



## QUICK RESPONSES TO COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST

### ROOTS OF THE CONFLICT

- Israel was established in 1948, shortly after a United Nations proposition to establish two separate states -- one Jewish and one Arab -- was rejected by the Arabs. Since then, the Arabs have waged war against Israel 5 times.
- 700,000 Jews were expelled and forced to leave their homes in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen, where they had lived for centuries. They were *all* resettled by Israel and the Jewish communities in Europe and the United States.
- The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in 1964, with the claim that *all* of Israel is "occupied territory" -- three years before Israel gained control of the West Bank and Gaza in the Six Day War (1967).
- Just prior to the Six Day War (June '67), when Israel was surrounded by 465,000 Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese troops, 2,800 tanks and 800 aircraft, Egyptian President Gamal Nassar declared, "Our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel."
- Between 1948 and 1967, the West Bank and Gaza were controlled by Jordan and Egypt. During their 19-year rule, neither country ever made any attempt to establish a Palestinian state there.
- Immediately after the end of the Six Day War, Israel offered to return most of the captured land in exchange for peace and normal relations; but the offer was rejected.
- In 1978, Anwar Sadat, president of Egypt, signed the Camp David Accords, recognizing Israel's right to exist. Israel returned the Sinai desert and other Egyptian land captured in the 1967 war. Every Arab country severed diplomatic ties with Egypt, and in 1981, Sadat was assassinated by Islamic Jihad.
- In 2000, as part of the continuing Oslo Peace Process, Israel offered to turn over 95% of the remaining territories to Yasir Arafat, with a part of East Jerusalem to serve as the capitol of the new Palestinian State. Arafat rebuffed the offer, failed to counter-offer and launched the current intifada.
- In Arab language broadcasts and print media, Yasir Arafat and other Palestinian leaders frequently refute Israel's right to exist; declare the liberation of Palestine, "from the river to the sea," and extol the virtues of suicide bombers and terrorism.

- The PLO's Fatah wing (founded and controlled by Arafat) has as its official emblem the entire state of Israel covered by two rifles and a hand grenade.



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### THE STATE OF ISRAEL

- Israel became a nation in 1312 BCE. Founded by King David, Jerusalem has been the spiritual capital of Israel for over 3,300 years.
- Jews pray facing Jerusalem; Muslims pray toward Mecca.
- Israel is the only democracy in Middle East, which is comprised of 21 Arab countries
- Citizens of many Arab countries cannot vote and women frequently have second-class status. Only Jordan allows its Palestinians the right to vote.
- Twenty percent of Israeli citizens are not Jewish. Israel is the only country in the region that permits its citizens – whatever their faith -- to worship freely and openly. When Jordan controlled Jerusalem, Jews were not allowed to worship at Judaism's most holy site, the Western Wall (the Kotel).
- Israeli-Arabs have full citizenship rights. Several Arabs, democratically elected to the Knesset (Israel's parliament), have served there for years.
- Israel is approximately the same size as New Jersey.
- UN Resolution 242 was passed in the wake of the 1967 war. Recognizing Israel's need to exist within secure borders, 242 was carefully crafted to call for the, "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict" and deliberately omitted use of the word "the" before "territories". Resolution 242 stresses the right of every state in the area to live in peace and security.
- Acknowledging that the Palestinians have a legitimate right to their own country, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered almost all of the territories, with a part of East Jerusalem to Arafat at Camp David in 2000. At subsequent negotiations in Taba, Egypt, PM Ariel Sharon has frequently acknowledged the Palestinians' right to their own homeland.