



PERSPECTIVES

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What's in a Name? The Israeli-Palestinian Case

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Palestinian-Arab propaganda machine incessantly fuels aggressive anti-Israel campaigns. The PA's public diplomacy is based on manipulation: it takes advantage of the ignorance and superficial historical knowledge of the rest of the world about the Israeli-Arab conflict to implant an invented history. The Jewish State may have committed a historic misjudgment by selecting the name "Israel," as the choice has damaged the state's strategic interests.

The never-ending Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the world's most intractable and explosive disputes, causing heightened emotion and bloodshed in the Middle East and around the globe. In many cases, terrorist groups, including ISIS and al-Qaeda, have dedicated their spectacular terror attacks to the cause of Palestine and the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

Israel is widely viewed as the villain responsible for the plight of the 1948 "refugees," as well as the "brutal oppression" of the Palestinian people in the "occupied territories." Palestinian-Arab propaganda fuels non-stop anti-Israel campaigns, primarily under the BDS umbrella, that support and reinforce this twisting of history. (BDS is the modern version of the near-forgotten "Arab League Boycott" formally declared on December 2, 1945.)

The Zionist movement and later the state of Israel are misrepresented as colonial forces bent on expelling the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine and depriving them of their rights in order to establish a foreign entity to be populated by an influx of immigrants from foreign states. The mouthpieces for these stories never say a single word about the millenarian link of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel (or Palestine as it came to be known since Roman times), and flatly deny the validity of the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917 ratified by the League of Nations mandate in 1922 calling for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

The UN Partition Plan of November 29, 1947, paved the way for the establishment of the state of Israel. It also crystallized the Arabs' determination to destroy the nascent Jewish state by force. As bluntly expressed by then Secretary-General of the Arab League Azzam Pasha: "This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades."

By 2020, the Palestinian Authority had come to be internationally recognized as the entity destined to ultimately emerge as the Palestinian State, based on a two-state solution. Yet Mahmoud Abbas, the PA's president, categorically rejects every aspect of President Trump's "Deal of the Century" and is pushing a propaganda campaign with the slogan "Disappearing Palestine."

At a special Arab League meeting in Cairo on February 1, 2020, Abbas displayed blatantly misleading propaganda maps of "historic Palestine" under the provocative heading "Palestine Loss of Land." They included the Palestine mandate map, the Partition map of 1947, the June 1967 lines, and "Trump's Projected Plan," with "Palestinian land" shown to diminish continuously over the decades. This performance was a typical manipulation that took deliberate advantage of the ignorance and superficial historical knowledge of most of the rest of the world about the Arab-Israeli conflict. The maps were a form of optical illusion designed to implant the false impression that Palestine was an entirely Arab state throughout human history that was literally stolen by the Jews.

This completely distorted version of history is the cornerstone of the BDS movement. With the Palestinian leadership's and the BDS movement's help, it is persistently reinforced in international thinking about the conflict and has had a substantial impact on policy making, mainly in Europe and Asia. This has resulted in the broad adoption of a consistently anti-Israel standpoint. Israeli *hasbara* finds itself helpless to correct past failures in public diplomacy.

At times, efforts by the Palestinians to reinforce their baseless version of history backfire. On June 20, 2016, Abbas went on an official visit to Saudi Arabia. While there, he gave the Saudi monarch a framed copy of the old daily *The Palestine Post*. The gesture was meant to reinforce the Palestinian narrative, but did exactly the opposite. As Israeli PM Netanyahu noted at the time, "Mahmoud Abbas this week gave the Saudi king a copy of *The Palestine Post* as a gift. Abbas apparently didn't know that *The Palestine Post* was a Zionist newspaper that changed its name to *The Jerusalem Post* and is still published today, in Jerusalem our capital."

The assertion that the Palestinians are the indigenous inhabitants of this land is central to their dispute with Israel. This claim is repeated regularly by the Palestinians and almost never challenged. In a recent speech, Abbas said:

“Our narrative says that we were in this land since before Abraham. I am not saying it, the Bible says it. The Bible says, in these words, that the Palestinians existed before Abraham. So why don’t you recognize my right?” Saeb Erekat, the PA’s chief negotiator, said: “I am the son of Jericho... the proud son of the Netufians and the Canaanites. I’ve been there for 5,500 years before Joshua Bin Nun came and burned my hometown Jericho.”

