

Q & A: THE FACTS ABOUT PALESTINE AND ISRAEL



Isn't Israel the historic homeland of the Jews?

Yes, just as it is the historic home of the Canaanites, Jebusites, Philistines, and former Jews who long ago became Christians or Muslims. Moreover, when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE, as many as 80% of the world's Jews were already living abroad.

But isn't Israel sacred to the Jews?

Of course, but it is also sacred to Christians and Muslims, both of whom have holy sites scattered throughout the area. Fundamentalist Jews, who make up some 20% of Israelis, believe that non-Jews should be barred entirely from living in Jerusalem and Greater ("Eretz") Israel.

Wasn't Israel necessary as a safe haven for European Jews after WWII?

Only 10% of the 3 million Jews still in Europe after WWII migrated to Israel.

Why did the Israeli government want to expel Palestinians from the newly created Israeli State?

Palestinians owned most of the land (90%) designated by the UN for a Jewish state in 1947 and formed a majority of the population. The Zionist leadership had long recognized that a purge of the original Palestinian population was imperative if Israel was to be a majority Jewish state. As a result, 900,000 Palestinians were forced to abandon some 369 villages. Their land was seized and turned over to the quasi-private Jewish National Fund for redistribution exclusively to Jews. Sadly, seizures of Arab-owned land have become an enduring and pervasive feature of Israeli rule not only in Israel but also in the W. Bank and Jerusalem where illegal land-grabs have left thousands impoverished and homeless.

Why did the Palestinians resist the creation of Israel?

Because they recognized that partition would result in the loss of their own villages and lands, the breakup of their communities, and the shattering of their culture.

How big is Israel?

Israel has never declared its frontiers. Many religious nationalist and ultra-orthodox Jews (about 20% of Israel's population) believe that Israel's boundaries should extend clear to the Euphrates. And while the Israeli government has never formally endorsed this position, politicians who share such views have often served in the Israeli cabinet. In terms of population, Israel has 6,277,000 people and Palestine 3,762,000.

Isn't Israel the only democratic state in the Middle East?

Israel is a Jewish state. Non-Jews in Israel (20% of Israel's population) do not enjoy the same privileges as Israel's Jewish citizens. While it is true that some Arab-Israelis serve in the Knesset, they are underrepresented, rarely find political allies, and are subject to vile slurs from their Jewish colleagues. Arab-Israelis who question the religious/sectarian nature of the state are not allowed to hold office. Discrimination against non-Jews in housing, social services, education, and travel is a matter of policy. Racist attitudes toward Palestinians are endemic in Israeli society and are even present in school textbooks. Bishop Tutu calls the system "apartheid".

What about Israel's human rights record?

Israel is responsible for extra-judicial targeted assassinations, administrative detentions, torture, restriction of access to health care, home demolitions, land confiscations, and annexations—all of which are human rights violations and/or violations of international law.

How many Palestinians are currently detained without charge?

It is estimated that currently there are 7-8,000 Palestinians held without charge by the Israeli occupiers. About 5% are

under the age of 18. B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, estimates that about 83% of detainees have experienced some kind of torture. Israeli "experts" advised US Forces on the techniques used at Abu Ghraib.

Haven't Palestinian terrorists killed many Israelis?

Armed resistance against an occupying military force is legal under international law. However, deadly force targeting civilians is terrorism. Too many have been killed on both sides. Since 2000, 1010 Israeli soldiers and civilians have been killed, while 3875 Palestinian civilians alone have died. Among these are 121 Israeli children and 722 Palestinian children. In addition, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have blown up, bulldozed, or otherwise destroyed over 4000 Palestinian homes and thousands of olive trees. "State" terrorism—Israeli killing of Palestinian civilians is almost a daily occurrence.

Don't the Palestinians want to "drive the Israelis into the sea"?

The Palestinian Authority in fact agreed to recognize Israel as part of the Oslo peace process. Israel, by contrast, continued its relentless seizure of Palestinian land. Indeed, recent polls indicate that 44-67% of Israelis support ethnic cleansing of all Palestinians.

LAND CONFISCATION

- Israel has confiscated 87% of E. Jerusalem and 75% of the W. Bank for settlements, military reserves, and parks.
- This land is no longer available for agricultural use or housing.
- Palestinians suffer both severe housing shortages and disruptions of traditional agriculture.

Isn't Israel under constant threat by huge Arab armies? How many settlements are there?

