

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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Fact #1: Jews have been living in Israel continuously for over 3,000 years

The Jewish people's historical right to a homeland in Palestine was first recognized by the international community (and by Great Britain, which had gained control of the region from the Ottoman Empire during World War I) through the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the League of Nations Mandate of 1922. Both of these documents preceded the Nazi Holocaust by decades, thereby disproving more recent (yet widespread) claims according to which Israel's creation was justified not by thousands of years of Jewish history, but rather only by the Holocaust.

In reality, Jews have maintained an unbroken presence in Israel for well over 3,000 years - beginning in the 2nd millennium B.C.E., continuing under a long series of Jewish kingdoms and foreign rulers, and through to the modern State of Israel. Conquerors, diplomats, pilgrims and visitors throughout the ages have left an abundance of references to the Jewish communities living there. Israel is filled with archaeological and historical sites, many of which testify to Jewish life over the centuries. Even the Muslim Qur'an refers to the Jewish people as the "Children of Israel".

Israel has also always been central to the lives of Jews living outside it. Though it was renamed "Palaestina" by its Roman conquerors with the specific intention of erasing its Jewish significance, for nearly 2000 years Jews living in exile prayed 3 times a day, facing Jerusalem, in the hopes that they would one day return.

Despite all this, Palestinian leaders, university professors, religious figures, archaeologists, historians, school textbooks, music videos, and even the Palestinian National Charter, continually spread the fabrication that Jews have no historical connection to the land, and that any claimed history was invented in order to justify the creation of Israel.

"Israel is the very embodiment of Jewish continuity: It is the only nation on earth that inhabits the same land, bears the same name, speaks the same language, and worships the same God that it did 3,000 years ago. You dig the soil and you find pottery from Davidic times, coins from Bar Kokhba, and 2,000-year-old scrolls written in a script remarkably like the one that today advertises ice cream at the corner candy store."

- Charles Krauthammer

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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Fact #2: One quarter of Israeli citizens are not Jewish

Though Israel was envisioned by the founders of Zionism as a home for the Jewish people after two thousand years of statelessness and persecution, that vision also included coexistence with the local non-Jewish populations. Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, specifically called for integration and warned against racism in his vision of the Jewish state. Ze'ev Jabotinsky, leader of the more nationalistic stream of Zionism, also advocated integrating the local Arab population as equals. In the years leading up to the creation of Israel, both Jews and Arabs who lived in the area benefitted greatly from the improving economy, social services and overall quality of life. In fact, many Arabs immigrated from surrounding areas in pursuit of these benefits.

When Israel was founded in 1948, its Declaration of Independence specifically called on its Arab inhabitants to “participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship”, and on the neighboring Arab countries to “establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help... for the advancement of the entire Middle East”.

Today, non-Jewish citizens of Israel constitute about 25% of the population, with 20% being Arabs. Arab Israelis have equal voting rights and their own political parties, and serve on the Israeli Knesset, Cabinet, Supreme Court, and diplomatic positions. They are granted all fundamental civil liberties, including freedoms of religion, speech, and assembly, and in fact enjoy more civil rights than Arabs living in any other Middle Eastern country. Israel is also the only country in the Middle East where Arab homosexuals can live without fear of prosecution, which is why many Palestinian gays have fled for Israel. Many Arab Israelis have spoken out in favor of Israel, and against allegations of an Israeli apartheid. Such claims have also been refuted by many others, including by Richard Goldstone, former Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa, who also presided over the UN report regarding the 2009 Gaza war.

Arab Israelis are generally not required to serve in the military, though some do volunteer. Members of the Druze and Circassian communities are drafted like Jewish citizens, at the request of their own community leaders.

Discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel does exist, though on a level comparable to that found in many other Western countries, and certainly far less than the discriminations to which Palestinians living in most Arab countries are subjected. In certain respects, Arab Israelis have more rights than some who live in Europe, such as the rights to wear hijabs.

