

Appendix IV: Myths & Frequently Asked Questions

From Anna Baltzer's *Witness in Palestine: A Jewish American Woman In The Occupied Territories* (updated and revised edition 2007)

www.AnnainTheMiddleEast.com

Myth #1: This is an ancient war between Jews and Muslims.

The Israel-Palestine conflict actually began quite recently. Jews and Palestinians had traditionally coexisted with little if any conflict between them before Zionist immigration began. European settlers started purchasing land from absentee Arab owners for exclusive Jewish labor and settlement, leading to the dispossession of the non-Jewish peasants living on that land.¹⁷

This is not a conflict of the Jewish people versus the Muslim people. First of all, 20% of Palestinians worldwide are Christians, and they are subject to the same restrictions as their Muslim counterparts. Israel has a strong peace movement calling for an end to the mutually-destructive Occupation, and many Jews find Zionism itself antithetical to Jewish principles.

Myth #2: The Palestinian refugee problem was created when Palestinians fled on radio orders from Arab leaders to move out of the way of an attack.

When Zionist and Israeli state and army archives were declassified in the 1980s, the myth that Palestinians left their homes voluntarily in 1948 was refuted by Israeli historians, who monitored countless broadcasts and found "not a single order or appeal, or suggestion about evacuation from Palestine, from any Arab radio station, inside or outside Palestine, in 1948." In fact, the only Arab orders recorded were for Palestinians to stay put.¹⁸ Israeli historian Ilan Pappé writes:

It is ironic that the "orders from above" theory should enjoy a kind of afterlife in the U.S. The Zionist community [there] is actually rather insulated from the complex public debate about Zionism in Israel. Our U.S. pro-Israel crowd looks a little backward when they keep repeating these myths. They are still digging out the same debating points they used thirty and forty years ago. They are perhaps more an embarrassment than a help to Israel's cause.¹⁹

Myth #3: Israel is a democracy.

Israel is the state of the Jewish people, not the state of its citizens. Non-Jewish citizens are excluded from many things granted automatically to Jews. Palestinian citizens of Israel are largely prevented from buying or leasing 93% of the land in Israel, much of it owned by the Jewish National Fund and thus exclusively reserved for Jews. Although they pay taxes, Palestinian citizens of Israel living in non-Jewish neighborhoods receive only a fraction of the resources and services granted to Jewish neighborhoods. Palestinian citizens of Israel are allowed to vote, and they can even run for office, unless they run on a platform advocating that Israel become the state of all of its citizens rather than the state only of the Jews, in which case they can be disqualified.²⁰ A 1989 High Court case challenging the law

¹⁷ Don Peretz, *The Arab-Israeli Dispute* (New York: Facts on File, 1996); As cited in *The Origin of the Palestine-Israel Conflict*, published by Jews for Justice in the Middle East, third edition. www.cactus48.com

¹⁸ Erskine Childers, British researcher; As quoted in Sami Hadawi, *Bitter Harvest* (Scorpion Publishing Ltd, 1983); As cited in *The Origin of the Palestine-Israel Conflict*, published by Jews for Justice in the Middle East, third edition. www.cactus48.com

¹⁹ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).

²⁰ For information about discrimination against Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, see p. 169 or visit www.Adalah.org or www.MossawaCenter.org.

found that “it is necessary to prevent a Jew or Arab who calls for equality of rights for Arabs from sitting in the Knesset [Israeli Parliament] or being elected to it.” One Justice stated that a political party should be disqualified if it advocates “a state, as all democratic states, of the totality of its citizens, without any advantage to the Jewish people as such.”²¹

Moreover, more than one third of the people living under Israeli rule are denied Israeli citizenship and the rights and protections that come along with it, including the right to participate in the government that controls their lives. These are the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The government in which non-Jews in the Occupied Territories can participate is not allowed to do basic things like control its people’s own borders, security, or finances.

It is worth noting that Israel is a democracy for Jews. In other words, Israel is an ethnocracy.

Myth #4: The return of the Palestinian refugees would mean the displacement of Jewish Israelis, and is therefore impossible.

