



Myths & Facts Online

Israel's Roots

By [Mitchell G. Bard](#)

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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 [C.E.](#) and then, 1,800 years later, 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 11th century, Jewish communities grew in Rafah, Gaza, [Ashkelon](#), [Jaffa](#) and [Caesarea](#).

The [Crusaders](#) massacred many Jews during the 12th 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 next 300 years. By the early 19th century — years before the birth of the modern [Zionist](#) movement — more than 10,000 Jews lived throughout what is today Israel.¹ The 78 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 Eban²

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 12th Century [B.C.E.](#), settled along the Mediterranean coastal plain of what are now Israel and the Gaza Strip. In the second century C.E., 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 B.C.E., 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 B.C.E. 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 B.C.E., when the [Assyrians](#) destroyed it, and the southern kingdom (Judah) surviving until the [Babylonian](#) conquest in 586 B.C.E. The Jewish people enjoyed brief periods of sovereignty afterward before most Jews were finally driven from their homeland in 135 C.E.

Jewish independence in the Land of Israel lasted for more than 400 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 3,000 years old today.

Palestine was never an exclusively Arab country, although Arabic gradually became the language of most 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 Prof. 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."⁶

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, the following resolution was adopted:

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

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."⁷

The representative of the Arab Higher Committee to the [United Nations](#) submitted a statement to the General Assembly in May 1947 that said "Palestine was part of the Province of Syria" and that, "politically, the Arabs of Palestine were not independent in the sense of forming a separate political entity." A few years later, Ahmed Shuqayri, later the chairman of the [PLO](#), told the Security Council: "It is common knowledge that Palestine is nothing but southern Syria."⁸

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](#) and Israel's capture of the West Bank.



MYTH

"The Palestinians are descendants of the Canaanites and were in Palestine long before the Jews."

FACT

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

Sherif Hussein, the guardian of the Islamic Holy Places in Arabia, said the Palestinians' ancestors had only been in the area for 1,000 years.⁹ 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 1,000 years, dating back no further than the conquest of [Muhammad's](#) followers in the 7th century.¹⁰ And that claim is also dubious. Over the last 2,000 years, there have been massive invasions that killed off most of the local people (e.g., the [Crusades](#)), migrations, the plague, and other manmade or natural disasters. The entire local population was replaced many times over. During the [British mandate](#) alone, more than 100,000 Arabs emigrated from neighboring countries and are today considered Palestinians.

By contrast, no serious historian questions the more than 3,000-year-old Jewish connection to the Land of Israel, or the modern Jewish people's relation to the ancient Hebrews.

“...[the Palestinian Arabs'] basic sense of corporate historic identity was, at different levels, Muslim or Arab or - for some - Syrian; it is significant that even by the end of the Mandate in 1948, after thirty years of separate Palestinian political existence, there were virtually no books in Arabic on the history of Palestine.”^{10a}

MYTH

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

FACT

In 1917, Britain issued the Balfour Declaration:

His Majesty's Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors 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.

The [Mandate for Palestine](#) included the Balfour Declaration. It 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

endeavors 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.¹¹

The Mandate was formalized by the 52 governments at the League of Nations on July 24, 1922.

MYTH

"The 'traditional position' of the Arabs in Palestine was jeopardized by 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.¹²

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.¹³

Lewis French, the British Director of Development wrote of Palestine:

We found it inhabited by fellahin who lived in mud hovels and suffered severely from the prevalent malaria....Large areas...were uncultivated....The fellahin, if not themselves cattle thieves, were always ready to harbor these and other criminals. The individual plots...changed hands annually. There was little public security, and the fellahin's lot was an alternation of pillage and blackmail by their neighbors, the Bedouin.¹⁴

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."¹⁵

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, 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'ihilasliyin*), 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.¹⁶

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

Mark Twain, who visited Palestine in 1867, described it as: "...[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."¹⁷

MYTH

“Zionism is racism.”

FACT

In 1975, the [UN General Assembly](#) adopted a [resolution](#) [slandering Zionism](#) by equating it with racism. In his spirited [response to the resolution](#), Israel's Ambassador to the UN, [Chaim Herzog](#) noted the irony of the timing, the vote coming exactly 37 years after [Kristallnacht](#).

