

# Defending Israel Against False Claims

## A Guide to Claims and Responses

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**CLAIM:** Israel is an apartheid state.

**BACKGROUND:** Several rights groups have said Israel's regime over Palestinians amounts to "apartheid." In a 2022 report, Amnesty International said it analyzed "Israel's intent to create and maintain a system of oppression and domination over Palestinians," including through "territorial fragmentation; segregation and control; dispossession of land and property; and denial of economic and social rights." The group concluded: "This is apartheid."

**RESPONSE:**

- According to the **Cornell Legal Information Institute**, "**apartheid refers to the implementation and maintenance of a system of legalized racial segregation in which one racial group is deprived of political and civil rights.**"
- **All citizens of Israel enjoy full civil rights including the right to vote**, and the Israeli Knesset (parliament) includes significant representation of elected Arab members.
- **Arab Israelis participate in civic life at all levels, including serving in senior posts in education, healthcare, and law. And for the first time, as of June 2021, an Islamist Arab political party is a partner in a governing coalition.**
- **Within Israel, there are safeguards aimed at ensuring the equal treatment of all citizens**, Jewish or Arab, and Israeli laws and democratic institutions, including the independent courts and robust free press, assigned to uphold and speak out for these rights.
- **Some claim that separate roads and checkpoints in the West Bank are examples of "apartheid," but these are security measures** that are instituted or removed, according to the security situation on the ground, and have saved countless Israeli and Palestinian lives. **A separation barrier**—another claim of "apartheid"—was only **erected between Israel and parts of the West Bank** in the early 2000s, following Palestinian terrorist attacks during the Second Intifada that killed hundreds of Israelis. The barrier **has been essential to curbing these attacks, which plummeted after its construction.**

Resources: AJC.org and ADL.org

**CLAIM:** Israel is a racist state.

**BACKGROUND:** Many claim Israel is a "racist" country. Simply put, Israel's Arabs are the freest and most prosperous Arabs in the Middle East. There is no other country in the region, Arab or otherwise, where Arabs enjoy greater rights, protections and upward mobility.

When confronted with these facts, those calling Israel "racist" will typically shift gears. They'll claim they're actually talking about the disparities between Israeli citizens and the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza who live under Israeli "occupation" without the rights of citizens.

**RESPONSE:**

- **“The State of Israel is among the most multiracial and multicultural countries in the world. Anyone landing in Israel is confronted with a rich pageant of humanity of different colors, cultures, and religions. Contrary to the tired stereotype, most Israeli Jews are not white Europeans but the descendants of Jewish refugees from the Muslim Middle East. And many Israelis are not Jewish at all.”**
- **“Israeli Arabs are full citizens who enjoy equal rights and equal protection under the law. They are well represented in Israel's top universities and professions, from medicine to law to engineering. They have full freedom to practice their religion.”**
- **“The reason West Bank Palestinians don't have the same rights as Israelis is because they are not Israeli citizens. Just as a Canadian doesn't have the same rights as an American citizen when visiting the USA, so too, the Palestinians don't have the same rights as Israelis.”**
- **The Palestinian Authority administers the lives of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Hamas administers the lives of Palestinians in Gaza. Israel is not involved with administering the Palestinians in either area.**

Resources: AJC.org and direct quotes taken from an Opinion Column in Newsweek by David Brog, executive director of the Maccabee Task Force and author of *Reclaiming Israel's History: Roots, Rights and the Struggle for Peace*.

**CLAIM:** Israel commits acts of genocide/ethnic cleansing.

**BACKGROUND:** Recently, many point to proposed evictions in East Jerusalem neighborhoods like Sheikh Jarrah as proof that Israel is ethnically cleansing Palestinians. These complex land disputes have worked their way through the Israeli court systems for years and are not spontaneous government actions. Currently the courts have ruled that the Palestinians may stay in these residences until a final decision. For a brief history on the layered situation in Sheikh Jarrah, see “Myth #3” here: <https://www.ajc.org/news/4-myths-and-facts-about-the-violence-in-jerusalem>.

