

Newt Gingrich's Invented History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Gingrich's Serial Hypocrisy Knows No Bounds

By [Jeremy R. Hammond](#)

Global Research, December 12, 2011

12 December 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Religion](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

The Republican presidential candidates are falling all over themselves [competing for who can be the most "pro-Israel"](#), with Newt Gingrich taking the game to a whole new level last week when he said in [an interview with The Jewish Channel](#) that Palestinians were an "invented" people. When asked whether he considered himself a Zionist, Gingrich responded (his emphasis):

Well, I believe that the Jewish people have the right to have a state, and I believe that the commitments that were made at the time—remember, there *was* no Palestine as a state. It was part of the Ottoman Empire. And I think that we've had an *invented* Palestinian people who are in fact Arabs and who were historically part of the *Arab* community. And they had a chance to go many places, and for a variety of political reasons, we have sustained this *war* against Israel now, since the 1940s, and it's tragic.

Shall we take that as a "Yes"? During the [ABC News Republican debate in Iowa on December 10](#), Gingrich defended his comments by saying:

Is what I said factually correct? Yes. Is it historically true? Yes. Are we in a situation where every day rockets are fired into Israel while the United States—the current administration—tries to pressure the Israelis into a *peace* process. Hamas does not admit the right of Israel to exist and says publicly, "Not a single Jew will remain." The Palestinian Authority Ambassador to India said last month, "There is no difference between Fatah and Hamas, we both agree Israel has no right to exist." Somebody ought to have the courage to tell the truth. These people are terrorists. They teach terrorism in their schools. They have textbooks that say, "If there are 13 Jews and nine Jews are killed, how many Jews are left?" We pay for those textbooks through our aid money. It's fundamentally time for somebody to have the guts and stand up and say, "Enough lying about the Middle East."

Unfortunately, Newt Gingrich isn't someone who has the guts to stand up and tell the truth, preferring instead with utmost hypocrisy to repeat numerous lies about the [roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#). Where to begin? Gingrich's comment that the Palestinians are an "invented" people is not new. It's simply a reiteration of old Zionist propaganda, dating back to before Israel even existed.

Chaim Weizmann, in a letter to Lord Arthur Balfour, wrote in May 1918 to say how the only guide to resolving the growing conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was through applying what he called "the democratic principle". Since "the brutal numbers operate against us, for there are five Arabs to one Jew", Weizmann wrote, the "present state of

affairs would necessarily tend towards the creation of an Arab Palestine, if there were an Arab people in Palestine". His meaning was not that there were no Arabs inhabiting the land—he had just acknowledged they were a large majority—but that they didn't meet the criteria for a "people", and thus that their right to self-determination could be denied to them under the colonialist application of "the democratic principle".

In 1936, David Ben-Gurion, head of the Labor faction of the Zionist movement, similarly declared that "there is no conflict between Jewish and Palestinian nationalism because the Jewish Nation is not in Palestine and the Palestinians are not a nation." His meaning, of course, was that Palestine was *not* "Palestine", but the "Jewish Nation", which belonged not to the Arabs but entirely to the Jews, the minor problem of the Arabs constituting the majority and possessing most of the land being of no consequence, since the colonialist "democratic principle" could be applied.

Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir more famously remarked in 1969, "It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist."

The basic logic of Gingrich's argument about Palestine being part of the Ottoman Empire follows much along the same principle. Since the Arab inhabitants of the land never exercised sovereignty over Palestine as an independent nation before, this logic dictates, we may therefore continue to reject their right to self-determination today. Gingrich is effectively reiterating the same racist and colonialist "democratic principle".

In the debate, Gingrich added:

The fact is the Palestinian right of return is based on a historically false story. Somebody ought to have the courage to go all the way back to the 1921 League of Nations mandate *for a Jewish Homeland*, point out the *context* in which Israel came into existence—and "Palestinian" did not become a common term until after 1977. This is a propaganda war in which our side refuses to engage, and we refuse to tell the truth while the other side lies, and you're not going to win in the long run if you're afraid to stand firm and stand for the truth.

Would that Gingrich would stand for the truth, instead of lying and repeating Zionist propaganda. He claimed to be speaking "as a historian", but his narrative is a fiction from start to finish. The *truth* is that the inhabitants of Palestine were known as "Palestinians" long before Israel was established. An example has already been shown, in the above quote from Ben-Gurion, who elsewhere described the Arab revolt of 1936 as "an active resistance by *the Palestinians* to what they regard as a usurpation of their homeland by the Jews" (emphasis added). Notice in this usage, "Palestinians" refers *specifically* to the Arabs, even though the term was also used to refer to native Jewish inhabitants.

Shall we dare to go back to the Palestine Mandate? We first must go back even further, to the document known as the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which Lord Balfour said in a letter to Lord Lionel Walter Rothschild, a representative of the Zionist movement:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine....