[Zionism](#) is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people, which holds that Jews, like any other nation, are entitled to a homeland.

History has demonstrated the need to ensure Jewish security through a national homeland. Zionism recognizes that Jewishness is defined by shared origin, religion, culture and history. The realization of the Zionist dream is exemplified by more than five million Jews, from more than 100 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. Approximately 1,000,000 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 dark-skinned [Jews from Ethiopia](#), Yemen and India is the best refutation of the calumny against Zionism. In a series of [historic airlifts](#), labeled Moses (1984), Joshua (1985) and Solomon (1991), Israel rescued almost 42,000 members of the ancient Ethiopian Jewish community.

[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, rebut the charge of exclusivity. Moreover, anyone — Jew or non-Jew, Israeli, American, or Saudi, black, white, yellow or purple — can be a Zionist.

Writing after "Operation Moses" was revealed, William Safire noted:

“...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.”¹⁸

By contrast, the Arab states define citizenship strictly by native parentage. It is almost impossible to become a naturalized citizen in many Arab states, especially [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.¹⁹

To single out Jewish self-determination for condemnation is itself a form of racism. When approached by a student at Harvard in 1968 who attacked Zionism, Martin Luther King responded: "When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews. You're talking anti-Semitism."²⁰

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.

MYTH

"The delegates of the UN World Conference Against Racism agreed that Zionism is racism."

FACT

In 2001, [Arab nations](#) again were seeking to delegitimize Israel by trying to equate [Zionism](#) with racism at the [UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban](#), South Africa. The United States joined Israel in boycotting the conference when it became clear that rather than focus on the evils of racism, [anti-Semitism](#) and xenophobia that were supposed to be the subject of the event, the conference had turned into a forum for bashing Israel.

The United States withdrew its delegation "to send a signal to the freedom loving nations of the world that we will not stand by, if the world tries to describe Zionism as racism. That is as wrong as wrong can be." White House Press Secretary Ari Fleisher added that "the President is proud to stand by Israel and by the Jewish community and send a signal that no group around the world will meet with international acceptance and respect if its purpose is to equate Zionism with racism."²¹

MYTH

“The Zionists could have chosen another country besides Palestine.”

FACT

In the late 19th century, the rise of religious and racist [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 recite the words “next year in Jerusalem” every [Passover](#). 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 renaissance of their civilization and culture.

MYTH

“Herzl himself proposed Uganda as the Jewish state as an alternative to Palestine.”

FACT

[Theodor Herzl](#) sought support from the great powers for the creation of a Jewish homeland. He turned to Great Britain, and

met with Joseph Chamberlain, the British colonial secretary and others. The British agreed, in principle, to Jewish settlement in East Africa.

At the [Sixth Zionist Congress](#) at Basle on August 26, 1903, Herzl proposed the British [Uganda Program](#) as a *temporary emergency refuge* for Jews in Russia in immediate danger. 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 at the Congress and nearly led to a split in the Zionist movement. The Jewish Territorialist Organization (ITO) was formed as a result of the unification of various groups who had supported Herzl's Uganda proposals during the period 1903-1905. The Uganda Program, which never had much support, was formally rejected by the Zionist movement at the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905.

MYTH

“All Arabs opposed the Balfour Declaration, seeing it as a betrayal of their rights.”

FACT

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. 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 looked to the fulfillment of the [Balfour Declaration](#) and 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."²²

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.

MYTH

“The Zionists made no effort to compromise with the Arabs.”

FACT

In 1913, the [Zionist](#) leadership recognized the desirability of reaching an agreement with the Arabs. Sami Hochberg, owner of the newspaper, *Le-Jeune-Turc*, informally represented the Zionists in a meeting with the Cairo-based Decentralization Party and the anti-Ottoman Beirut Reform Society and was able to reach an agreement. This “entente verbale” led to the adoption of a resolution assuring Jews equal rights under a decentralized government. Hochberg also secured an invitation to the First Arab Congress held in Paris in June 1913.

