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Facts & Logic About the Middle East

October 10, 2017

When your politics are failing, your economy is bankrupt and your society is in shambles, blame the "occupation"

Dear Friend of FLAME:

I was standing at the meat counter in the grocery store the other day. The man next to me wore a tee shirt that had "Freedom for the Palestinians!" emblazoned on it. I leaned over to him and said, "You know the Palestinians would have a lot more freedom if they would just hold elections—it's been almost 12 years now." The man seemed taken aback—I suspect his tee shirt doesn't get much pushback in Berkeley, California. He mumbled something about the Israeli occupation and shuffled off.

But of course, "occupation" is at the heart of the Palestinian narrative and the lynchpin of Palestinian excuses—why no state, why no elections, why no industrial infrastructure, why rampant corruption, why dependence on billions in foreign welfare payments.

The "occupation" is also the alleged reason Palestinian leaders say there have been no serious peace talks with Israel since the Palestinians walked away from Israeli-American land-for-peace offers in 2001 and 2007—when an end to the so-called "occupation" was twice promised.

I've heard two prominent pundits address the question of "occupation" recently, both with insight. Yossi Klein Halevi said he will not use the word "occupation" to describe what Israel is doing—because Israel's actions are not illegal—but he will use it to describe a state of mind in Israel, which he believes is a burden to Israeli society.

The other commentator was Bret Stephens, the *NY Times* columnist, who noted that Israel doesn't want to be in the "occupation business," but as a consequence of decades of

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YOU DESERVE TO KNOW THE TRUTH...

Exit the U.N. Human Rights Council

The U.S. should leave this anti-Semitic group, which devotes every meeting to condemning Israel, while ignoring the world's most heinous human rights crimes

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is composed of 47 nations, nearly 2/3 of which, like Saudi Arabia, China, Cuba, Egypt and Jordan, are aggressive authoritarian. In contrast, the Middle East's only democracy, after more democratic than all other regions combined, What are the facts? Richard Lakin, an Israeli school teacher who founded a school for Muslim, Christian and Jewish children, was shot in the head by Palestinian terrorists who looted a bus full of innocent children. Lakin's daughter was grabbed in a snare by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The U.N. Human Rights Council never condemned Lakin's killers or the Palestinian Authority (PA)—nor has it condemned hundreds of other terror attacks against Israel or the PA's acts of incitement that provoke them. Given the misstatement of millions of people by dozens of countries worldwide, why is Israel consistently and unfairly singled out for the vilification? Democracy obliterated—oppression ignored. Israel is a champion of freedom, pioneering its citizens—including its 20 percent Arab population, women, LGBTIQ and religious minorities—all rights of speech, assembly, the vote and government service, including its military. For other nations on earth, after such Israeli freedoms, and in the Middle East, only Israel does. Yet since its founding in 1948, the United Nations Human Rights Council has condemned Israel 81 times—more denunciations than those of all other countries combined, including Syria, Sudan, North Korea and Iran. In 2016 alone, UNHRC Council votes were majority resolutions against Israel (one North Korea and Syria included). We wonder: Israel is the only nation that has a standing UNHRC speech that led to its condemnation. What explains this hypocrisy? First, Jews in the Palestinian region live more than 120x UNHRC's average nation, which routinely condemns Jews in a number of Muslim lands—though the Jewish nation of Israel precedes all Muslims in Palestine by more than 1,300 years. These states openly oppress Muslims—the fundamental tenets of the region's indigenous Jewish people. What's more, Muslims make up large voting minorities in many other member countries, such as India, China and the U.S., which also abstain despite support claims of Israel's requests to Palestine's terrorism, terrorism, which has led to the world's longest military occupation in Kashmir, Turkey (disgustingly occupies half of Cyprus), and Bosnia has been brutally occupied since 1992. These countries' occupations are regularly mentioned by UNHRC. Today Israel remains the only democracy from Arab lands in 1917—today that was part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's mandate—yet Israel is the only To receive free FLAME updates, visit our website: www.factsandlogic.org

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Palestinian terrorism simply has no choice but to protect itself with a substantial military presence in Judea and Samara (aka, the West Bank).

The real point, of course, is that the Palestinians have Israeli soldiers in territories they would like someday to control (these lands are *not*, as we have established many times, "Palestinian territories"), because they can't just can't peacefully accept two states for two people. In fact, poll after poll shows that most Palestinians do not believe the Jews have a connection to the Holy Land (despite Egyptian, Roman and Biblical history and masses of archeological records to the contrary) and above all deny Jewish rights to a state in the region of Palestine.