As a general indicator, a recent Harvard study found that 77% of Arab Israelis would rather live in Israel than in any other country. Many Arabs have also stated that they would much rather live in Israel than under Palestinian rule.

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

“Palestine must be built up without violating the legitimate interests of the Arabs... Palestine is not Rhodesia... 600,000 Arabs live there, who before the sense of justice of the world have exactly the same rights to their homes as we have to our National Home.”

- Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organization (and later the first President of Israel), 1925

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

Fact #3: Israel has repeatedly accepted the two state solution

In 1947, the U.N. voted to partition the British Mandate of Palestine, in light of its recognition that both Jews and Arabs had legitimate claims to the land. The proposed partition included three areas: a Jewish state, an Arab state, and an internationally administered zone in Jerusalem. The Jewish population accepted, and reaffirmed their intention to coexist peacefully with the Arabs living in the area; the Arab population refused, and responded with riots and violence.

When Israel was established half a year later, its founders officially extended their “hand to all neighbouring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness, and [appealed] to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help [...] for the advancement of the entire Middle East”. Those countries responded by launching a war of annihilation on the newborn state. Decades later, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas acknowledged the Arab refusal to accept the 1947 partition plan as a “mistake”.

In 1967, after defending itself against another war of annihilation, the Israeli government accepted UN Resolution 242 and voted unanimously to return the vast majority of territories it had captured (the Sinai Desert, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip and West Bank) in exchange for peace. The Arab response was unequivocal: “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it”.

In 2000, Israel made a series of two-state proposals which (contrary to popular myth) eventually included almost all of the West Bank (plus additional territory from Israel proper), the entire Gaza strip, Palestinian control over East Jerusalem, and a \$30 billion solution for the Palestinian refugees. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat not only refused – he made no counter-offer, abandoned negotiations, and immediately began planning the Al-Aqsa Intifada. Arafat was heavily criticized for this, both by the American mediators and by fellow Arabs and Palestinians.

Those Arab countries that eventually came to accept Israel’s existence – Egypt (1979, despite widespread Arab opposition) and Jordan (1994) – signed peace treaties which have been mutually honored to this day.

“Since 1948, every time we've had something on the table we say no. Then we say yes. When we say yes, it's not on the table anymore. Then we have to deal with something less. Isn't it about time we say yes?”

- Prince Bandar bin Sultan of Saudi Arabia

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

Fact #4: The Arab-Israeli conflict is not about the occupation - it's about the existence of Israel

The central issue in the Middle East conflict has never been Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza – rather, it's the very fact of Israel's existence.

All major Palestinian organizations are centered around the goal of destroying Israel. The Palestinian National Charter (adopted in 1964 - three years before the Six Day War and the resulting occupation) declares its aim to be “the elimination of Zionism in Palestine”. The PLO's 10 Point Program of 1974 reaffirmed this as the organization's goal. The charters of Hamas and Hezbollah both explicitly state that their goal is to “obliterate” Israel. Even while supposedly negotiating for peace, Palestinian leaders have repeatedly stated that any peace agreement would only be a tactic towards the ultimate goal of eliminating Israel entirely. To this day, Palestinian media routinely broadcast the real Arab wish: to claim all of Israel, not just the West Bank and Gaza.

Arab resistance to the Jewish presence before the occupation, and indeed before the creation of Israel itself, affected not only those Jews who were already living in the region but also European Jews who tried to flee the Nazis (most of whom had nowhere to go but Palestine) and who were prevented from entering due to Arab pressure on the British. These refusals resulted in large-scale tragedies such as the Struma affair.

Jews living elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa also suffered greatly from Arab opposition to the creation of Israel. In the 1940's, Arab mobs attacked Jewish communities (some of which had existed for thousands of years, and had been older than Islam itself) in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Morocco and Egypt. In Yemen, the nearly 2000-year old Jewish community of Aden was completely destroyed. These persecutions culminated in the expulsion and/or flight of nearly one million Jews from Arab lands.

