

Occupied Palestine: The Most Enduring Media Cover-up

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Clearing the FOG hosts Margaret Flowers and Kevin Zeese interviewed Alison Weir, journalist and founder of [If Americans Knew](#), a website that provides factual information about the Israeli State and Palestine. Weir describes how she learned firsthand that US media provide a false and one-sided narrative about Occupied Palestine and why she has dedicated the past twenty years to counter that. She also explains some of the most common myths and what she learned as she did research for her book, "[Against Our Better Judgment](#)." Weir is a very clear thinker on the issue of Palestine-Israel and provides the data and language we need to speak to a propagandized population. You can listen to the entire interview and the week's news analysis on [Clearing the FOG](#).

Interview

Clearing the FOG (CtF): Alison, your website is a great source of information. Before we get into the site, why don't you tell us about how you got involved in this issue.

Alison Weir (AW): People always wonder that because I don't happen to be Jewish or Arab or Muslim or Palestinian and like most Americans 20 years ago, I knew very little about this issue. I had been active on other issues, anti-war during the Vietnam war, civil rights, that type of thing but I had never focused on Israel-Palestine until the Second Intifada began in the Fall of 2000. I'm sure you know intifada just means "Uprising," a Palestinian Uprising. When that began, in Fall of 2000, I got curious about it.

My background is journalism. At that time, I was the editor of a very small weekly newspaper in Northern California. This wasn't for my job, it was just my personal curiosity. I started to follow the news coverage on this uprising and I quickly noticed that it was very one-sided, that we were hearing from and about Israelis in great detail, but we got very little information from and about Palestinians.

I went on the internet and discovered a great deal of information from the region itself, from humanitarian agencies that were there, Israeli media in English, Palestinian media. And I discovered that Israeli forces were shooting Palestinians every day in large quantities, including many children and I noticed this reality was not being reported on the news sites that I usually looked at. The San Francisco Chronicle, the New York Times, especially NPR, seemed to be covering that up.

So the more I looked into it, the more I felt this was a truly significant cover-up. I felt and I do feel now that this was the longest-lasting and most enduring cover-up I had ever seen

and that it was occurring across the political spectrum. After a few months of looking into that, I decided, it seemed so significant that I quit my job in Sausalito and traveled as a freelance reporter throughout Gaza and the West Bank. It was a very intense trip, I was not part of any delegation. There really weren't any delegations at that time.

When I came back, I started the organization, If Americans Knew. The goal has been to be very factual, to show the sources of our information. It's very transparent. It gives Americans without ideological slant the facts on Israel-Palestine and especially the American connection, the fact that we are in many ways responsible for what Israel does because our tax money goes to Israel. It's now over 10 million dollars per day. We've given Israel far more than we've given anybody else.

Most Americans, I think, are the way I was. I felt I had no connection to this confusing issue on the other side of the world, but I learned I have a very direct connection to it and therefore it's my responsibility to know about it and to act in ways that I feel are morally required. In a nutshell, that's how I ended up 20 years later still working on this issue.

CtF: That was a very courageous thing to do. Of course, the US also provides cover for Israel in the United Nations or when the International Criminal Court wants to investigate Israel. How were you received by Palestinians when you went there to cover the Intifada?

AW: The perception was and is that you will be in great danger from Palestinians. But I discovered it was the opposite. I was welcomed. I was invited to stay in people's homes, which I often did. People were very excited to learn that an American journalist was there. I told people I'm here to see what's going on and people would smile at me in places like Gaza where there were really very few Americans at that time. I didn't see any other journalists traveling around.

Crowds of people would come up to me and they wanted to show me their bullet-riddled homes and show me what was happening to them. So I found it then and on my other trips there since, people are very welcoming, very friendly. Often they're very aware of how much money the US gives to Israel. Even though most Americans don't know that, it is known in the region. Despite their knowledge of that and despite their knowledge of how the US has supported Israel in so many ways, they're still very welcoming to Americans and very willing to not blame us for what our government is doing. So it's really the opposite of what people have been led to believe it would be like.

CtF: We were just in Occupied Palestine recently and what you describe is very consistent with our experience as well. Your website focuses on correcting the misconceptions. What are some of the most important misconceptions that people in the United States have about the situation in Occupied Palestine?