In short, to accept historical facts and the self-determination of the Jewish people to their homeland would negate the Palestinian narrative of victimhood, whose cornerstone for the last half century has been the "occupation."

This week's *Hotline* (below) features a brilliant article by Asaf Romirowsky, executive director of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME) and a Fellow at the Middle East Forum. Romirowsky explains how "occupation" serves an insidious strategic purpose in Palestinian political machinations—in essence, if you accept the fact that Israelis are occupiers, peace talks are futile. The only solution is for the U.N. (or the "international community") to delegitimize and expel Israel.

Next time you hear someone invoke the "occupation," I hope this week's article has prepared you with a confident response: Blaming the "occupation" is a circular argument with no exit. Until the Palestinians stop fighting Israel's existence and terrorizing its people, Israel will continue to defend itself—if necessary, right in the Palestinians' midst.

In order to achieve Palestinian independence, the Palestinians must agree to respect and live in peace beside the Jewish state of Israel—sounds simple, but this is the ultimate sticking point for the Arabs. Always has been.

Best regards,

Jim Sinkinson
President, Facts and Logic About the Middle East (FLAME)

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P.S. Did you know: While the U.N. discriminates against Israel in many ways, the organization's most outrageously unjust agency is the U.N. Human Rights Council, long a harbor for oppressive regimes to pass judgments on other nations, and above all against Israel. The Middle East's only democracy and truly a light unto nations in so many ways, Israel suffers more condemnations by the UNHRC than all other nations together. In just the last year, the UNHRC passed twice as many resolutions against Israel as against North Korea and Syria combined. In order to make Americans—especially college and university students—aware of this injustice, FLAME has just produced and will soon publish a new position paper: "[Exit the U.N. Human Rights Council](#)." This paid editorial will appear in magazines and newspapers, including college newspapers, with a combined readership of some 10 million people. In addition, it is being sent to every member of the U.S. Congress and President Trump. If you agree that this kind of public relations effort on Israel's behalf is critical, I urge you to support us. Remember: FLAME's powerful ability to influence public opinion—and U.S. support of Israel—comes from individuals like you, one by one. I hope you'll consider giving a donation now, as you're able—with \$500, \$250, \$100, or even \$18. (Remember, your donation to FLAME is tax deductible.) To donate online, just go to [donate now](#). Now more than ever we need your support to ensure that the American people and the U.S. Congress end our support of blatantly anti-Semitic, global jihadist organizations.

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How Palestine "Occupies" Itself

By Asaf Romirowsky, The Begin Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies Perspectives Paper No. 606, October 7, 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: "Occupation" has become an all-purpose Palestinian tool. On the one hand, the Palestinians claim the Israeli "occupation" makes serious negotiations with Israel impossible. On the other, they claim the

"occupation" makes the development of local institutions and civil society impossible. Western and Israeli diplomats have largely avoided criticism of this strategy, possibly because it has become a central tenet of Palestinian identity.

A consistent Palestinian strategy for seeking statehood while blaming Israel for its absence has been codified through the narrative of "occupation." The anniversary of the 1967 war brought this to the forefront in endless accusations regarding the Israeli "occupation" of the West Bank. There is even an assertion that Gaza is still "occupied."

Occupation is a Palestinian tool to avoid negotiations, since "no tactical brilliance in negotiations, no amount of expert preparation, no perfect alignment of the stars can overcome that obstacle." Nor is progress in Palestinian economics, institution-building, or civil society possible, because—as Nabeel Kassis, Palestinian Minister for Finance, put it—"Development under occupation is a charade." Even the Palestinian Authority's own repression and crackdown on freedom of the press is, according to Hanan Ashrawi, caused "of course [by] the Israeli occupation." And despite the palpable underdevelopment of Palestinian institutions and civil society, Europe must keep funding them, since "Preparedness for several possible scenarios with a long-term focus on functioning institutions is what is required from the EU and other donors in Palestine."

In 2011, when Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas put forward the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) at the UN, we saw this process in action. The approach is specifically designed to prevent any direct negotiations with the State of Israel. Some Palestinian supporters even opposed the UDI precisely because Palestine "lacks the most essential elements of statehood: independence and sovereignty, and effective control over its territory. The fact is that Israel, the occupying power, has the final say in most matters affecting the destiny of the Palestinian people."