The Arab Congress proved to be surprisingly receptive to Zionist aspirations. Hochberg was encouraged by the Congress’s favorable response to the entente verbale. Abd-ul-Hamid Yahrawi, the President of the Congress, summed up the attitude of the delegates:

All of us, both Muslims and Christians, have the best of feelings toward the Jews. When we spoke in our resolutions about the rights and obligations of the Syrians, this covered the Jews as well. Because they are our brothers in race *and we regard them as Syrians who were forced to leave the country at one time but whose hearts always beat together with ours*, we are certain that our Jewish brothers the world over will know how to help us so that our common interests may succeed and our common country will develop both materially and morally (author’s emphasis).²³

The entente verbale Hochberg negotiated was rendered ineffectual by wartime developments. The outspoken Arab opposition to the [Balfour Declaration](#) convinced the Zionist leadership of the need to make a more concerted effort to reach an understanding with the Arabs.

[Chaim Weizmann](#) considered the task important enough to lead a Zionist Commission to Palestine to explain the movement’s aims to the Arabs. Weizmann went first to Cairo in March 1918 and met with Said Shukeir, Dr. Faris Nimr and Suleiman Bey Nassif (Syrian Arab nationalists who had been chosen by the British as representatives). He stressed the desire to live in harmony with the

Arabs in a British Palestine.

Weizmann's diplomacy was successful. Nassif said "there was room in Palestine for another million inhabitants without affecting the position of those already there."²⁴ Dr. Nimr disseminated information through his Cairo newspaper to dispel the Arab public's misconceptions about Zionist aims.²⁵

In 1921, Winston Churchill tried to arrange a meeting between Palestinians and Zionists. On November 29, 1921, the two sides met, but no progress was made because the Arabs insisted that the Balfour Declaration be abrogated.²⁶

Weizmann led a group of Zionists that met with Syrian nationalist Riad al-Sulh in 1921. The Zionists agreed to support Arab nationalist aspirations and Sulh said he was willing to recognize the Jewish National Home. The talks resumed a year later and raised hopes for an agreement. In May 1923, however, Sulh's efforts to convince Palestinian Arab leaders that Zionism was an accomplished fact were rejected.²⁷

Over the next 25 years, Zionist leaders inside and outside Palestine would try repeatedly to negotiate with the Arabs. Similarly, Israeli leaders since 1948 have sought [peace](#) treaties with the Arab states, but [Egypt](#) and [Jordan](#) are the only nations that have signed them.

MYTH

"The Zionists were colonialist tools of Western imperialism."

FACT

"Colonialism means living by exploiting others," Yehoshofat 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?"²⁸

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."²⁹

Emir Faisal also 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).³⁰

“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. We do not want to dominate them: we want to serve with them.....”

— **Martin Buber**³¹

In the 1940s, the Jewish underground movements waged an *anti-colonial* 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 in the Hussein-MacMahon Correspondence.”

FACT

The central figure in the Arab nationalist movement at the time of World War I was Hussein ibn 'Ali, who was appointed by the Turkish Committee of Union and Progress to the position of Sherif of Mecca in 1908. As Sherif, Hussein was responsible for the custody of Islam's shrines in the Hejaz and, consequently, was recognized as 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. 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.³² 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.³³

Nevertheless, the Arabs held then, as now, that the letters constituted a promise of independence for the Arabs.

[Text of Letters](#)

MYTH

“The Arabs fought for freedom in World Wars I and II.”

FACT

Contrary to the romantic fiction of the period, most of the Arabs did not fight with the Allies against the Turks in World War I. David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, noted that most Arabs fought for their Turkish rulers. Faisal's supporters in Arabia were the exception.

In World War II, the Arabs were very slow to enter the war against [Hitler](#). Only Transjordan went along with the British in 1939. Iraq was taken over by pro-Nazis in 1941 and joined the Axis powers. Most of the Arab states sat on the fence, waiting until 1945 to see who would win. By then, Germany was doomed and, since it was necessary to join the war to qualify for membership in the nascent United Nations, the Arabs belatedly began to declare war against Germany in 1945: Egypt, on February 25; Syria, on February 27; Lebanon, on February 28; and Saudi Arabia, on March 2. By contrast, some 30,000 Palestinian Jews fought against Nazi Germany.