When Israel was created in 1948, the armies of five Arab nations invaded with the explicit intention of annihilating it. In the 1967 Six Day War, Arab leaders were again open about their goal of completely eradicating Israel. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat consistently stated over the decades that his goal was the outright elimination of Israel. In recent years, the leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah, along with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, have continued in this vein by repeatedly declaring that their aim is not merely to end the occupation, but to destroy Israel entirely.

“The truth is that if Israel were to put down its arms there would be no more Israel. If the Arabs were to put down their arms there would be no more war.”

- Benjamin Netanyahu, 2006

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

Fact #5: Arab violence against civilians began long before the occupation

Contrary to popular myth, Palestinian Arabs had been deliberately targeting Jewish civilians for decades before Israel was even established, and half a century before the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The first major attacks on civilians took place in 1920-21, when violent riots erupted in Jerusalem and Jaffa. In 1929, at least 85 Jews were killed in massacres in Hebron and Safed, among other locations; in the early 1930's, the first Palestinian terror organization, Black Hand, began carrying out attacks against civilians; and during the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939, violence against civilians became widespread throughout Palestine.

Attacks by Arabs against Jewish civilians continued during the 1948 War, including an ambush on a medical convoy in which 79 Jews – mostly doctors and nurses – were killed, and massacres in Kfar Etzion and Haifa. During the 1950's and 60's, terrorists from neighboring Arab countries ("fedayeen") repeatedly infiltrated Israel to attack civilian targets, including a wedding, a synagogue, buses, trains, and civilian homes.

Attacks on civilians intensified in the period leading up to and following the Six Day War, including deliberate massacres of children in a school and on a school bus, the murder of 11 Israeli athletes during the 1972 Olympic Games, and attacks on civilian buses, apartment buildings, hotels, airport terminals, and pedestrian malls, among others. Palestinian terrorism during this period also included the hijacking and/or bombing of several civilian flights and a cruise ship.

Palestinian suicide attacks began in 1989 and continued throughout the 1990's. The frequency of suicide bombings greatly intensified in the early 2000's, with targets including many restaurants, bars and cafes, a Passover Seder, a discotheque, a university cafeteria, shopping malls, and many buses. Israel responded by building the West Bank security barrier and reinforcing the Gaza barrier, both of which have proved very effective at preventing terrorist attacks.

Since the Gaza barrier prevented terrorists from attacking Israelis at close range, they changed tactics and began firing rockets at Israeli cities. Between 2001 and 2009, 8,600 rockets and mortars were fired at Israeli population centers. The rocketfire was multiplied several times over following Israel's disengagement from Gaza in 2005. After 8 years of rocket attacks on civilian targets, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in an attempt to root out the terrorist infrastructure in Gaza.

“This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades.”

- Azzam Pasha, Secretary General of the Arab League, May 15, 1948 (one day after Israel declared independence)

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

Fact #6: Palestinian leadership actively supported the Nazis during WWII

The leader of the Muslims in pre-Israel Palestine, Grand Mufti Mohammad Amin Al-Husayni, was closely allied with, and actively assisted the Nazis throughout the Second World War.

Al-Husayni met with Hitler several times, and was hosted in Berlin as the Nazis' honored guest for most of WWII. He was given a personal tour of the Auschwitz death camp by Heinrich Himmler, where he reportedly "admonished the guards running the gas chambers to work more diligently". Al-Husayni was also a leader in the recruitment of hundreds of thousands of Muslims for the German SS, and actively worked with the Nazis towards bringing the Holocaust to Palestine, including planning a chemical attack on Jewish civilians in Tel Aviv. Yasser Arafat, the next major Palestinian leader after Al-Husayni, was proud to have served as one of his troops in 1948, and considered him "our hero".