It's worth noting that President Wilson established a commission to examine the question of Palestine, headed by Henry Churchill King and Charles R. Crane. The King-Crane Commission report of 1919 observed, with regard to the British policy, that the creation of a Jewish state would constitute "the gravest trespass upon the 'civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.'" In their discussions with Zionist representatives, "the fact came out repeatedly ... that the Zionists looked forward to a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine". The report concluded that if the principle of self-determination was to rule, the will of the people of Palestine must be respected, and the great majority of the population was "emphatically against the entire Zionist program."

The British government elucidated on its policy in the Churchill White Paper of June 1922, which emphasized that the Balfour Declaration had not aimed "to create a wholly Jewish Palestine", but that the "Jewish National Home" they envisioned would be "*in Palestine*" (emphasis added). The paper stated further that "all citizens" of Palestine "in the eyes of the law shall be Palestinian"—notice we again find the term Gingrich says didn't come into use until 1977. The paper went on to describe its vision of what amounted to autonomous Jewish communities existing *within* a greater state of *Palestine*.

The League of Nations issued its Palestine Mandate the following month, July 1922. Although the Covenant of the League of Nations stated that the wishes of the population of occupied territories "must be a principle consideration in the selection of the Mandatory", the Palestinians were not consulted. The Zionist Organization, on the other hand, was. In issuing the Mandate, the League of Nations included the wording that Britain "should be responsible for putting into effect the [Balfour] declaration", the terms of which were repeated.

British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon objected strongly to the Mandate. He recognized that while his government officially did not support the establishment of a Jewish state, its policy effectively furthered that Zionist goal. "The Zionists are after a Jewish State with Arabs as hewers of wood and drawers of water," he said. "So are many British sympathizers with the Zionists."

That category included Lord Balfour, who had once declared to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis Dembitz Brandeis, "I am a Zionist", and who admitted that despite Western rhetoric about democracy and self-determination, "in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country".

Continuing, Curzon pointed out that British policy consisted of "flagrant" contradictions and blasting the hypocrisy of the Mandate. "Acting upon the noble principles of self-determination," he said, the League of Nations "then proceed[ed] to draw up a document which ... is an avowed constitution for a Jewish State." In the British Parliament, Lord Sydenham, in a reply to Balfour, admonished that "the harm done by dumping down an alien population upon an Arab country ... may never be remedied". The injustice done to the Arabs would "start a running sore", he presciently proclaimed, "and no one can tell how far that sore will extend."

One [widely propagated myth](#) about the conflict is that Israel was created by the United Nations. While this belief is extremely popular, *it is categorically false*. The truth is that the report of the U.N. Special Committee on Palestine explicitly acknowledged that its majority recommendation to partition Palestine was a rejection of the Arabs' right to self-determination. The General Assembly's own ad-hoc committee appointed to further review

UNSCOP's majority recommendation rejected it as "contrary to the principles of the [U.N.] Charter". The U.N., the committee observed, could not "deprive the majority of the people of Palestine of their territory and transfer it to the exclusive use of a minority in the country ... in complete disregard of the wishes and interests of the Arabs of Palestine."

The Assembly nevertheless adopted Resolution 181 on November 29, 1947. *This resolution did not partition Palestine*. It was merely a recommendation, which was all the General Assembly was authorized to do under the Charter. It had no legal authority to partition Palestine, and it didn't purport to. It referred the matter to the Security Council, *where it died*. The Council rejected the plan because the only way to implement it would be through the use of force against the will of the majority of the population. The U.S. delegate, Warren Austin, eloquently pointed out that such a use of force would be contrary to the principles of the very Charter under which they operated.

Israel was not created by U.N. fiat in 1947. It was created on May 14, 1948 when the Zionist leadership under Ben-Gurion unilaterally declared its existence, without defining its borders. It is important to stress that Jews at that time owned only 7% of the land of Palestine, and that Resolution 181 neither partitioned Palestine nor conferred upon the Zionist leadership any legal authority for its unilateral declaration.

In the conflict that ensued, [more than 750,000 Arabs were ethnically cleansed from Palestine](#). The [right of return](#) is an internationally recognized legal right guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, recognized explicitly in the case of Palestinian refugees first in U.N. General Assembly Resolution 194 of December 11, 1948.

Which brings us back to Gingrich's remarks. When he speaks of the "commitments that were made at the time", he is referring the Balfour Declaration and the Palestine Mandate and the fiction that the latter constituted some kind of legal basis for the establishment of the state of Israel, which falsehood rests further upon the racist and colonialist assumption that the nations of the West somehow had the authority to take land away from the Arabs and give it to the Jews.

When he says that Palestinians "had a chance to go many places" and explicitly rejects their right of return, what he is saying is that the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was a *legitimate* action, and that Palestinians—who apparently must have no special affinity for their birthplace or the land of their ancestors—should just accept its legitimacy.

