arabs. These

were not kept.

Critics dismiss the Weizmann-Faisal agreement because it was never enacted; however, the fact that the leader of the Arab nationalist movement and the Zionist movement could reach an understanding is significant because it demonstrated that Jewish and Arab aspirations were not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The international community accepted the Balfour Declaration, as evident from its inclusion in the Mandate for Palestine, which specifically referred to "the historical connections of the Jewish people with Palestine" and to the moral validity of "reconstituting their National Home in that country." The term "reconstituting" shows recognition of the fact that Palestine had been the Jews' home. Furthermore, the British were instructed to "use their best endeavours to facilitate" Jewish immigration, to encourage settlement on the land, and to "secure" the Jewish National Home. The word "Arab" does not appear in the Mandatory award.[16]

The Mandate was formalized by the fifty-two governments at the League of Nations on July 24, 1922.

MYTH

Arabs in Palestine suffered because of Jewish settlement.

FACT

For many centuries, Palestine was a sparsely populated, poorly cultivated, and widely neglected expanse of eroded hills, sandy deserts, and malarial marshes. As late as 1880, the American consul in Jerusalem reported the area was continuing its historic decline. "The population and wealth of Palestine has not increased during the last forty years," he said.[17]

The Report of the Palestine Royal Commission quotes an account of the Maritime Plain in 1913:

> The road leading from Gaza to the north was only a summer track suitable for transport by camels and carts . . . no orange groves, orchards or vineyards were to be seen until one reached [the Jewish village of] Yabna [Yavne . . . Houses were all of mud. No windows were anywhere to be seen . . . The ploughs

> used were of wood . . . The yields were very poor . . . The sanitary conditions in the village were horrible. Schools did not exist . . . The western part, towards the sea, was almost a desert . . . The villages in this area were few and thinly populated. Many ruins of villages were scattered over the area, as owing to the prevalence of malaria, many villages were deserted by their inhabitants.[18]

Surprisingly, many people who were not sympathetic to the Zionist cause believed the Jews would improve the condition of Palestinian Arabs. For example, Dawood Barakat, editor of the Egyptian paper *Al-Ahram*, wrote: "It is absolutely necessary that an entente be made between the Zionists and Arabs, because the war of words can only do evil. The Zionists are necessary for the country: The money which they will bring, their knowledge and intelligence, and the industriousness which characterizes them will contribute without doubt to the regeneration of the country."[19]

Even a leading Arab nationalist believed the return of the Jews to their homeland would help resuscitate the country. According to Sherif Hussein, the guardian of the Islamic Holy Places in Arabia:

> The resources of the country are still virgin soil and will be developed by the Jewish immigrants. One of the most amazing things until recent times was that the Palestinian used to leave his country, wandering over the high seas in every direction. His native soil could not retain a hold on him, though his ancestors had lived on it for 1000 years. At the same time, we have seen the Jews from foreign countries streaming to Palestine from Russia, Germany, Austria, Spain, [and] America. The cause of causes could not escape those who had a gift of deeper insight. They knew that the country was for its original sons (*abna'ihi-l-asliyin*), for all their differences, a sacred and beloved homeland. The return of these exiles (*jaliya*) to their homeland will prove materially and spiritually [to be] an experimental school for their brethren who are with them in the fields, factories, trades and in all things connected with toil and labor.[20]

As Hussein foresaw, the regeneration of Palestine, and the growth of its population, came only after Jews returned in massive numbers.

> *A desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent mournful expanse . . . A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action . . . We never saw a human being on the whole route . . . There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of the worthless soil, had almost deserted the country.*
>
> **—Mark Twain's description of Palestine in 1867**[21]

MYTH

Zionism is racism.

FACT

In 1975, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution slandering Zionism by equating it with racism. Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, which holds that Jews, like any other nation, are entitled to self-determination in their homeland—Israel.

Zionism recognizes that Jewishness is defined by shared origin, religion, culture, and history. The realization of the Zionist dream is exemplified by more than six million Jews, from more than one hundred countries, who are Israeli citizens.

Israel's Law of Return grants automatic citizenship to Jews, but non-Jews are also eligible to become citizens under naturalization procedures similar to those in other countries. For example, Germany, Greece, Ireland, and Finland have special categories of people who are entitled to citizenship.

More than one million Muslim and Christian Arabs, Druze, Baha'is, Circassians, and other ethnic groups also are represented in Israel's population. The presence in Israel of thousands of Jews "of color" from Ethiopia, Yemen, and India is the best refutation of the calumny against Zionism.

Zionism does not discriminate against anyone. Israel's open and

democratic character, and its scrupulous protection of the religious and political rights of Christians and Muslims, rebuts the charge of exclusivity. Moreover, anyone—Jew or non-Jew, Israeli, American, Chinese, black, white, or purple—can be a Zionist.

By contrast, the Arab states define citizenship strictly by native parentage. It is almost impossible to become a naturalized citizen in Arab states such as Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Several Arab nations have laws that facilitate the naturalization of foreign Arabs, with the specific exception of Palestinians. Jordan, on the other hand, instituted its own "law of return" in 1954, according citizenship to all former residents of Palestine, *except for Jews* and Gazans.[22] In 2004, however, Jordan began revoking the citizenship of Palestinians who lacked Israeli permits to reside in the West Bank.[23]

The 1975 UN resolution was part of the Soviet-Arab Cold War anti-Israel campaign. Almost all the former non-Arab supporters of the resolution have apologized and changed their positions. When the General Assembly voted to repeal the resolution in 1991, only some Arab and Muslim states, as well as Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam were opposed.