Muslim anti-semitism and support for the "Final Solution" have continued to this day, with calls to "kill all the Jews" routinely broadcast throughout the Muslim world. State-sponsored newspapers publish articles thanking the Nazis, while major religious figures preach killing the Jews "down to the very last one". Holocaust denial is also openly preached – even by history professors, and in school textbooks. Books such as Hitler's Mein Kampf and the antisemitic forgery The Protocols of the Elders of Zion are bestsellers in several Muslim countries, while Muslims in demonstrations hold signs bearing such slogans as "Re-open Auschwitz" and "God Bless Hitler".

"Kill the Jews wherever you find them, this is pleasing to Allah."

- Mohammad Amin Al-Husayni, Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, 1943

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

Fact #7: Arab leaders have been abusing the Palestinians for political gain since the beginning of the conflict

Certainly the most tragic example of Palestinian leaders abusing their own people is their explicit policy of maximizing their own civilian casualties in order to generate worldwide condemnation against Israel. Both Hamas in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon intentionally put their own civilians in harm's way by firing rockets from civilian areas, including hospitals, mosques, schools, UN posts, residential areas, and foreign press buildings. Hamas fighters have grabbed children off the streets to use as human shields, made their war headquarters under the largest hospital in Gaza, and booby trapped schools, zoos, civilian buildings, and even their own homes to maximize the carnage. They have prevented civilians from fleeing, broadcast messages on public television and radio calling on women and children to shield their fighters, and killed Palestinians who tried to resist being abused in this way. Civilians who were injured by Israeli attacks in both Gaza and Lebanon have blamed Palestinian terrorists for intentionally drawing fire to their homes. Several Arab leaders have also blamed Hamas and Hizbullah for dragging the region into conflict, including representatives of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Palestinian Authority, among others.

Palestinian terrorists also make it extremely difficult for Israeli forces to differentiate between civilians and combatants by abusing humanitarian symbols, including a long history of hijacking ambulances and TV vehicles to transport fighters, explosives and suicide bombers. Both Hamas and Hizbullah have fought behind white flags; their combatants fight in civilian clothes; they have also used the Red Crescent symbol to disguise combatants. In the 2009 Gaza conflict, Hamas increased rocket attacks during the ceasefires, and repeatedly stole humanitarian aid (then tried to sell it back to the people), to the extent that at one point the UN suspended delivery of aid. Hamas has attacked aid trucks and border crossings; stolen fuel; refused aid; converted medicine bottles into grenades; and barred the injured from receiving medical treatment. When issuing requests for international aid, Hamas asks for weapons and fighters, instead of basic commodities for its people. In 2007, a Gaza resident who had been receiving treatment in an Israeli hospital used her medical permit to try to blow herself up in that same hospital.

Palestinians and their supporters also generate blame towards Israel by exaggerating and fabricating civilian suffering for the international media, which routinely proceeds to propagate these claims unquestioningly. "Pallywood" tactics include staging injuries, funerals and power blackouts, doctoring and misrepresenting photos and videos for the press, and wildly exaggerating casualty figures. Several foreign and Palestinian journalists have been threatened and attacked for reporting stories not in keeping with the desired Palestinian image.

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

The mass abuse of Palestinians at the hands of Arab leaders began with the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem in the War of 1948. Before launching the war, leaders of the invading Arab armies ordered Palestinian Arabs to leave their homes so they could “obliterate every place the Jews seek shelter in”. From then until today, Palestinians refugees have been denied basic rights in almost every Arab country where they have sought shelter, including Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq.

Libya expelled 30,000 of its Palestinian refugees; Kuwait expelled over 400,000. Yasser Arafat himself said that “What Kuwait did to the Palestinian people is worse than what has been done by Israel to Palestinians in the occupied territories.”

According to the Arab League, the explicit policy of denying Palestinians citizenship in other Arab countries and keeping them in “very bad conditions” is in order “to preserve their Palestinian identity”. An Egyptian foreign minister also openly stated that the intention in demanding the right of Palestinian refugees to return “is the extermination of Israel”.

Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza fare no better. Though they are the largest per-capita recipients of aid in the world, their leaders have to a large extent refused to use those funds to improve the conditions of ordinary Palestinians. Instead, several billion dollars in aid were diverted to Yasser Arafat’s personal accounts, while other aid was used to fund terrorism against Israel. The wealthy Arab states, for their part, have remained true to their policy of neglecting the Palestinians by giving only five percent of total aid, much less than they had publicly pledged.

“For the Palestinian people, death has become an industry, at which women excel, and so do all the people living on this land. The elderly excel at this, and so do the mujahideen and the children. This is why they have formed human shields of the women, the children, the elderly, and the mujahideen, in order to challenge the Zionist bombing machine. It is as if they were saying to the Zionist enemy: 'We desire death like you desire life.'”

- Hamas MP Fathi Hammad, 2008 [translation by MEMRI]

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

Fact #8: Palestinian children are being brainwashed into hate, martyrdom and genocide

“Bombs are more precious than children”; “martyrdom is better than peace”; “it is a Muslim’s duty to kill Jews”: these are the messages Palestinian children get from all directions, including their schools, camps, TV shows, music videos, magazines, and political leaders – some even from their own parents.

Children in both the West Bank and Gaza are flooded from the earliest age with messages glorifying death and murder. Babies are dressed up as suicide bombers; toddlers are given machine guns; pre-teens are sent to terrorist camps; and teens are sent on real suicide attacks. Children who have died as “martyrs” are glorified as role models, and are considered the “greatest message” Palestinians can send to the world.

Perhaps most unthinkable is the reality that some Palestinian mothers rejoice over the deaths of their own children. One Gazan woman has been widely praised – even elected – for sending three of her nine children on suicide attacks, and encouraging the rest to follow in their footsteps.

“We can forgive you for killing our sons. But we will never forgive you for making us kill yours.”

- Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir to Egyptian President Anwar Saddat, 1978

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

Fact #9: Palestinians are treated differently than all other refugees

Palestinians who became refugees during the 1948 War were one group among many that were displaced during the 1940's. Many millions of people, from many different places around the globe, became refugees during this time, including European Jews who had managed to survive the Holocaust, yet still faced continued persecution in their home countries, and up to one million Jews from ancient communities in the Middle East and North Africa, who were expelled, or forced to flee, from their homes as a result of the Arab response to the creation of Israel.

From the start, the Palestinians were dealt with differently than all other refugees. While all others came under the administration of a series of global organizations that eventually became the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Palestinians received their own relief organization: the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). The entire set of criteria for qualifying as a Palestinian refugee was (and still is) significantly different than the criteria applicable to all others. While the UNHCR worked to provide durable solutions for refugees under its administration, Arab leaders intentionally kept the Palestinians in stateless limbo by refusing to accept any solution that did not involve than the complete destruction of the State of Israel.

In 1948, the UN passed Resolution 194, which recommended the repatriation of refugees to their original homes. The Arab states unanimously rejected the resolution, because it also required all parties "to live at peace with their neighbours".

By 1960, the last remaining refugee camps from World War II had been successfully cleared. The hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Europe and Arab lands who chose to resettle in Israel had also been successfully accommodated – without assistance from the international community. The Palestinian refugees, however, were still being held hostage to the pan-Arab determination to destroy Israel.

The abuse of Palestinian refugees by their fellow Arabs for political ends continues to this day. In nearly every Arab country where Palestinian refugees have sought shelter, have been denied the most basic of human rights. The total number of Palestinian refugees, instead of declining, has been multiplied six times over, due largely to the fact that the Palestinians are among the only nations in the world whose descendants also qualify as refugees. In fact, no Palestinian has ever lost their refugee status.