**RESPONSE:**

- The definition of ethnic cleansing is the expulsion, imprisonment, or killing of an ethnic minority by a dominant majority in order to achieve ethnic homogeneity.
- The narrative that Israel is ethnically cleansing the Palestinian population is entirely false. Arab citizens comprise roughly 20% of the population and the Palestinian population in both the West Bank and Israel has increased annually since the founding of the state and is growing at a steady rate of 1% each year.
- Israel is **a vibrant and diverse society, with sizable non-Jewish minority communities** that make up nearly a quarter of the country’s total population. Further, **every Israeli citizen enjoys the same civil rights under the law.**

Resource: AJC.org, AISH.com

**CLAIM:** Israel is a foreign, settler colonialist power.

**BACKGROUND:**

“Settler colonialism” refers to an attempt by an imperial power to replace the native population of a land with a new society of settlers. Many anti-Israel activists and academics use the term to describe the political and demographic changes over the last 150 years in what today is the State of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They argue that Jews were only a small minority of the population in the late 19th century (in what was then part of the Ottoman Empire) and that European Jews subsequently “colonized” and seized Palestinian land and resources.

Further, both inside and outside Israel there is much criticism of Israel’s settlement policies in the West Bank. But ascribing the term “settler colonialism” to such activity is also a distortion. Should a mutually negotiated two-state solution establish a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel, it will likely encompass most of the West Bank.

**RESPONSE:**

- **Jews are not “new” to Israel.** There have been Jews living in Israel continuously for hundreds of years and **their history in this region goes back 3800 years**, documented by archeological findings. Even when the vast majority of Jews were exiled from their homeland by the Romans, there still remained a population of Jews in the Land of Israel.
- Further, **this was not an invasion of white Europeans displacing Palestinians.** Until the mass immigration of Jews from the former Soviet Union, most of the Israeli population was non-white. Even **today, only about 30% of Israeli Jews are of European descent.**
- The **settlements in Gaza did not displace any Arabs** living there. Ultimately the **Israeli government removed all 9000 Israeli citizens living in 25 settlements** in 2005.
- **The settlements in the West Bank do not displace Arabs living there.** The media sometimes gives the impression that several hundred Palestinians are forced to leave for every Jew who moves to the West Bank. The truth is that **most settlements have been built in uninhabited areas, and even the handful of established in or near Arab towns did not force any Palestinians to leave.**

Resources: [AJC.org](http://AJC.org) and [JewishVirtualLibrary.org](http://JewishVirtualLibrary.org)

**CLAIM:** After the War of Independence, the State of Israel forced out the Palestinians.

**BACKGROUND:**

Although much is heard about the plight of the Palestinian refugees, little is said about the Jews who fled from Arab states. Their situation had long been precarious. During the 1947 UN debates, Arab leaders threatened them. For example, Egypt's delegate told the General Assembly: "The lives of one million Jews in Muslim countries would be jeopardized by partition."

The number of Jews fleeing Arab countries for Israel in the years following Israel's independence was nearly double the number of Arabs leaving Palestine. Many Jews were allowed to take little more than the shirts on their backs. These refugees had no desire to be repatriated. Little is heard about them because they did not remain refugees for long. Of the 820,000 Jewish refugees between 1948 – 1972, 586,000 were resettled in Israel at great expense, and without any offer of compensation from the Arab governments who confiscated their possessions. Israel has consequently maintained that any agreement to compensate the Palestinian refugees must also include Arab compensation for Jewish refugees. To this day, the Arab states have refused to pay any compensation to the hundreds of thousands of Jews who were forced to abandon their property before fleeing those countries. Through November 2003, 101 of the resolutions on the Middle East conflict referred directly to Palestinian refugees. Not one mentioned the Jewish refugees from Arab countries.