For the first time in history, thousands of black people are being brought to a country not in chains but in dignity, not as slaves but as citizens.

—William Safire writing after "Operation Moses" rescued black Jews from Ethiopia[24]

MYTH

The Zionists could have chosen another country besides Palestine.

FACT

In the late nineteenth century, the rise of anti-Semitism led to a resurgence of pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe, shattering promises of equality and tolerance. This stimulated Jewish immigration to Palestine from Europe.

Simultaneously, a wave of Jews immigrated to Palestine from Yemen,

Morocco, Iraq, and Turkey. These Jews were unaware of Theodor Herzl's political Zionism or of European pogroms. They were motivated by the centuries-old dream of the "Return to Zion" and a fear of intolerance. Upon hearing that the gates of Palestine were open, they braved the hardships of travel and went to the land of Israel.

The Zionist ideal of a return to Israel has profound religious roots. Many Jewish prayers speak of Jerusalem, Zion, and the land of Israel. The injunction not to forget Jerusalem, the site of the Temple, is a major tenet of Judaism. The Hebrew language, the Torah, laws in the Talmud, the Jewish calendar, and Jewish holidays and festivals all originated in Israel and revolve around its seasons and conditions. Jews pray toward Jerusalem and every Passover recite the words "next year in Jerusalem." Jewish religion, culture, and history make clear that it is only in the land of Israel that the Jewish commonwealth can be built.

In 1897, Jewish leaders formally organized the Zionist political movement, calling for the restoration of the Jewish national home in Palestine, where Jews could find sanctuary and self-determination, and work for the renascence of their civilization and culture.

Due to the urgency of the plight of Jews in Russia, at the Sixth Zionist Congress at Basel on August 26, 1903, Herzl proposed the creation of a Jewish state in Uganda as a *temporary emergency refuge*. While Herzl made it clear that this program would not affect the ultimate aim of Zionism, a Jewish entity in the land of Israel, the proposal aroused a storm of protest at the congress and nearly led to a split in the Zionist movement. The Uganda Program, which never had much support, was formally rejected by the Zionist movement at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905.

Our settlers do not come here as do the colonists from the Occident to have natives do their work for them; they themselves set their shoulders to the plow and they spend their strength and their blood to make the land fruitful. But it is not only for ourselves that we desire its fertility. The Jewish farmers have begun to teach their brothers, the Arab farmers, to cultivate the land more intensively; we desire to teach them further: together with them we want to cultivate the land—to "serve" it, as the Hebrew has it. The more fertile this soil becomes, the more space

> *there will be for us and for them. We have no desire to dispossess them: we want to live with them.*
>
> **—Martin Buber**[25]

MYTH

The Zionists were colonialist tools of Western imperialism.

FACT

"Colonialism means living by exploiting others," Yehoshafat Harkabi has written. "But what could be further from colonialism than the idealism of city-dwelling Jews who strive to become farmers and laborers and to live by their own work?"[26]

Moreover, as British historian Paul Johnson noted, Zionists were hardly tools of imperialists given the powers' general opposition to their cause. "Everywhere in the West, the foreign offices, defense ministries and big business were against the Zionists."[27]

Emir Faisal saw the Zionist movement as a companion to the Arab nationalist movement, fighting against imperialism, as he explained in a letter to Harvard law professor and future Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter on March 3, 1919, one day after Chaim Weizmann presented the Zionist case to the Paris conference. Faisal wrote:

> The Arabs, especially the educated among us, look with deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement . . . We will wish the Jews a hearty welcome home . . . We are working together for a reformed and revised Near East and our two movements complete one another. *The Jewish movement is nationalist and not imperialist.* And there is room in Syria for us both. Indeed, I think that neither can be a real success without the other (emphasis added).[28]

In the 1940s, the Jewish underground movements waged an *anticolonial* war against the British. The Arabs, meanwhile, were concerned primarily with fighting the Jews rather than expelling the British imperialists.

MYTH

The British promised the Arabs independence in Palestine.

FACT

The central figure in the Arab nationalist movement at the time of World War I was Hussein ibn ‘Ali, the Sherif of Mecca in 1908. As Sherif, Hussein was responsible for the custody of Islam’s shrines in the Hejaz and was one of the Muslims’ spiritual leaders.

In July 1915, Hussein sent a letter to Sir Henry MacMahon, the High Commissioner for Egypt, informing him of the terms for Arab participation in the war against the Turks. The letters between Hussein and MacMahon that followed outlined the areas that Britain was prepared to cede to the Arabs in exchange for their help.

The Hussein-MacMahon correspondence conspicuously fails to mention Palestine. The British argued the omission had been intentional, thereby justifying their refusal to grant the Arabs independence in Palestine after the war.[29] MacMahon explained:

> I feel it my duty to state, and I do so definitely and emphatically, that it was not intended by me in giving this pledge to King Hussein to include Palestine in the area in which Arab independence was promised. I also had every reason to believe at the time that the fact that Palestine was not included in my pledge was well understood by King Hussein.[30]

Notes, Chapter 1

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