Despite the high-sounding rhetoric about the declaration, which followed the 1998 Palestinian "Declaration of Independence," its goal was to put the onus for a Palestinian state on the UN. But Palestinians are already treated by the UN like no other entity, whether state or people. Vast financial and administrative resources are dedicated to the "Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People." Despite these efforts, which have cost many millions and have lasted almost 70 years, long predating the 1967 "occupation," there is still no Palestinian state.

Palestinians and their supporters want to have the occupation both ways. It is the trump card for their own refusal to negotiate and failure to develop their own society, but it is also a useful tool for further internationalization of the conflict and prolongation of their international welfare status.

This pattern has been clear for decades. Even Hillary Clinton, then US Secretary of State, understood the façade. "There is no substitute for face-to-face discussion and for an agreement that leads to a just and lasting peace," she said. "That is the only path that will lead to the fulfillment of the Palestinian national aspirations ... Nor is it viable to build the institutions of a future state without the negotiations that will ultimately create it."

Until now, however, successive American administrations have challenged only Palestinian rhetoric, not Palestinian methods—and the rhetoric of "occupation" has not been directly challenged at all. This is because, alongside "refugee-ness" and victimhood, it stands close to the center of Palestinian identity, at least in political terms.

The UDI strategy was a diplomatic way of selling the so-called "occupation." Nothing can happen in Palestinian society or politics, such as the development of Palestinian state institutions or a culture of peaceful coexistence with Israel, because of the "occupation." Empty symbolism like the UDI shrewdly facilitates the long-term Palestinian goal of eradicating Israel by co-opting the UN and the international community of NGOs. This long march through the institutions has broadened the global delegitimization of Israel at a low cost. The inevitable failure of UDI efforts to create a viable Palestine nonetheless rally the cause, while its political successes undermine Israel. The speed of change is slow enough to maintain the illusion of peace and all-important Western aid.

Threats are part of any diplomatic toolbox, and Palestinians excel at them. Insufficient American trumpeting of "even-handedness," and, above all, any challenges to Palestinian narratives of victimhood (and the resulting need for international aid), produce new rounds of threats. The Palestinian Authority now sees stagnation and lack of appetite within the Trump administration, especially after Jared Kushner's last visit. Thus did Ahmad Majdalani, an aide to Abbas, comment after the meeting that "if the US team doesn't bring answers to our questions this time, we are going to look into our options, because the status quo is not working for our interests."

A new approach to internationalizing the conflict and promoting

the Palestinian narrative is being developed. Hence the plan to change the international definition of "Palestinian territories under occupation" into "a Palestinian state under occupation." This would shift attention back to the "occupation" while requiring nothing from the Palestinian Authority.

Of course, declaring a de facto state does not make it a reality. Nor will declaring that state to be "under occupation."

The reality is that both the essential non-existence and the victimized character of the Palestinian state represent a conscious decision to embrace failure. This will not change unless there are direct negotiations, a choice the PA has consistently refused.

While a functioning Palestinian state remains desirable, it is telling that the Palestinian leadership has refused to directly negotiate with Israel and uses bodies like the UN to endorse a "virtual" state with no viable institutions. Is the Palestinian goal a state of their own, or just the erasure of Israel? If the latter, it is to be followed by what? Insisting upon a Palestinian state must go hand in hand with reviving the moribund Palestinian political system and institutions that would support it, like a free press. But these are demands that should come first from Palestinians. When such demands come from Israel or Western countries, they collide with the narrative of "occupation."

Palestinian nationalism has never seen the conflict as one between two national groups with legitimate claims and aspirations. Israel's existence—indeed, Zionism itself, the very idea of Jewish nationalism—is regarded as wholly illegitimate. Palestinian acceptance of the two-state solution was a means of appeasing the West and its stated desire for all parties to live in peace according to democratic, national ideals. But for Arafat in his day and now for Mahmoud Abbas, the two-state solution was a mechanism with which to buy time until the Palestinians can finally overcome and defeat Israel. The language of "occupation" plays a key role.

Whether Palestinians think they are an "occupied state" or "Palestinian territories under occupation," as long as Palestinians cling to the notion of being "occupied" and Israel remains the "occupier" we are destined to see more of the dynamics of the past and fewer possibilities in the future. Until we see more self-awareness, self-criticism, and a sense of accountability, Palestinian identity and statehood will remain occupied in perpetuity. Palestine is indeed "occupied" by shadows of its own making.

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