AW: That's at the heart of the problem because there are so many that it's hard to make people realize it's really as different as they expect. If there were only one or two, people can accept that. It's harder for them to realize that almost everything they thought was true is not accurate. And that is what I am often telling them.

One of the main things is that we are directly related to the conflict. We give Israel massive amounts of money. This is per capita on average 7,000 times more than we give other people. One of the other things is that many people are unaware that Israel was established in my lifetime, that when I was born there was no Israel. There was a region called Palestine

that had been there called Palestine for really millennia.

Many intelligent and knowledgeable people are not aware of what Israel Palestine is about, that basically Israel was established through warfare. It was not established by the United Nations, another misconception. It was established by a war of ethnic cleansing. That's what we now term that type of war. It's the title of an excellent book by an Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, so, the very foundation of Israel is very different than people realize.

This was an intentional dispossession of the indigenous population. It started with the beginning of the establishment of the modern state of Israel and continues through today. Constantly Israel is confiscating additional Palestinian land and taking it over for Jewish-only settlements, as they're called. Many people are unaware that many Palestinians are Christians. This is where Christianity began. It's rarely mentioned in the US media.

The other thing people are often unaware of these days is media coverage always focuses on "rockets from Gaza." Every news report mentions rockets from Gaza. The fact is that I was there traveling around by myself as a reporter before any rockets had been fired and I saw already at that time in early 2001 extreme devastation. I saw neighborhoods in Gaza that were bullet-riddled, that looked like the pictures you see of World War II ruins. In the West Bank too shelling was going on. This was before any rockets had been fired.

People think Israel is defending itself from rockets, but the rockets were actually resistance groups in Gaza trying to fight back with really very ineffectual rockets. In the whole time they've been used, they've killed at most a few dozen Israelis. Meanwhile, Israeli forces have killed many thousands of Gazans. The only statistic we get in the typical news report is thousands of rockets have been fired from Gaza. They never tell that the total number of Israelis who have been killed is perhaps by now, maybe 50, perhaps not even that high and they never tell that during that time about 5,000 Gazans have been killed. We don't hear about the massive bombardment of Gaza that's been going on for a very long time and that has killed thousands of Gazans. And of course, killed many people in the West Bank also.

CtF: When we were there, we saw fighter planes flying over Jerusalem on their way to bomb Gaza. Over 30 Gazans were killed, including a family. Tens of thousands of Palestinians were displaced from their homes in the recent siege of Gaza. And these so-called rocket attacks, they're like little pipsqueak rockets. These rockets were a response to an Israeli assassination in Gaza. It's really amazing they use that as an excuse, but they do.

AW: They get away with it because the media only tell about the response and don't tell about what came before. The American population is completely misled. Most of these are small homemade projectiles, but media will report them as missiles and people are imagining a Nike missile or something. That's just not what's going on.

There have been studies of the chronology of the violence in the conflict. There was one excellent study by an MIT professor who looked at periods of calm, at various truces through the years. Her study showed that it was something like 96% of the time in the shorter truces it was Israel that had first resumed violence against Palestinians and in the longer truces, it was 100% of the time that Israeli forces resumed the violence. This is just not known to the American public because it's very filtered news coverage that people are getting.

Your point of hearing jets flying over to bomb Gaza is very significant. People don't know that here we have one of the most powerful militaries on the planet, largely due to our tax

money and often US weaponry, fighting against a population that has no Air Force, no Navy, no aircraft, no helicopter gunships. The disparity is astounding and the media try to call it a war. A war is between two military forces. That's not what we have when we look at Gaza and Israeli forces.

CtF: It's such an asymmetric situation. Palestinians have been forced from their homes, living in an apartheid state and have the right under international law to defend themselves. But the Palestinians we met with while we were there, activists, said we are nonviolent, we believe in using non-violence and talked about teaching their children not to hate other people, how giving in to that was destructive. One of the things that people push back in the United States is they say that there never really was a Palestine, that Palestinian nationality didn't start until the 20th century. Can you comment on that?

AW: Yes. This is one of the Israeli talking points that many people have fallen for. You see this on Facebook and Twitter and various places. It's a nonsensical argument. It's true, there was not a state of Palestine. There was not a state of Israel. There was a region called Palestine. You can look at old maps.