When he says the U.S. has "sustained" a "war against Israel", what he means is that the U.S. doesn't recognize the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of Israel. Gingrich was joined in this sentiment onstage at the debate by fellow Zionist Rick Santorum, who said, "The Israelis have the right to determine what happens in *their* land, and *all* of Israel, including the, quote, 'West Bank', is Israeli land."

The truth is that *all* of the West Bank—including East Jerusalem—and Gaza are "occupied Palestinian territories", to quote from the judgment of the International Court of Justice. Israel's annexation of *Palestinian* East Jerusalem has been rejected by the international community as "illegal", "null and void" in [numerous U.N. Security Council resolutions](#), including 252, 267, 271, 298, 446, 452, 465, 471, 476, 478, 592, 605, 607, 636, 694, 726, and 799. Similarly, all of Israel's settlements in the West Bank "have been established in breach of international law", to quote again from the ICJ ruling. And whatever "history" and

“truth” Zionists like Gingrich and Santorum would have Americans believe, the fact that all of the West Bank and Gaza are Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories under international law *is completely uncontroversial*.

As for Palestinian militant groups firing rockets into Israel from Gaza, Gingrich is absolutely right to condemn such violence, indiscriminate in nature and thus a war crime under international law. But what Gingrich hypocritically neglected to mention was the fact that Israel is responsible for the vast preponderance of the violence and murdering of civilians, which it carries out *with full U.S. support*.

Israel’s massacre in Gaza from December 27, 2008 to January 18, 2009, codenamed “Operation Cast Lead”, for instance, was a U.S.-backed full-scale military assault on the civilian population perpetrated with U.S.-supplied arms, including F-16s and Apache helicopters. The U.S. took its complicity in Israel’s war crimes and other violations of international law in blocking the implementation of the recommendations of the report of the U.N. Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, the most important of which was that the Security Council—where the U.S. exercises a veto—should refer the matter to the ICJ.

Gingrich said President Obama is guilty of pressuring Israel into the so-called “peace process”. The truth is that this is the process by which the U.S. and Israel have sought to block implementation of the international consensus on a two-state solution, which envisions a full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state along the pre-June 1967 armistice lines, with minor and mutually agreed revisions to the final border. The truth is that Obama has pressured the *Palestinians* to return to this “peace process”, and demanded that they do so “without preconditions”, which means while Israel’s illegal colonization of the West Bank continues. The Palestinian leadership ultimately rightfully rejected a return to the “peace process” and its rejectionist framework in favor of turning to the international community to recognize their legal rights and legitimate political aspirations. The transparent truth of the matter, to anyone who has eyes to see or ears to hear, is that the U.S. hasn’t been waging a war on Israel for many decades, *but on Palestine*.

And what about Gingrich’s comment that Hamas rejects Israel’s “right to exist” and wants to expel or exterminate all the Jews? It is true that Palestinians don’t recognize that Israel has a “right to exist”. And, of course, it doesn’t. No state does. This is an absurd formulation. The proper framework for discussion is the right to self-determination, and it is this right that is being denied not to the people of Israel, *but to the Palestinians*. The demand that Palestinians recognize Israel’s “right to exist” is a demand that they accept that the Zionist’s unilateral declaration of the existence of the Jewish state of Israel and ethnic cleansing of Palestine (required for the state to be demographically “Jewish”) were legitimate—as Gingrich clearly himself believes. Furthermore, the truth is that Hamas’s leadership has [repeatedly and for many years](#) reiterated its willingness to accept a Palestinian state *alongside Israel on the ‘67 borders*.

And Gingrich’s comments about Palestinians teaching their children to hate Jews, that they learn math by subtracting numbers of Jews? Glenn Kessler touched on that in his *Washington Post* blog, [The Fact Checker](#), in which he stated, “We cannot immediately find evidence of the statement claimed by Gingrich.” Kessler further cites the U.S.’s own State Department as observing that “International academics concluded the [Palestinian] textbooks did not incite violence against Jews, but showed imbalance, bias, and inaccuracy”, all of which certainly applies to school textbooks in the U.S., or in Israel, for that matter.

Kessler also cited the Israeli daily *Haaretz* observing that Israel's education system "is hardly better than the Palestinian one when it comes to inserting political messages in textbooks."

But let us congratulate Mr. Gingrich for at least one true statement: This is indeed a propaganda war. And let us applaud his statement that it is about time for someone to have the courage to stand up and say, "Enough lying about the Middle East!" The lying certainly does need to stop, but Mr. Gingrich should begin with the plank in his own eye.

Jeremy R. Hammond is an independent political analyst and founding editor of [Foreign Policy Journal](#). He was a recipient of the Project Censored 2010 Award for Outstanding Investigative Journalism for his work covering the '08-'09 Gaza Conflict. He is currently writing a book on the U.S. role, with a particular focus on the Obama administration, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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