Dr. Salman Abu Sitta, a former member of the Palestinian National Council and the founder of the Palestine Land Society, has conducted extensive research on the possibility of refugees returning to their villages, many of which no longer exist. At an international convention on the right of return in July of 2006, he clarified his findings in five illustrative points:

- The land of the refugees, roughly 93% of present-day Israel, is currently inhabited by 1.5% of Israeli Jews.
- Of the more than 500 Palestinian villages from which the refugees were expelled, 90% are still vacant (many planted over with trees), 7% are partially built-over, and just 3% are completely built over—those in Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem.
- A full 97% of the refugees live within 62 miles of their homes, and 50% of them live within 25 miles. Many can see their land from their camps but cannot go there.
- The population density of Gaza is roughly 15,500 people/square mile, while Gaza’s refugees’ land nearby is practically empty—fewer than 16 Israelis/square mile. There are fewer Jews in the half of Israel closest to Gaza (from Ramleh to Eilat) than the population of a single Gaza refugee camp. Israel has welcomed as many Russian immigrants as there are Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Gaza combined, and has been clear that it would make room for millions more Jewish immigrants if such a possibility arose.²²

The issue is not about space; it’s about demographics. The issue is that allowing Palestinian refugees to return would alter the ethnic character of Israel.

Myth #5: Israel has no genuine partner for negotiations or peace.

The most common example cited as “proof” that Palestinians don’t want peace is Yasser Arafat’s rejection of the offer presented by Israeli Prime Minister Barak at Camp David in

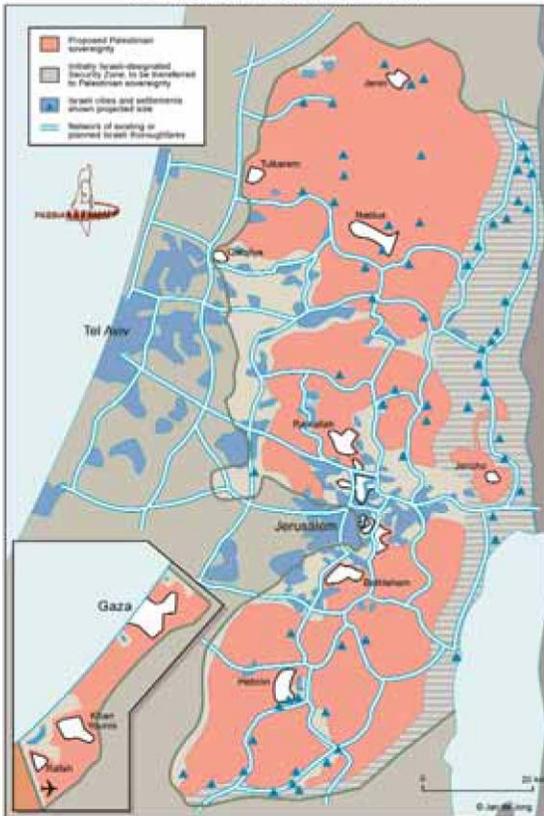
²¹ Shapiro, *Jerusalem Post* (December 15, 1989); *Yediot Achronot* (December 15, 1989); As cited in Chomsky, *Fateful*, p. 507

²² *Al-Awda’s 4th International Convention* (San Francisco: July 2006). www.al-awda.org/abusitta.html

2000. Widely perceived as generous, in fact the proposal fell far short of Israel's responsibilities to the Palestinians under international law in numerous ways:

- The proposal suggested that Israel annex 10% of the West Bank, including some of its most fertile and water rich areas, also home to more than 80,000 Palestinians.
- The proposal kept Israel in control of the West Bank's border with Jordan, thereby creating a defacto Palestinian island within Israel.
- The proposal offered the Palestinians control over the Arab sections of Jerusalem, but kept all of the city—as well as 85.3% of settlers—under Israeli sovereignty.
- The proposal specified that the Palestinian state would not control airspace or water, and could not have an army.
- The proposal cut the Palestinian state into three separate cantons: the Gaza Strip, the north West Bank, and the south West Bank. Gaza had no clear territorial link to the West Bank.

Projection of the West Bank Final Status Map presented by Israel, Camp David, July 2000



⑩ The proposal denied Palestinian refugees their right to return to their homes and land to live in peace with their neighbors.²³

Arafat's rejection of Barak's offer does not seem so shocking when you see a map of what the final effect would have looked like. President Jimmy Carter writes about Camp David: "There was no possibility that any Palestinian leader could accept such terms and survive, but official statements from Washington and Jerusalem were successful in placing the entire onus for the failure on Yasir Arafat."²⁴ Even Barak's foreign minister Shlomo Ben-Ami—a key player at Camp David—later admitted publicly: "If I were a Palestinian I would have rejected Camp David as well."²⁵

One could argue that Arafat should have agreed to the proposal because now the Palestinians are even worse off, but that's not a logic I hear employed by many Palestinians I've talked to. Most of them say they would prefer being forced into oppression than signing away their rights to freedom. Maybe this way they can still hope for change.

²³ Boston Coalition for Palestinian Rights, 2002. www.bcpr.org/break.html

²⁴ Carter, 152.