**RESPONSE:**

- **The Palestinians left their homes in 1947-49 for a variety of reasons:**
  - Thousands of wealthy Arabs **left in anticipation of a war.**
  - Thousands more **responded to Arab leaders' calls to get out of the way of the advancing armies, and a handful were expelled.**
    - While abuses amid the independence struggle have been documented, there was never an Israeli policy or high-level directive to drive out the Palestinian population. The reason the **Arabs were expelled was strictly because of their constant attacks on Jews, which was a serious safety concern.**
  - **Most simply fled to avoid being caught in the crossfire of a battle.**
- **Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians remained in Israel and became citizens of the new state with all the legal rights afforded to every other Israeli citizen.**
- Since then, the **Arab population in both the West Bank and Israel has increased annually** since the founding of the state and **is growing at a steady rate of 1% each year.**

See "Myths & Facts - The Refugees" ([jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org)) for more information

Resources: [AJC.org](http://AJC.org), [JewishVirtualLibrary.org](http://JewishVirtualLibrary.org) and [history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war](http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war)

**CLAIMS:** Israel has no claim to the land of Israel/

**The British promised they would grant Arabs independence in the land of Palestine.**

**BACKGROUND:** Israel's detractors often depict the Jews as newcomers to "Palestine" who are displacing the aboriginal Arab people. The truth is that the Jewish people are indigenous to the land of Israel and have a continuous presence in Israel since around 1700 BCE.

**RESPONSE:**

- **Jews have lived in Israel for over 3800 years.** Of all the people who lived in the area at that time, such as the Phoenicians, Moabites, and Philistines, only the Jews remain today.
- **Even during the times when the Jews were expelled from the holy land, a portion of the Jewish population remained in Israel, continuously, throughout the years.**
- **Archeological and biblical evidence supports that Jews have lived in this area continuously since 1700 BCE.**
- **Arabs are not native to "Palestine;" they are aboriginal to Arabia.** The Arab people became a unified ethnic group in Arabia during the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E. when they ventured out of the Arabian **Peninsula** which is about 2300 years after the Jews arrived.
- **Palestine was never exclusively Arab. No independent Arab or Palestinian state ever existed in the area.**
- In July 1915, the central figure in the Arab nationalist movement, Hussein ibn 'Ali, 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. Subsequent letters between Hussein and MacMahon outlined the areas that Britain was prepared to cede to the Arabs in exchange for their help.

**The Hussein-MacMahon correspondence conspicuously fails to mention Palestine.** The British argued the omission had been intentional, justifying their refusal to grant the Arabs independence in Palestine after the war. **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 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."**

Resources: [AJC.org](http://AJC.org), [JewishVirtualLibrary.org](http://JewishVirtualLibrary.org), [embassies.gov.il/UnGeneva/AboutIsrael/history/Pages/History](http://embassies.gov.il/UnGeneva/AboutIsrael/history/Pages/History) and [www.worldhistory.org/palestine](http://www.worldhistory.org/palestine)



## **CLAIM:** Israel occupies the West Bank

**BACKGROUND:** Occupation typically refers to foreign control of an area under another state's previous sovereignty. In the case of the West Bank, there was no legitimate sovereign because Jordan had illegally occupied the territory from 1948 to 1967. Only two countries – Britain and Pakistan – recognized Jordan's action. The Palestinians never demanded an end to Jordanian occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state. They also never called for the end of the Egyptian occupation of the Gaza Strip.

It is also necessary to distinguish the acquisition of territory in a war of conquest as opposed to a war of self-defense. An occupier is a nation that attacks another and then retains the territory it conquers. One that gains territory while defending itself is not in the same category.