MYTH

“Israeli policies cause anti-Semitism.”

FACT

[Anti-Semitism](#) has existed for centuries, well before the rise of the modern [State of Israel](#). Rather than Israel being the cause of anti-Semitism, it is more likely that the distorted media coverage of Israeli policies is reinforcing latent anti-Semitic views.

As writer Leon Wieseltier observed, “the notion that all Jews are responsible for whatever any Jews do is not a [Zionist](#) notion. It is an anti-Semitic notion.” Wieseltier adds that attacks on Jews in Europe have nothing whatsoever to do with Israel. To blame Jews for anti-Semitism is similar to saying blacks are responsible for racism.

Many Jews may disagree with policies of a particular Israeli government, but this does not mean that Israel is bad for the Jews. As Wieseltier noted, “Israel is not bad for the Jews of [Russia](#), who may need a haven; or for the Jews of [Argentina](#), who may need a haven; or for any Jews who may need a haven.”³⁴

As noted in the [fact about criticism of Israel](#), taking issue with Israeli policies is acceptable if you do so because you believe that a) Israel has the right to exist, and b) that changes will make Israel a better place. In fact, such criticism, *by Israelis*, can be found in the Israeli media every day. Criticism crosses the line, however, when it delegitimizes Israel and is intended to weaken rather than strengthen its institutions.

“Israel is the only state in the world today, and the Jews the only people in the world today, that are the object of a standing set of threats from governmental, religious, and terrorist bodies seeking their destruction. And what is most disturbing is the silence, the indifference, and sometimes even the indulgence, in the face of such genocidal anti-Semitism.”

— Canadian Minister of Justice and Attorney General [Irwin Cotler](#)³⁵

MYTH

“Supporters of Israel only criticize Arabs and never Israelis.”

FACT

[Israel](#) is not perfect. Even the most committed friends of Israel acknowledge that the government sometimes makes mistakes, and that it has not solved all the problems in its society. Supporters of Israel may not emphasize these faults, however, because there is no shortage of groups and individuals who are willing to do nothing but focus on Israel's imperfections. The public usually has much less access to Israel's side of the story of its conflict with the Arabs, or the positive aspects of its society.

Israelis themselves are their own harshest critics. If you want to read criticism of Israeli behavior, you do not need to seek out anti-Israel sources, you can pick up any Israeli newspaper and find no shortage of news and commentary critical of government policy. The rest of the world's media provides constant attention to Israel and the coverage is far more likely to be unfavorable than complimentary.

Myths and Facts also pulls no punches when it comes to addressing Israel's responsibilities for events and policies that tarnish its image, including Israel's role in the Palestinian refugee problem, the massacre at Sabra and Shatila, and social and economic inequalities between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel.

Israel's supporters believe Israel has a right to exist and that close relations between Israel and other nations in the world is in everyone's best interest. When friends criticize Israel, it is because they want the country to be better. Israel's detractors do not have that goal; they are more interested in delegitimizing the country, placing a wedge between Israel and its allies, and working toward its destruction.

Friends of [Israel](#) do not try to whitewash the truth, but they do try to put events in proper context. That is also our goal.

Notes

¹Dan Bahat, ed. *Twenty Centuries of Jewish Life in the Holy Land*, (Jerusalem: The Israel Economist, 1976), pp. 61-63.

²[New York Times](#), (November 18, 1981).

³Yehoshua Porath, [The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, 1918-1929](#), (London: Frank Cass, 1974), p.

4.

⁴Max Dimont, [Jews, God and History](#), (NY: Signet, 1962), pp. 49-53.

⁵Moshe Kohn, "The Arabs' 'Lie' of the Land," [*Jerusalem Post*](#), (October 18, 1991).

⁶Yehoshua Porath, [*Palestinian Arab National Movement: From Riots to Rebellion: 1929-1939*](#), vol. 2, (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1977), pp. 81-82.

⁷Moshe Kohn, "The Arabs' 'Lie' of the Land," [*Jerusalem Post*](#), (October 18, 1991).

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