This is all invented history.

One might well wonder why Israel, which faced several genocidal assaults and is constantly the target of terror attacks, is viewed by so many around the world not as a victim but as an aggressor. In other words, how is it that the world has been so ready to believe that when it comes to Palestinian terror, the ends justify the means?

One answer might lie in the thinking of Prof. Martin Kramer, who published an impressive article on the eve of modern Israel’s 72nd birthday. In his piece, entitled “1948: Why the name Israel?”, Kramer discusses the difficult decision the nascent state had to make about choosing a name. He notes that the selection of the name “Israel” was made by David Ben-Gurion almost at the last minute, just before the official ceremony at which Israel was proclaimed an independent state on May 14, 1948. Other names had been proposed and considered, but they were rejected by Ben-Gurion.

A press report from September 30, 1937, quotes Ben-Gurion thus: “Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) for us stands for the whole country rather a part of it”. This was perhaps why Ben-Gurion couldn’t live with the name “Palestina-Aleph-Yud,” though that was the official Hebrew name of the entire country under the British mandate.

Ben-Gurion was known for his deep fondness for the Hebrew language. He wrote: “Hebrew is the cultural cement while the land is the material cement for the renewing nation”. His exclusion of the use of the name “Palestine” for the Jewish State might be explained by his desire to give it the Hebrew name by which it had been known since biblical times.

On this point, it is worth noting an official document from May 1948 issued by The People’s Administration, Israel’s cabinet-in-waiting, in which it debated the question of translating the name “Israel” into Arabic. This body reached the conclusion that the state’s name in Arabic should be “Israel,” just as it was in Hebrew, rather than “Palestine.”

One of the arguments in favor of this decision was that “it [is] possible that a future Arab state in the Land of Israel will be named Palestine, so confusion might occur.” This thinking displayed not only a very early manifestation of

political correctness but historical foresight as well, as the Arab League had unequivocally rejected the Partition Plan and therefore was not party to UNGA Resolution 181, which designated the establishment of an Arab state (alongside its Jewish counterpart) in mandatory Palestine.

The UN's official manner of referring to the conflict in the Middle East was generally consistent until the early 1960s: it used the name "Palestine" for the territory and "Arabs"—not "Palestinians"—for the refugees. This could indicate that when referring to the Palestine question, the UN considered Israel the equivalent of mandatory Palestine.

It was not until May 28, 1964—the date on which the PLO was established—that the name "Palestine" was adopted, one might even say stolen, by an Arab entity committed to the complete abolishment of the Jewish state. This objective was clearly manifested in articles 1 and 2 of the Palestinian Charter (1968) as follows:

1. Palestine is the homeland of the Arab Palestinian people; it is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland, and the Palestinian people are an integral part of the Arab nation.
2. Palestine, with the boundaries it had during the British Mandate, is an indivisible territorial unit.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is arguable that Ben-Gurion's insistence on using the biblical name "Israel" for the young Jewish state—and the accompanying negation of the mandatory official name of this geographical piece of land—was short-sighted and overly driven by a messianic spirit.

The Jewish leadership's voluntary disengagement from the name "Palestine" created a vacuum that was eventually filled by representatives of the Arab "refugees," who redubbed their constituency "Palestinian Refugees".

This is by no means the only case of a dispute over the selection of a country's name. The most recent instance is the Greece-Macedonia conflict, which reached the brink of all-out war over the name Macedonia. That name is sensitive for the Greeks, who have a province of the same name. In January 2019, the two sides reached a compromise in which the former Macedonia was renamed the Republic of North Macedonia.

A similar ticking bomb concerns the historic China-Taiwan conflict, which has lasted since 1949. Taiwan, officially named the Republic of China (RoC), is currently run by the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), which claims it is an independent country. China considers Taiwan a renegade province that must be united with the mainland, by force if necessary. Beijing rebuffs all

Taiwanese initiatives to omit the linkage to China by officially adopting the name Taiwan, and reads such attempts as provocations.

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