Israel has the best-equipped and most powerful army in the region with 177,500 men in active service and 429,000 in reserve. It receives over \$2 billion in military aid from the US each year and has the right to buy "excess" US military hardware at bargain basement prices. In addition, Israel is the only nuclear power in the region, boasting over 200 nuclear warheads. According to Jane's World Defense, Israel is one of the top five arms exporters in the world—even exporting arms to China over US protests.

Why don't Palestinians employ nonviolent resistance against the Israelis?

In fact there is far more nonviolent resistance than violent confrontation to the occupation. Demonstrations frequently result in serious injury and even death to unarmed Palestinian demonstrators. However, this is almost never reported in the American press.

Is press coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict biased?

To cite just one example, in 2004, eight Israeli children and 179 Palestinian children were killed. The three major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) reported the Israeli deaths 83% of the time, however, the deaths of Palestinian children were reported on average only 8% of the time.

Why has Israel built the separation wall inside the 1967 armistice line?

Israel says this 30-foot concrete barrier (declared illegal in 2005 by the International Court of Justice) is for security, but the wall is built inside the 1967 armistice line, creating new borders that annex settlements of 182,000 Jews who are illegally settled on occupied land. It confiscates huge blocks of the Occupied Territories. It divides Palestinian land into 13 separate ghettos. It separates farmers from their fields and markets, children from their schools, and the sick from clinics and hospitals. Along with bypass roads and settlements, it precludes the possibility of a viable Palestinian state.

What are living conditions like in Palestine?

Unemployment is 32% of the workforce, and 56% of the population is living below the poverty line of \$2 per person per day. Tourism has declined by 95% and construction is at a standstill. Add to this the daily humiliations of checkpoints, home demolitions, artillery barrages, and armed Jewish settlers stoning Palestinian school children or shooting at Palestinian farmers and you have a fair idea of life in the Territories. The UN predicts that economic conditions will further deteriorate if Israel, Europe, and the US continue to withhold funds from the Hamas-led government.

Haven't the Israelis made repeated efforts to make peace with the Palestinians?

It is important to distinguish between what the Israelis say they will do and facts on the ground. For example, the Oslo Accords (1992) promised Palestinian sovereignty and an end to new Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. In the first 4 years after the Oslo accords the settler population in the Territories increased by 48%.

One must distinguish between settlements and outposts. There are between 145 and 198 settlements and another 130 outposts, which are caravan or tent settlements usually set up by the most radical fundamentalist Jewish settlers. It is such settlers who killed 54 Palestinian farmers and their children over the past 5 years.

The new Olmert government is speaking of unilateral withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. Isn't this a generous offer to create a Palestinian state?

The Olmert plan ignores UN resolutions and seizes all of Jerusalem plus an additional 50% of the W. Bank. The resulting "state" would be shot through with Jewish settlements and laced with exclusively Jewish roads connecting the settlements. The Palestinian "state" would not be contiguous, sovereign, or economically viable. It would be a series of open-air prison camps—in effect, worse than the Bantustans of the old apartheid S. Africa.

Isn't negotiation with terrorists like Hamas impossible?

Hamas has clearly indicated a willingness to negotiate on equal terms with the Israelis. This means that it expects Israel to recognize a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders in exchange for a truce anticipated

become full recognition if Israel stands by its agreements. Hamas has demonstrated good faith by remaining committed to a moratorium on terrorism for the last 16 months, a period when Israelis killed 354 Palestinian civilians. It is worth noting that the US and Britain had no problems negotiating with Sin Fein/IRA, a group which ultimately rejected terrorism and became a partner in the government of N. Ireland. In the end, the real question is whether the Olmert/Israeli government wants to negotiate at all or simply define "peace" on its own terms.

Why pick on Israel – There are other countries with bad human rights records, aren't there?

None of them receive \$3 billion in US aid each year, loan write-offs, and US backing for their illegal behavior.

Why economic sanctions now?

Because the human rights abuses have been going on for over 50 years. Because the situation in the Occupied Territories continues to deteriorate. Because the threat of economic sanctions has caused Israel and its supporters to stand up and pay attention for the first time in years. Because what has happened in Iraq and what is happening in Israel now are profoundly related. And finally, because sanctions have worked elsewhere to end longstanding human rights abuses, notably in South Africa.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

- Israel has placed 471 physical barriers on Palestinian roads to block traffic.
- There are 50 permanent checkpoints in the W. Bank plus 100 temporary or "flying" checkpoints set up on a weekly basis.
- Traveling only 20 miles may take hours and involve countless humiliations.