## **RESPONSE:**

- **The definition of “occupier” is a nation that attacks another and then retains the territory it conquers. This does not apply to a nation that is defending itself.**
- **Israel acquired the West Bank from Jordan, who occupied it during the 1967 War. This happened while fending off an assault by Jordan and driving out its forces.**
- **After the war, the UN Security Council rejected the Arab demands that Israel be required to withdraw from all territories won in 1967 and passed Resolution 242 which acknowledged that Israel was entitled to claim at least part of these lands for new defensible borders.**
- **Eventually, Israel transferred virtually all civilian authority in the West Bank to the Palestinian Authority. Israel only retained the power to control its external security and that of its citizens.**
- **The only way to resolve the dispute over the territories is for the Palestinians to negotiate a final settlement. Until now, the intransigence of the Palestinian Authority's leadership has prevented the resumption of talks, which offer the only path to an agreement to ensure a peaceful future for Israelis and Palestinians alike.**

Resource: [JewishVirtualLibrary.org](http://JewishVirtualLibrary.org)

**CLAIM:** Israel occupies the Gaza Strip.

**BACKGROUND:**

From 1948 to 1967, the Gaza Strip was occupied by Egypt, which took control of the territory during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, also known as Israel's War of Independence. As a result of the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel gained control over the Gaza Strip from Egypt.

Some media accounts of the Gaza Strip often blame Israel's "occupation" as one of the root causes of the conflict. However, Israel does not occupy the Gaza Strip and has had no presence in the coastal enclave for nearly two decades.

**RESPONSE:**

- Israel fully left the Gaza Strip, which Hamas controls, in 2005.
- Israel removed 8,000 civilians and all military presence there.
- Immediately after Israel left Gaza, Hamas and other terrorist organizations began shooting rockets at Israel.
- If the reason for this conflict is Israel's "occupation" of Gaza, why has Hamas continued to attack since Israel left?

Resources: AJC.org and AISH.com

**CLAIM:** The people of Gaza have lived in poverty for decades due to Israel's sea and land blockade.

**BACKGROUND:** In June 2007, Hamas staged a coup and seized control of Gaza from the PA. To prevent smuggling and the infiltration of terrorists, Israel and Egypt tightened their respective border crossings and placed restrictions on shipping. Though Israel is routinely condemned for enforcing the blockade, critics usually ignore the role of Egypt, which must cooperate to close the southern end of the Gaza Strip. In October 2014, and then again in March 2015, for example, Egypt demolished dozens of homes along its border with Gaza to create a buffer zone to stop smugglers and extremists from crossing in either direction.

**RESPONSE:**

- Israel has only blockaded Gaza to prevent materials that could be used for terrorism from entering.
- Egypt also continues to blockade Gaza and during this recent war, refused to allow any Palestinians into their country. One can only ask why Egypt would do this and why the Palestinians do not condemn them.
- Israel has continued to provide electricity, water, fuel, and other necessities, even while being attacked repeatedly by Hamas rockets.
- Approximately 15,000 Palestinians from Gaza were permitted to enter and work in Israel in 2022.
- Israel has intensified their blockade since the Hamas terror attack on October 7<sup>th</sup> to prevent any materials from reaching Hamas. On October 21<sup>st</sup>, Israel agreed to allow humanitarian aid to enter through Egypt.
- The unemployment rate in Gaza is 47% and more than 80% of its population lives in poverty, according to the United Nations. However, between 2014 and 2020 Gaza received about 8 Billion dollars in aid from around the world so how can there be so much poverty?

According to an article by NBC News, the answer is that although Hamas receives \$100 million a year from Iran, millions from covert sources, rakes in between \$300 - \$450 million a year from taxes and kickbacks from salaries, sale of goods, and smuggling, and receives income from an investment portfolio worth \$500 million, they continue to confiscate humanitarian funds to support their military and to build a vast web of tunnels under Gaza.

- Further, a recent article in the Wall Street Journal also claims, "Hamas shows such little concern for Gazans that it has long stolen their humanitarian aid".
- U.N. sources told Israel's Walla News that (after a failed missile from Palestinian Islamic Jihad landed on the Al Ahli hospital in Gaza) recent aid was stolen, and Israel's military liaison to the Palestinians reports that 24,000 liters of fuel and medical supplies went to Hamas, whose underground bases use diesel generators.

