**Five Simple Truths about the Mideast Conflict**

**By Michael L. Brown**

Is there any subject more controversial than the question of the legitimacy of the modern State of Israel? Is it the eternal home of the Jewish people, promised to them by God Himself? Or is it the illegitimate home of violent Jewish occupiers, an apartheid state guilty of ethnic cleansing? Or is it something in between? In the midst of the often emotional arguments on both sides, it is helpful to review five simple truths about the Mideast conflict.

**1. There is no such thing as a historic “Palestinian people” living in the Middle East**. To be sure, there have been Arabs living in the land of Palestine for centuries. (The land of Israel was derisively renamed “Palestine” by the Romans in the second century A.D.). And it is true that some of these families have lived in Palestine without interruption for many generations. But at no time before 1967 did these Arabs identify themselves as “Palestinians,” nor did they seek to achieve any kind of statehood there. As expressed by former terrorist Walid Shoebat, “Why is it that on June 4th 1967 I was a Jordanian and overnight I became a Palestinian?”

Before 1967, these was no such thing as Arab, Palestinian nationalism and no attempt to develop the territory as a homeland for the Arabs who lived there, and in 1936, when the Palestine Orchestra was formed, it was a Jewish orchestra. In fact, the original name of the *Jerusalem Post*, the flagship Jewish newspaper, was the *Palestine Post*.

There is no question that there are several million people who identify themselves as Palestinians today, and many of these people have suffered great hardship in recent years. Nonetheless, the concept of a Palestinian people is a modern invention, and it is part of the anti-Israel propaganda machine without any basis in fact. The recent comments of Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, claiming a 9,000 year Palestinian pedigree, are purely fictional: “Oh, Netanyahu, you are incidental in history; we are the people of history. We are the owners of history."

**2. There were anti-Jewish intifadas in Palestine two decades before the founding of the State of Israel in 1948**. We are often told that Jews and Arabs coexisted peacefully in Palestine prior to the formation of the Jewish state in 1948, or at least, prior to the rise of strong Jewish nationalism. In reality, as Jews began to return to their one and only ancestral homeland in the late 19th century, hostilities began to rise among their Arab neighbors, despite the fact that there was more than enough room for both.

By the 1920’s, radical Muslim leaders like Haj Amin Al-Husseini, later a confidant of Adolph Hitler, were organizing intifadas against the Jewish population, with many Jewish lives lost. And what helped fuel Al-Husseini’s Jew-hatred was the anti-Jewish sentiment found in the Koran and early Muslim traditions. Post-1948 Jew-hatred simply built on centuries of Islamic anti-Semitism.

**3. Jewish refugees fleeing from Muslim and Arab countries were absorbed by Israel after 1948; Arab refugees fleeing from Israel after 1948 were not absorbed by Muslim and Arab countries.** Despite the fact that the Muslim nations surrounding Israel are 650 times the size of this tiny state, they made no effort to absorb the approximately 600,000 Arab refugees who fled Israel in 1948 when war was declared on Israel by five neighboring Arab nations.

To this day, these refugees are not welcomed by other Arab states. As expressed more than 20 years ago by Ralph Galloway, former head of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, “The Arab States do want to solve the refugee problem. They want to keep it as an open sore, as an affront to the United Nations and as a weapon against Israel.” Yet Israel absorbed roughly 800,000 Jewish refugees that had to flee from Muslim nations after 1948.

**4. Only one side in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is truly committed to peaceful co-existence.** It is often stated that if the Palestinians put down their weapons, there would be no more war but if the Israelis put down their weapons, there would be no more Israel. This is not to say that all Palestinians are warmongers and all Israelis are doves. But the vast majority of Israelis are not driven by a radical ideology that calls for the extermination of their Arab neighbors, nor are they teaching their children songs about the virtues of religious martyrdom.

Israel does not relish spending a major portion of its budget on defense, nor does it relish sending its sons and daughters into military service. It simply will not surrender Jerusalem, its historic and religious capital, and it will not commit regional suicide by retreating to indefensible borders. In return it simply asks the Palestinians to say, “We embrace your right to exist.”

**5. The current uprisings throughout the Muslim and Arab world today remind us that Israel cannot fairly be blamed for all the tension and conflicts in the region.** The nation of Israel is obviously not faultless in the current conflict, but it is ludicrous to think that without the presence of this supposed evil nation in the Middle East, all would be well. There have been constant disputes between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, and in 1980, Abd Alhalim Khaddam, then Syria’s Foreign Minister, admitted, “If we look at a map of the Arab Homeland, we can hardly find two countries without conflict. . . . We can hardly find two countries which are not either in a state of war or on the road to war.”

Certainly, there are many obstacles that stand in the way of a true peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, and the road ahead is fraught with uncertainty, but it would be a good starting point if we replaced myths and emotional arguments with facts.