²⁵ John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby: Mearsheimer and Walt Respond to Criticisms," *London Review of Books* (May 11, 2006); As cited by Scholars for Peace in the Middle East. www.spme.net

In fact, Israel has been offered peace in exchange for compliance with international law several times, and rejected each offer. Here are some examples:

- In the mid-1970s, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) endorsed a comprehensive peace with Israel in exchange for its full withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. Israel rejected the offer.²⁶
- In March 2002, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, along with all 21 other members of the Arab League, proposed not only peace but normal relations and regional integration with Israel in exchange for an end to the Occupation and a “just solution” to the refugee problem. Israel rejected the offer.²⁷
- Israel effectively rejected the Saudi Initiative a second time when the proposal was included as part of the “Roadmap” announced by the UN. Wrote Carter, “The Palestinians accepted the road map in its entirety, but the Israeli government announced fourteen caveats and prerequisites, some of which would preclude any final peace talks.”²⁸

The Palestinians long ago joined the international consensus advocating two states based on the 1967 borders, shared Jerusalem, and a just solution for the refugees. Fatah recognized Israel’s right to exist and renounced terrorism in 1988.²⁹ Hamas has also announced its willingness to establish peace with Israel along its internationally recognized borders. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh told Newsweek and the Washington Post:

If Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders, then we will establish a peace in stages. We will establish a situation of stability and calm which will bring safety for our people ... a long-term hudna [ceasefire].³⁰

Israel has refused to negotiate with the democratically elected Palestinian government of Hamas for three official reasons: (1) failure to renounce violence, (2) failure to recognize and abide by previous agreements, and (3) failure to recognize the right of a state besides one of its own to exist in historic Palestine. Interestingly, Israel is guilty of all three of the very things for which it faults Hamas.³¹

Myth #6: Palestinian textbooks incite hatred against the Jewish people.

There is a widely held belief that Palestinian textbooks demonize Israelis and teach Palestinian children to hate Jews. This particular myth originated with Itamar Marcus, an Israeli settler who founded an organization called the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace. Marcus’ claims have been refuted by Israeli, American and European studies that examined the actual content of Palestinian texts.³²

²⁶ Finkelstein, *Image*, p. 176.

²⁷ *Ibid*, at xxi.

²⁸ Carter, p. 159.

²⁹ PASSIA 2007.

³⁰ Yitzhak Ben-Horin, “We don’t want to throw them into the sea,” *Israel News* (February 25, 2006).
www.ynetnews.com

³¹ See pp. 329-330 for an elaboration on this point.

³² Len Traubman, “Reports on Palestinian kids’ hatred grossly exaggerated,” *Jewish News Weekly of Northern California* (February 6, 2004).

In response to pressure from Congress to investigate the issue, the US government commissioned the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information to convene a team of professional educators—Israeli, Palestinian and American—to explore the allegations. Their 2003 report concluded: “[The Palestinian] textbooks do not incite against Israel or against peace” and “the overall orientation of the curriculum is peaceful despite the harsh and violent realities on the ground.... Religious and political tolerance is emphasized.”³³

In Europe, the prestigious Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research facilitated research into the allegations. The Hebrew University’s Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace and the Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture have published studies on the texts. Committees of the US Senate and the European Parliament have both held hearings on the matter. It seems no people’s textbooks have been subjected to as much scrutiny as those of the Palestinians.

Yet time and again, independently of one another, researchers have found no incitement to hatred in Palestinian textbooks. It seems the original allegations were based on Egyptian or Jordanian textbooks and false translations.³⁴ A Middle East Working Group of the European Union found the textbooks “free of inciteful content ..., constituting a valuable contribution to the education of young Palestinians.”³⁵

If anyone’s textbooks deserve scrutiny, perhaps it’s those of the Israelis. Professor Dan Bar-Tal of Tel Aviv University concluded from a study of 124 textbooks that “over the years, generations of Israeli Jews [have been] taught a negative and often delegitimizing view of Arabs.” Bar-Tal reported two major themes of Arab characteristics. One implied a “primitiveness” and an “inferiority in comparison to Jews.” The other presented Arabs as violent, brutish, untrustworthy, cruel, fanatical, treacherous, and aggressive.³⁶

In an article entitled, “Learning all the wrong facts,” *Haaretz* reporter Akiva Eldar cites numerous studies concluding that many Israeli textbooks not only dehumanize Arabs, but are entirely devoid of the word “Palestinian.” Also alien to many educational materials was the Green Line to distinguish Israel from the Palestinian territories. Those maps that do outline the West Bank often refer to it as “Judea and Samaria” or “Palestine-Eretz Yisrael,”

i.e. part of the “Land of Israel.” Some official Israeli maps include Israeli settlements but exclude Palestinian towns, even those within Israel.³⁷

Myth #7: Israel only uses violence as a last resort, to defend itself and to prevent terror attacks.