Resources: AISH.com, WSJ.com/articles/gaza-aid-unrwa-united-nations-hamas-israel-45bfbfe and NBC News <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/gaza-plagued-poverty-hamas-no-shortage-cash-come-rcna121099>

## **CLAIM:** Israel intentionally targets Palestinian civilians

**BACKGROUND:** Israel's military actions in Gaza are a response to threats from Palestinian terrorist groups, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, who, in addition to the latest, unprecedented massacre, use tactics like firing rockets from civilian areas such as schools, hospitals, and mosques.

Israel is allowed under international law to attack military targets even if civilians will be hurt or killed if there is a legitimate and necessary military objective. Destroying Hamas terrorists and strongholds is legitimate and necessary. It is horrific and disturbing that Hamas hides behind their civilians. Their death is the fault and intention of Hamas, not Israel.

Further, the accusation that Israel is "indiscriminately" targeting Palestinian civilians is a lie. Israel is attacking terrorists, not civilians. Although Gaza is a densely populated territory, and its residents are near areas where hostilities occur, Israel goes to great lengths to avoid civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip. Israel has developed and deployed early warning systems to alert civilians in areas where military strikes are imminent and urges them to leave the conflict zone.

## **RESPONSE:**

- **Palestinian terror groups such as Hamas often place military assets, including rocket launchers, within or near civilian areas such as hospitals and schools, which makes it difficult for Israeli forces to target these assets without causing civilian casualties.**
- **Hamas uses civilian facilities such as hospitals, schools, and even residences to store weapons and as launch pads for their missiles, trying to draw Israeli fire.**
- **To facilitate protecting civilians, Israel utilizes:**
  - **Air raid sirens, phone messages, and leafletting** to warn residents of impending attacks.
  - **"Roof knocking"** where non-explosive munitions are fired at a target building to warn occupants to evacuate before a real strike occurs.
- **Unlike Hamas, which fires rockets indiscriminately at Israeli civilian areas, Israel employs advanced technology and precision-guided munitions to target military assets while minimizing collateral damage and the risk to civilians.**
- **During past conflicts, Hamas has told Palestinians not to leave and the terrorists hide behind and literally under civilian locations. And worse, during the current war, knowing there is going to be an aggressive ground assault, they have prevented many civilians from going to a safer place.**

Resources: AISH.com, AJC.org and www.UNRWA.org

**CLAIM:** It is Israel's fault that Palestinians do not have their own state and for the on-going conflict.

**BACKGROUND:** Since 1948, Palestinians have lamented Israel's creation as the “Nakba”, or catastrophe, that resulted in their dispossession and blocked their dreams of statehood. More recently, Palestinians claim that peace would have come long ago, had Israel withdrawn to its July 1967 borders and if not for Israel's occupation of the West Bank and its blockade of the Gaza Strip.

**RESPONSE:**

- The fact is that the Arabs' dream of statehood was not blocked. They were offered statehood at the same time as the Jews but refused. Ironically, the UN plan included a much larger area than what is now offered.
- **Palestinian Arabs were offered a plan for or path toward statehood 4 times, but all were refused:**
  - **1947** – UN partition plan for two states in 1947 which was refused by Mufti Haj Amin Hussein.
  - **1993** – Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Arafat signed the Oslo Accords, a significant step toward a 2-state solution. However, soon after, the Palestinians started sending waves of suicide bombers to the streets to kill Israelis.
  - **2000** – Camp David Summit where Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered significant territorial concessions to the Palestinians, including the establishment of a Palestinian state in most of the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital. Arafat rejected the offer.
  - **2007** – Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert gave an unprecedented offer based on a return to the 1967 borders, including land swaps and a division of Jerusalem. Olmert never received a final response from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to the deal that would have led to statehood.
- **You cannot have peace if both parties are not committed to it. Hamas is a \*terrorist organization and their charter calls for the destruction of Israel and the killing of Jews.** They believe that Israel is a Muslim land that only Muslims can control. They have no interest in negotiations, compromise, or peace.
- **Hamas has never acted like it wanted peace. Even after Israel carried out a unilateral evacuation of Gaza in 2005, all Israeli citizens, Palestinians continued to launch missiles and rockets at Israeli towns for years.**
- **Hamas declared war on Israel on October 7, 2023, by perpetrating the ultimate terrorist act when terrorists invaded Israel and slaughtered over 1400 babies, children, women, men, and elderly people, and abducted over 200 hostages.**
- **Palestine Authority President Mahmoud Abbas claimed to want peace with Israel in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 2022 but spent most of his time undoing those claims:**
  - He made clear that **he rejects Israel's legitimacy.**
  - He **denounced the Balfour Declaration.**
  - He **championed the heroic “martyrs” who “have lit the way to independence with their blood”.**
  - When **Yair Lapid, Interim Prime Minister** from July-December 2022 **offered Abbas a one-sentence formula for peace, “Put down your weapons, and there will be peace”, he didn't respond.**