The Palestinians have long since become the largest and longest-standing refugee population in the world. To support them, the UNRWA has also grown to become the largest of all UN agencies.

"The Arab States do not 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. Arab leaders don't give a damn whether the refugees live or die."

- Alexander Galloway, director of UNRWA in Jordan, 1952

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

Fact #10: Israel is treated differently than all other countries

For decades, Israel has been the target of widespread condemnation and criticism, out of all proportion to the severity of its actions in comparison with other countries, and with little to no consideration of the context within which the condemned actions were taken.

The UN Commission for Human Rights, whose members represented some of the most repressive regimes in the world, dedicated such disproportionate efforts to criticizing Israel at the expense of other causes that it was dismantled and replaced, with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stating that "the politicization of its sessions and the selectivity of its work [...] cast a shadow on the reputation of the United Nations system as a whole". Its replacement, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), turned out to be even more biased than its predecessor, and has dedicated overwhelming attention to Israel, while ignoring and blocking criticism of human rights abuses of equal or greater severity – often committed by the council's own members. Massacres committed by Palestinians against their own population, and war crimes routinely perpetrated by Palestinians against Israelis, are similarly ignored.

The UNHRC has been strongly criticized for its overwhelming bias against Israel, both by Annan and by current UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, as well as by independent NGO's such as Freedom House, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. HRW, however, has come under the exact same criticism from its own founder (among others), while AI is also demonstrably guilty of the same double standard.

Discrimination against Israel at the United Nations is not limited to the UNHRC, and has long been prevalent in several other UN bodies, including the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Commission on the Status of Women, and UNESCO.

The UN Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, established by the UNHRC in response to the 2008-2009 Gaza War, was so biased from the outset that Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, refused to lead it. Richard Goldstone also initially refused for the same reason, and only accepted after requiring that it also include an investigation into Palestinian crimes. The resulting report, however, was still extremely one-sided, with only one-twentieth of the document dedicated to the eight years of rocket attacks that prompted the Israeli response, and a similarly gross understatement of Hamas's intentional practice of sacrificing its own civilians. Goldstone himself wrote an editorial in 2011 in which he retracted and corrected several of the report's conclusions, and criticized the UN Human Rights Council for its bias against Israel.

The claim implicit in this bias, that Israel is the "prime example of human rights violators in the world", is particularly insidious in light of efforts Israel has made to avoid harming civilians, and the Palestinians' deliberate policy of provoking Israel into doing just that.

Israel has dropped millions of leaflets, made hundreds of thousands of phone calls, and broadcast messages by TV, radio and loudspeaker, all warning civilians to leave areas that were to be attacked. It

10 Facts About the Arab-Israeli Conflict

<http://www.arabisraeliconflict.info>

has aborted military strikes in order to avoid civilian harm, invented new procedures aimed at getting civilians to leave before an attack, and even given medical treatment to enemy fighters. These and other efforts taken by the IDF to avoid harming civilians greatly exceed the measures taken by western military forces in areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Mogadishu, among others.

During the early years of the conflict (1920-1937), the Jewish community in Palestine employed an official policy of restraint and purity of arms ("Havlagah") in response to the repeated attacks inflicted upon it by the Arab population. Jewish terrorist groups that later carried out attacks on civilians were forcefully disbanded by Israel upon creation of the State, and were strongly condemned by the Zionist World Congress and prominent Jews worldwide.

The Israeli Supreme Court has issued several rulings restricting IDF activity, including banning the use of human shields and torture, and prohibiting attacks on ambulances (even though these have repeatedly been used to transport terrorists and weapons). Israeli soldiers and officers who have violated these rulings and the IDF code of conduct have been investigated, tried and imprisoned. Israelis who commit acts of terrorism against Arabs are also arrested, tried and imprisoned.

“During Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli Defence Forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare.”

- Col. Richard Kemp, former commander of British forces in Afghanistan, speaking before the UN Human Rights Council in 2009