Palestine was a region back in biblical times. It was talked about in more recent times. It was talked about in more recent centuries. It was under the Ottoman Empire. It was what we call multicultural. Around 1900, the population was about 80 percent Muslim, about 15 percent Christian and a little under five percent Jewish. This was a region. It was not a nation-state, as we know nation-states came relatively late to the world. Germany wasn't a nation-state for many years. The United States did not used to be a nation-state. Palestine was a region. Palestinians have existed.

There was a book published some years ago by an Israel partisan who went by the name Joan Peters claiming the Palestinians did not exist, that they were just nomads that had come in because the Zionists' wonderful entrepreneurial spirit had created jobs for these nomads to join them. This is the thesis of her book called "From Time Immemorial." Many people read it. It was praised by pretty much every book review in the United States.

People like Barbara Tuchman, an Israel partisan, but known as a historian, praised it. It turned out to be a complete hoax. Some very good historians and analysts including some Jewish Americans looked into the book and found out that these many footnotes were often fraudulent. They were actually coming from Zionist propaganda. In Israel itself, it was exposed as non-factual. In Britain, it was exposed as non-factual. In the United States, it eventually was, but I don't think any of the people that gave it a positive review and that endorsed it then had the honesty or principle to retract their erroneous reviews.

Many people, especially many Jewish Americans, read that book and were taken in by it and then repeat the myth that there were no such thing as Palestinians. Even Golda Meir, the famous Israeli Prime Minister, said at one point that quote there were no Palestinians. That's like Americans trying to say well there were no Native Americans here. Of course, there was.

CtF: Even in the country itself Israeli Jews seem oblivious to the reality in their own country. Home demolitions and the settlers putting settlements on Palestinian communities and on Palestinian lands. We drove on Jewish-only roads. If I Google "Jewish only roads," I find an article about "Jewish only roads don't exist." One of the challenges we have in talking to people in the United States, and even in Israel, Occupied Palestine, is they don't want to see reality. How do you communicate to people who just seem oblivious whether unintentionally

or intentionally?

AW: Certainly, Israelis have been brought up to be just the way you're describing. Nurit Peled, an academic, has done excellent work showing that Israeli textbooks are very propagandistic in the way that they depict Palestinians. They're not even called Palestinians. They call them Israeli Arabs. So this is deeply embedded in many portions of the Israeli population.

Fortunately, there are many people in Israel that are dissenting from that and they're trying to reach their fellow Israelis. There are Israelis Against Torture and Israelis Against Home Demolition. There are a number of Israeli groups within the society, a small fraction, but they're doing really wonderful work in trying to expose what's actually going on. There are some Israeli journalists, especially Gideon Levy, who write every week in the Israeli media about some of the latest atrocities being committed by Israel against Palestinians.

I would love to reach everybody. I'd love to reach every Israeli. I'd love to reach every American who's taken in by Israeli talking points. What I focus on is the really fairly promising reality that about three-quarters of the American population, despite the pro-Israel media coverage that we've been getting for decades and despite Hollywood, really does not have a strong view on this issue. And general surveys will show that they say something like we shouldn't take sides, which is sensible. If you don't know much about an issue, you just don't take sides.

That sounds like a fairly wimpy approach to those of us who know what's going on there, but what that would mean if you don't take sides is we would stop giving Israel 10 million dollars per day. We would stop vetoing UN resolutions to protect Israel from world condemnation of its violence. So it's actually quite a good stand if we did what the majority of Americans already say we should do.

I try to focus on giving the general public the facts on this issue and the importance of making their wishes known to their elected representatives that it's time to stop this massive aid to Israel. It prevents peace. Israeli militarists think they have a blank check from the most powerful nation on the planet, which they do right now. So my view is we give voters factual information on this. We show how extremely tragic the situation is because of what we're funding and the fact that it hurts us as well and emphasize how important it is to tell our elected representatives that we want them to change these misguided destructive US policies of a blank check to Israel.

It's time for us to vote and to work on the issue of Israel Palestine. Not only because of what it's doing to Palestinians, not only because of what it then does to the US but because our support of Israel has led to our wars in the region. It has led to much of the violence in the region that has since spilled over elsewhere. It's the core issue of the Middle East and it's the time for us to focus on it and to address it.

CtF: I want to ask you about a topic that you've been writing about recently. And that is the criticism that people who question or criticize the Israeli state are anti-semitic. Can you talk about that?

AW: Yes, that's used all the time and most of us are profoundly opposed to bigotry of all kinds. We don't want to be splattered with such mudslinging. We don't want to be called anti-Semitic. We don't want to be anti-Semitic and we're not being anti-Semitic when we

speak out for justice as a principal, but that's the attack that they try to use.