\* Both the United States and The European Union have designated Hamas as a terrorist organization.

Resources: Reuters, AJC.org, and The Times of Israel OP Ed/Sept 23, 2022: *Abbas asked why there is no Palestinian state. The answers were in his speech.*

## **CLAIM:** Israel Violates International Humanitarian Law

**BACKGROUND:** There are three key principles that inform the global rules of combat during wartime:

**Necessity** allows parties in armed conflicts to take necessary measures that are not otherwise prohibited to carry out legitimate military actions. It also anticipates that collateral damage may occur as a result.

**Distinction** requires that all parties in conflicts distinguish between civilians and combatants. Attacks may only be directed against combatants. Attacks that deliberately target civilians are prohibited. To achieve this, IHL requires military structures to be built separately from civilian populations. It also requires fighting forces to wear military uniforms.

**Proportionality** requires that acts of self-defense and retaliation be proportionate to the overall threat from the aggressor. It bans attacks that may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, or excessive damage to civilian homes and structures that would go beyond the anticipated military advantage sought from the attack.

## **RESPONSE:**

- **Necessity: Israel is exercising its inherent right of self-defense, enshrined in the UN Charter**, in response to Hamas's attacks. That right doesn't end with the elimination of the hundreds of terrorists that infiltrated Israel on October 7. **Israel is entitled to continue exercising this right until it eliminates the ongoing threat posed by Hamas.**
  - **Because Hamas does not aim its strikes at military targets, its indiscriminate attacks do not qualify as strikes that are necessary to achieve a military objective and therefore violate the standard of necessity in International Humanitarian Law.**
- **Distinction: The IDF adopts a strict approach to distinguishing military targets from civilian ones.** Only people who directly participate or provide the financing/supplies for a specific attack are to be treated as military targets. The **IDF** also traditionally **requires multiple sources to verify a target**. When striking, the **IDF employs multiple tactics to ensure civilians are least likely to be in the area** and minimize the collateral effects of the blast.
  - **Hamas continuously violates international law by deliberately attacking Israeli civilian population areas with their rocket and missile fire.**
    - **The savage slaughter of Israeli civilians and hostage-taking by Hamas terrorists on October 7, 2023, was an egregious violation of International Humanitarian Law** that amounts to war crimes.
  - **When Hamas violates the principle of distinction by carrying out its operations, firing missiles, and working from civilian sites, the sites become legitimate military targets.**
- **Proportionality: The principle of proportionality requires that damage to civilians not be excessive in relation to the military advantage anticipated** from a strike against a military target. Proportionality does not require one party in a conflict to avoid incidental harm to civilians altogether; just as **it does not require one party to avoid exceeding its adversary's losses or limit its use of weapons to the type or quantity of those employed by its adversary.**

Resource: AJC.org.

For in-depth information about International Humanitarian Law: <https://www.ajc.org/news/israel-hamas-and-international-law-what-you-need-to-know>