

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Myths About Israel and the Middle East (1)

Do the media feed us fiction instead of fact?

We all know that, by dint of constant repetition, white can be made to appear black, good can get transformed into evil, and myth may take the place of reality. Israel, with roughly one-thousandth of the world's population and with a similar fraction of the territory of this planet, seems to engage a totally disproportionate attention of the print and broadcast media of the world. Unfortunately, much of what the media tell us — in reporting, editorializing in columns, and in analysis — are endlessly repeated myths.

What are the facts?

■ **Myth:** The “Palestinians” are a nation and therefore deserving of a homeland.

■ **Reality:** The concept of Palestinian nationhood is a new one and had not been heard of until after the Six-Day War (1967), when Israel, by its victory, came into the administration of the territories of Judea and Samaria (the “West Bank”) and the Gaza Strip. The so-called “Palestinians” are no more different from the Arabs living in the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, than Wisconsinites are from Iowans.

■ **Myth:** Judea and Samaria (the “West Bank”) and the Gaza Strip are/were “occupied Arab territory.”

■ **Reality:** All of “Palestine” — east and west of the Jordan River — was part of the League of Nations mandate. Under the Balfour Declaration, all of it was to be the “national home for the Jewish people.” In violation of this mandate, Great Britain severed the entire area east of the Jordan River — about 75% of Palestine — and gave it to the Arabs, who created on it the kingdom of Transjordan. When Israel declared its independence in 1948, five Arab armies invaded the new country in order to destroy it at its very birth. They were defeated by the Israelis. The Transjordanians, however, remained in occupation of Judea and Samaria (the “West Bank”) and East Jerusalem. They proceeded to drive all Jews from those territories and to systematically destroy all Jewish houses of worship and other institutions. The Transjordanians (now renamed “Jordanians”) were the occupiers for nineteen years. Israel regained these territories following its victory in the Six-Day War. Israel

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has returned the entire Gaza Strip to the Palestinians. The final status of the “West Bank” will be decided if and when the Palestinians will finally be able to sit down and seriously talk peace with Israel.

■ **Myth:** Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria (the “West Bank”) are the “greatest obstacle to peace.”

■ **Reality:** This is simply not correct, although it has been repeated so often that many have come to believe it. The greatest obstacle to peace is the intransigence and the irreconcilable hostility of the Arabs. Not more than 400,000 Jews are settled in these territories, living among about 1.4 million

Arabs. How can Jews living there be an obstacle to peace? Why shouldn't they live there? Over 2 million Arabs live in Israel proper. They are not an obstacle to peace. Neither the Israelis nor they themselves consider them as such.

■ **Myth:** Israel is unwilling to yield “land for peace.”

■ **Reality:** The concept that to the loser, rather than to the victor, belong the spoils is a radically new one. Israel, victorious in the five wars imposed on it by the Arabs, has returned over 90% of the territory occupied by it: the vast Sinai Peninsula, which contained some of the most advanced military installations, prosperous cities and oil fields developed entirely by Israel that made it independent of petroleum imports. For the return of Gaza Israel was “rewarded” with constant rocket attacks. In the Camp David Accords, Israel agreed to autonomy for Judea and Samaria (the “West Bank”) with the permanent status to be determined after three years. But, so far, no responsible Palestinian representation has been available to seriously negotiate with Israel about this.

All these myths (and others we shall talk about) have poisoned the atmosphere for decades. The root cause of the never-ending conflict is the unwillingness of the Arabs (and not just the Palestinians) to accept the reality of Israel. What a pity that those of the Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens have lived and continue to live in poverty, misery and ignorance. They could have chosen to accept the proposed partition of the country in 1947, would now have had their state alongside Israel for over sixty years and could have lived in peace and prosperity. They could have kept hundreds of thousands of refugees in their homes and could have saved tens of thousands of lives. Peace will only come when the Arabs finally accept the reality of Israel. And that is not a myth — that is a fact!

This message has been published and paid for by

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