A member of the Israeli Parliament some years ago on Amy Goodman's Democracy Now said, and I'm paraphrasing, she said this is a trick. We always use it when somebody is critical of Israel, we call them anti-Semitic and that is exactly what is going on. Nobody should be anti-Semitic. Nobody should be against any population, should be hostile and prejudiced against people. Bigotry is wrong. So that's what they try to use.

What's gotten worse is that not only do they try to claim somebody's anti-Semitic when we're talking about a nation-state and talking about injustice and trying to support principles of justice for all people, there is an effort to change the definition of anti-Semitism to include criticisms of Israel. This is extremely insidious.

It's been going on for a number of years. There's a new formulation in which certain criticisms of Israel, factual statements about Israel, will now be defined as anti-Semitism. Therefore it will be defined as hate speech, etc. This effort was begun by an Israeli Minister named Natan Sharansky. It has now been embedded in the US State Department and it's being embedded elsewhere around the world. We need to learn about that and we need to oppose it. We need to stick with the traditional definition of anti-Semitism and we should oppose all anti-Semitism just as we oppose all racism, but we should not allow that incorrect epithet to be used to silence us or to prevent us from working for justice and human rights for all people including Palestinians.

CtF: One of the people we visited with when we were recently in Occupied Palestine was Rabbi Hirsh, who is with an ultra-orthodox Jew, and he makes a very strong case that Zionism is inconsistent with Judaism, that it violates the Torah. That makes the state of Israel really under his religious analysis to be against Judaism. A growing group of Jews in the United States is getting active in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement. A number of Jewish groups are actually beginning to criticize Zionism and Israel. It's really is an absurd claim that people who criticize Israel or Zionism are anti-Semitic. It just shows the weakness of their arguments.

AW: It does and I'm glad you brought that up because when Zionism, political Zionism, began with Theodore Herzl and some conferences in Switzerland in the late 1800s, the majority of Jews around the world did not join that movement. They said we're Americans, we're British etcetera. Even a Jewish population in Palestine was opposed to it, especially observant Jews were opposed to it and considered it a heretical move. There are many Jews who for religious reasons oppose Zionism saying this is against the Bible. It's against God's will. That's part of what people don't know. And in my book, in the research I did, it was very interesting to see how Zionists were very upset that Jewish-Americans were not embracing Zionism in the early years. In fact, for a number of decades, there were groups such as the American Council on Judaism that actively and strenuously opposed Zionism.

CTF: Finally, how can people learn more about the work that you do?

AW: The first thing would be to go to our website: IfAmericansKnew.org. From there, you will also go to our blog, the [If Americans Knew blog](http://IfAmericansKnew.blog). Between those two resources, I believe there's a lot of information that will be useful to people. My book is available on Amazon. The short title is "[Against Our Better Judgment](#)." It can be read very quickly. It's one of the selling points and it's thoroughly cited. It turned out that the book is half citations. So every statement in it, you can find the source for that statement. It contains a great deal of

information that many people, even experts on the issue, did not know about before because when I started researching it, I was starting from scratch. I read a huge number of books. We're also working to encourage people to join the effort to work within their congressional district to inform the people in your community about what's going on. You can email us at contact@IfAmericansKnew.org and help get this information off the internet and into the hands of people in your community. We also have a very active Facebook page, [If Americans Knew Facebook page](#), where we post things every day. I especially encourage people to join our email list. We should not rely on Facebook for our communication. That is a private company and they could turn it off whenever they want to so, please join our email list also.

CtF: If you haven't visited If Americans Knew, it's a very deep website. If you ever want to understand a particular aspect of Israel or Occupied Palestine, you'll find a lot of the facts right there. If you're ever writing about it, debating it, trying to understand and discuss it with others, it's a very fact-based and deep web site that serves a very useful purpose for engaging on this issue.

AW: We've certainly tried and the websites been live about 15 or 16 years. There's really a depth of content there. We're trying to upgrade it to a more modern look but there's so much content, we just haven't been able to do that yet. So it's an old-school look but the content is there for people to find and it's all sourced. We try to make sure that our material is factual and show people that that's the case.

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Margaret Flowers and Kevin Zeese co-direct Popular Resistance where [this article](#) was originally published.

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