Human rights organizations have documented extensive disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli army over 40 years. For example, according to Amnesty International, most of the children killed by soldiers in 2002 were attacked “when there was no exchange of fire and in circumstances in which the lives of the soldiers

³³“Reviewing Palestinian Textbooks and Tolerance Education Program,” *Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information*, submitted to the Public Affairs Office US Consulate General (Jerusalem, 2003).

³⁴Roger Avenstrup, “Palestinian textbooks: Where is all that ‘incitement?’” *International Herald Tribune* (December 18, 2004).

³⁵Akiva Eldar, “Reading, writing, and propoganda,” *Haaretz* (September 10, 2004).

³⁶Traubman, *Jewish Weekly News of Northern California*.

³⁷Akiva Eldar, “Learning all the wrong facts,” *Haaretz* (December 9, 2004).

were not at risk.”³⁸ *B'tselem*, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, described the situation as follows:

In every city and refugee camp that they have entered, IDF soldiers have repeated the same pattern: indiscriminate firing and then killing of innocent civilians, intentional harm to water, electricity and telephone infrastructure, taking over civilian houses, extensive damage to civilian property, shooting at ambulances and prevention of medical care to the injured.³⁹

Israel also uses humiliation tactics, as in the town of Halhul where town notables and other men were taken from their homes to the town square by soldiers in the middle of the night, where they were “ordered to urinate and [defecate] on one another, and also to sing Hatikva [‘The Hope,’ the national anthem of Israel] and to call out ‘Long Live the State of Israel.’ ... Some were even ordered to lick the earth.” Other Palestinian detainees and civilians have reported being forced to crawl on all fours and bark like dogs. Children were made to slap their parents. Soldiers wrote numbers on the arms of Palestinian prisoners on Holocaust Remembrance Day.⁴⁰ Israeli settlers reportedly “caught an old man who had protested when his lands were taken and shaved off his beard—just what Polish anti-Semites did to Jews.”⁴¹

FAQ #1: There are many terrible things happening around the world. Why should Americans care so much about this particular conflict?

Whether they know it or not, Americans are deeply involved in the Israel/Palestine conflict because they are Israel’s financial sponsors. US tax-payers are funding Israel’s aggression and therefore have a right and a responsibility to demand that those tax dollars not be used to violate international law and human rights.

The US government also perpetuates the conflict by preventing the United Nations from taking decisive action against Israel’s crimes. A University of Cambridge study found that the US veto has ensured that Israel enjoys “virtual immunity” from the enforcement measures typically adopted by the UN against countries committing identical violations of international law.⁴² According to President Carter:

The United States has used its U.N. Security Council veto more than forty times to block resolutions critical of Israel. Some of these vetoes have brought international discredit on the United States, and there is little doubt that the lack of a persistent effort to resolve the Palestinian issue is a major source of anti-American sentiment and terrorist activity throughout the Middle East and the Islamic world.⁴³

³⁸ “Killing the Future,” *Amnesty International*, pp. 1-2, 16; As cited in Finkelstein, *Chutzpah*, p. 113.

³⁹ “A Deadly Pattern,” *B'tselem*, press release (March 12, 2002); As cited in Qumsiyeh, p. 117.

⁴⁰ Zvi Barel, *Haaretz* (January 20 & 30, 1983); Edward Walsh, *Washington Post—Boston Globe* (February 18); David Richardson, *Jerusalem Post* (February 18); Aharon Bachar, “Do not say: We did not know, we did not hear,” *Yediot Ahronot* (December 3, 1982); As cited in Chomsky, *Fateful*, pp. 130-131.

⁴¹ “The Gangrene of the Occupation,” *Al Hamishmar* (February 19, 1982); As cited in Chomsky, *Fateful*, p. 142.

⁴² Mark Weller and Dr. Barbara Metzger, “Double Standards,” *Negotiations Affairs Department, Palestinian Liberation Organization* (September 24, 2002); As cited in Finkelstein, *Image*, p. xviii.

⁴³ Carter, pp. 209-210.

FAQ #2: Why does the US continue to give Israel so much aid and political support?

