

Letters from Abroad

The Greatest PR Scam in History

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Great question from a reader: "You're always talking about Arabs—they do this, they do that. But you never mention Palestinians. Aren't they the real problem over there? Why don't you mention them?"

I don't talk about "Palestinians" for a very good reason: There's no such thing as a "Palestinian."

That's not an original observation, by the way. Back in June of 1969, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir set the record straight.

"There was no such thing as Palestinians, they never existed," she said. "It wasn't as though there were a Palestinian people in Palestine, then we came, threw them out and took their country away from them. They didn't exist."

"Palestinians" still don't exist, but you'd never know it, would you? Credit the late PLO leader (and terrorist-supreme) Yasser Arafat for that. In one fell swoop, he created the "Palestinian people," endowed them with a culture and a history (cribbed from normative Arab history) and demanded that the world grant them a state—or else.

The truth is, up until the late 1960's, if you said "Palestinian," you would have been referring to a Jew who lived in Israel.

But let's start at the beginning. During the Late Bronze Age (1600 -1200 BCE), Egypt was attacked by invaders from the Mediterranean coast—Greece, Asia Minor, the Aegean area. The Egyptians called these foreign attackers "Philistines" and successfully fought them off, but when the dust had settled, so did the Philistines. Instead of returning home, they stayed, settling just outside Egypt, joining the Canaanite people who were already there, which included those pesky Israelites. In Hebrew, "Philistines" is "plitim"—literally, foreign invaders. It was the Roman emperor Hadrian (76-138 CE) who first applied the term "Palestina" to Eretz Yisroel, the historic "Promised Land."

Fast forward to 1920. World War I is over, and the British, who had flattened the Ottoman Empire, were granted the administrative mandate over the land by the League of Nations. The British used the word "Palestine" to denominate this new geographical division of land, which had previously been a part of Syria. The Arabs in the territory—fewer than 100,000—were enraged, deeply resenting being cut off from what they considered their homeland, Syria. Not one Arab said anything about any name known as "Palestine."

Then came World War II, the Holocaust,

and the global consensus to create a Jewish homeland. On Nov. 29, 1947, the League of Nations approved the "partition plan," creating both a Jewish state and an Arab state in the territory. Neither group was happy with the borders, but Israel accepted their state, while the Arabs rejected theirs. Israel declared statehood on May 14, 1948—and since that time, Arab attacks have alternately slowed or intensified, but never ceased. Nevertheless, not until 1967, did anyone assert a claim on behalf of a nation known as "Palestine."

"Palestine" was Yasser Arafat's brainchild. Born in Egypt, Arafat believed his talents were wasted as a civil engineer in Kuwait. Having helped form the Fatah party in 1957, Arafat decided they could be the basis of a new nation, one he would control, a nation called "Palestine." Under his nom de guerre, Abu Ammar, Arafat led dozens of raids against Israelis, eventually turning his rag-tag group of Fatah terrorists into the very first "Palestinians." Ethnically and culturally, they were Syrians, Iraqis, Lebanese and Saudis—"Jordanians," if you wish, but Jordan didn't exist as a geographical unit 1949.

Today, "Palestinians" are indistinguishable from any other Arabs. They have no distinct language, religion, history or traditions. Before Arafat, there had never been a "Palestinian" leader. There's never been a country called "Palestine."

Even so, you say, shouldn't we grant people—any people—the right to call themselves whatever they want? If they want to be called "Palestinians," shouldn't we accept that?

Fair enough. In almost all organized legal systems, people are permitted to choose the name by which they will be known, that is, with one big exception: you can't choose a name with the intent to defraud. If you decide you'd rather be called "Donald Trump" or "Queen Elizabeth," you might have a problem if you also decide to access their bank accounts acting as them.

For Yasser Arafat, fraud wasn't a problem, so using the name "Palestine" for his new-found people was a stroke of brilliance. He lifted a generic name for the Jewish homeland, claimed it as his own, and then created—out of whole cloth—a people to go along with it.

And the world let him get away with it.

P. T. Barnum had something to say about that.

So today, the name "Palestinian"—as applied—is a fraud. Claiming an ancient connection that simply doesn't exist is just one more way for the world's 22 Arab nations—who control 5,368,500 square miles in these parts—to grab another big hunk of Israel's mere 10,000 square miles, less than 2 percent of the whole.

The Arab goal is pure and simple: destroy Israel. If creating a "Palestinian people" demanding a "return" to a mythical homeland is something the world is dumb enough to permit, hey, what's the problem? Whatever works, right?

What's really sad is that it proves that Hitler's 1925 "big lie" theory still works: tell a lie so colossal, no one would believe that someone "could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously."

Next week: A Tour of Ancient Peki'in

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A Palestinian police officer stands by a mural decorated with the portrait of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. (AP Photo/Mohammed Ballas)