

U.N. TOOK AWAY PALESTINIAN LAND; ISRAEL WENT AFTER MORE

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Byline: AMMAR AHMED

How ironic that J. Kirk Brandfass, in a Dec. 24 Gazette commentary, lambasted Dr. John Warner for "historically flawed and biased" account of the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. Seldom have I read an article so plagued with historical inaccuracies, distortions and outright falsehoods as was Brandfass' piece.

He argued that Palestinians brought their current suffering upon themselves by repeatedly making war against the Israeli state, and subsequently losing those wars. Brandfass suggested that Palestinians inherently hate all Jews and thus engaged in an unprovoked, hate-driven campaign to exterminate Israel and its inhabitants. The facts, however, show a very different story.

The 1947 U.N. partition plan did not give the Palestinians a much-sought-after chance at a homeland, as Brandfass implies. They already had a homeland. On the eve of the U.N. resolution, Israelis owned only 6.6 percent of Palestine. The rest belonged to the Palestinians. For hundreds of years, the deeds to the land had been possessions of the Palestinians and their ancestors. Two-thirds of the population of Palestine was Arab. Only one-third was Jewish. And yet the U.N. plan gave over half of the land to the Jews, including the best, most arable farmland. Is it really any surprise that the Palestinians rejected such an unjust plan?

It is also historically inaccurate to say that the ensuing fight began with the Arab invasion on May 15, 1948. Almost immediately after passage of the U.N. resolution, Jewish forces took to the field to secure areas designated Jewish and then expand into the lands designated for the Palestinians. Under military Plan Gimmel and later Plan Dalet, Jews engaged in organized military action against Arabs in Palestine, often terrorizing local populations. By the time Arab armies invaded, the Israelis had already conquered substantial portions of Palestine outside the U.N.-defined borders of the Israeli state. The Jordanian government, in fact, made public that its war aims were solely limited to contesting Israeli efforts to annex Palestinian-designated territories.

In portraying the 1948 war as an invasion of a poor, defenseless Israel, Brandfass said the Arab armies were much larger than that of Israel. In reality, trained Jewish forces substantially outnumbered the total forces committed to battle by the five Arab countries. Armed, frontline Jewish troops numbered 27,400, compared with 13,876 for the Arabs. In writing about the '48 war, Israeli historian Simha Flapan admits, "The Israelis were not outnumbered."

The Israeli victory in the 1948 war was accompanied by massive displacement of Palestinians from their homes, creating over half a million refugees, mostly women, children and elderly men. Israelis prevented the Palestinians from returning to their homes and razed hundreds of Palestinian villages, building Jewish settlements on the newly cleared land. I ask Brandfass, was it really the Palestinians who were trying to destroy Israel, or the other way around?

Israeli refusal to let Palestinians return to their homes was a prime cause of the tensions that led to the 1967 war. In regard to this war, Brandfass said Egypt and Syria massed their armies at the Israeli border for the purpose of attacking Israel in another attempt "to destroy Israel's very existence." The truth is that the Arabs did not want war, but the Israelis took advantage of the situation to launch a surprise attack on Egypt.

Since the war, Israeli leaders have openly admitted that the Arab troop mobilization resulted in no immediate threat to Israeli existence. Furthermore, Israeli leaders such as David Ben-Gurion have admitted that they very much doubted Egyptian leader Nasser's desire for war. In 1972, Israeli cabinet minister Mordecai Bentov disclosed that Israel's "entire story" about "the danger of extermination" was "invented of whole cloth and exaggerated after the fact to justify the annexation of new Arab territories."

In the years following the 1967 war, Israel refused to give up illegally held Arab territory: the West Bank, Gaza Strip, east Jerusalem, Golan Heights, and Sinai Peninsula, in direct violation of U.N. Resolution 242. It was for the specific reason of reclaiming this illegally and unjustly held territory that Egypt started the 1973 war. Once again, Brandfass' pro-Israeli propaganda obscures the truth by characterizing this war as "yet another attempt to destroy Israeli's very existence." None of the fighting even took place in Israel; it was solely confined to the occupied lands.

According to former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, "The Yom Kippur War was not fought by Egypt and Syria to threaten the existence of Israel. It was an all-out use of their military force to achieve a limited political goal."

The historical facts show that Brandfass' premise is simply wrong. It is unfair and dishonest to say that the Palestinians themselves are to blame for their current suffering. The Palestinians and their Arab allies did not, by any stretch of the imagination, repeatedly launch total war to destroy the Israeli state and people. In stark contrast, the Palestinians have been victims throughout: from the unjust U.N. partition plan to expulsion from their homes by expansionist Israeli forces to the current apartheid-like occupation.

I do not wish to stoop to Brandfass' level of making personal attacks against another writer, but I do wish to end with a piece of general advice: Before you label someone else's article as "historically flawed," make sure you have done your homework.

Ahmed, a 1999 graduate of Charleston's George Washington High, is studying Middle Eastern history at Rice University in Houston. He says that quotations and statistics in this essay were taken from former Rep. Paul Findley's book, "Deliberate Deceptions: Facing the Facts About the U.S.-Israeli Relationship" (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1995).

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