The main reasons for US support of Israel can be summed up as follows:

1. The second most-powerful lobby in the US is the "Zionist Lobby" (often mislabeled the "Jewish Lobby" even though it is composed of many non-Jews, and many Jews oppose it), led by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).⁴⁴ Described in the *New York Times* as "the most important organization affecting America's relationship with Israel,"⁴⁵ AIPAC has more than 100,000 US members and an annual budget of as much as \$40 million,⁴⁶ which it uses to promote US policy aligned with Israeli interests. AIPAC has successfully defeated numerous senators who were perceived to be insufficiently pro-Israel.⁴⁷ Senator William Fulbright once wrote:

AIPAC ... and its allied organizations have effective working control of the electoral process. They can elect or defeat nearly any congressman or senator that they wish, with their money and coordinated organization.⁴⁸

University of Chicago professor John Mearsheimer and Harvard professor Stephen Walt published a controversial article entitled "The Israel Lobby," outlining various ways in which the lobby's control over US politics actually functions to the detriment of US strategic interests.⁴⁹

2. Some argue that the US would never pursue another country's interests above its own and that US support for Israel is due to the countries' twin interests in military and spin-off development projects and the storage and base facilities that Israel provides for US forces targeting oil-rich countries in the region.⁵⁰

Still others believe that it is a combination of the Zionist Lobby and US strategic interests that perpetuates US support for Israeli violations of international law.

3. No small number of American industries are profiting from US support for Israel. Most notable among these are US arms manufacturers. In addition to American weapons that are donated to Israel, two-thirds of US financial aid to Israel is earmarked for purchase of more US arms.

Other groups profiting from the conflict include the oil industry, Arab leaders, and US elected representatives who receive generous election donations for maintaining the status quo or increasing US unconditional support for Israel.⁵¹

4. Finally, American public opinion about Israel tends to be sympathetic for two reasons: First, people are rightfully sensitive to the tragic plight of Jews throughout history.

⁴⁴ Daniel Kurtzman, "AIPAC listed 2nd most powerful group on Fortune list," *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix* (November 28, 1997).

⁴⁵ As cited on AIPAC's homepage: www.aipac.org

⁴⁶ "AIPAC Holds National Meeting Amid Spy Scandal Investigation," *Democracy Now!* (May 25, 2005).

⁴⁷ Mitchell Kaidy, "Tiny Israel's Giant U.S. Lobby Goes Unmentioned in Campaign Finance Hearings," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (December 1997), p. 42.

⁴⁸ J. William Fulbright, *The Price of Empire* (London: Pantheon Books, 1989), p. 183; As cited in Qumsiyeh, p. 168

⁴⁹ John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby," *London Review of Books* (March 23, 2006).

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, at xiii.

⁵¹ See Qumsiyeh, *Sharing the Land of Canaan*, pp. 203-204 for details about each of these groups.

Against this historic backdrop, people are resistant to criticizing Israel and seeing Jews as anything other than the victims.

Second, although American tax-payers give more foreign aid to Israel than to any other country in the world, many remain largely ignorant of the uses of this aid and therefore do nothing to change it. This is due in large part to what many—myself included—perceive as a US mainstream media pro-Israel bias, which is documented extensively by the organization *If Americans Knew*. One of the group's studies found that the Associated Press reported deaths of Israeli children even more often than they occurred but failed to cover 85% of the deaths of Palestinian children. Another study on the *San Francisco Chronicle* made 30 mentions of Israeli children dying for every 20 who died (i.e., some deaths were reported more than once), but reported on only 1 in 20 deaths of Palestinian children. Studies on the *New York Times*, ABC, CBS, NBC, and other media sources revealed similar trends. Stories about torture, hunger strikes, Israeli refuseniks, and the Palestinian nonviolence movement were also grossly underreported. As long as Americans remain ignorant of Israeli's atrocities, they are unlikely to pressure their government to stop funding them.⁵²



**He already knows
what he wants to be
when he grows up.**

What kind of society raises six-year olds on dreams of suicide/homicide and hatred? A society that targets Israel.

They target Israel, because Israel shares America's values — democracy, freedom of religion, women's rights, a free press, scientific achievement and a burgeoning, open economy.

By supporting Israel's struggle against terror, you are helping defend the cause of freedom, not just in Israel, but here in America and throughout the free world.

ISRAEL The front line of the free world.

*It is not surprising that most Americans remain ignorant of Israel's crimes given the prevalence of media asserting claims like the one below (which I encountered at a Washington DC metro station in June 2007). The subtitle reads: "What kind of a society raises six-year-olds on dreams of suicide/homicide and hatred? A society that targets Israel. **They target Israel because Israel shares America's values**—democracy, freedom of religion, women's rights, a free press, scientific achievement and a burgeoning, open economy. By supporting Israel's struggle against terror, **you are helping defend the cause for freedom**, not just in Israel, but here in America and throughout the free world. —ISRAEL. The front line of the free world."*

⁵² www.IfAmericansKnew.org