

ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY

April 29, 2020



History of Zionism

Rooted in biblical times

“Zionism” has existed as a concept, if not by name, since biblical times, when the Jews suffering during their first exile in the land of Egypt were brought out by Moses and began their journey home—to the Promised Land, the land of Israel.

Since then, there have been many periods throughout Jewish history during which Jews were exiled from their land or persecuted within it. Yet the Jews persistently, stubbornly, refused to give up on their homeland, and in every generation, groups have attempted to return home and revive Jewish culture and life in Israel.

Examples abound: Ezra and Nehemiah, who brought the Jews back from Babylonian exile and eventually rebuilt the Second Temple; and Nahmanides and Judah HaLevi, among others, two great scholars from the Middle Ages who gave up their home in the Diaspora to move to Israel. This is only a small part of the list, of the people and families whose life goal was to resettle their homeland. For those Jews who remained in the land where they were exiled, the term “Diaspora” was applied, meaning a voluntary separation and intentional choice not to return.



The Israelites are led out of Egypt to the Promised Land

The Enlightenment (1700–1800s)

The Age of Enlightenment (*Haskalah* in Hebrew), during the 18th and 19th centuries, revolutionized the way other nations viewed Jews, and the way Jews viewed themselves. Jews began to be granted equal citizenship rights in countries across Europe, starting with France, and many assimilated into their new culture and country, popularizing secular Judaism.



Vilna Gaon

At the same time, anti-Semitism was on the rise, but this time it was racially, rather than religiously, motivated. For many, the rise in anti-Semitism, particularly in Russia, combined with the Enlightenment-era notion of “nationalism” stirred Zionist aspirations.

Influential Jewish voices recognized the importance of the Jewish people taking steps to reestablish Israel as the homeland of the Jews. The Vilna Gaon, a Lithuanian Torah sage, exhorted his followers to make *aliyah* and resettle the land of Israel.

Though he himself never made it to Israel, following his death, a group of 500 of his followers undertook the arduous journey to Israel between the years 1800–1812. They eventually settled in Jerusalem, spreading the teachings of the Vilna Gaon and establishing a vibrant Ashkenazic presence in Israel.

Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, a German rabbi who lived at the beginning of the 19th century, was one of the

earliest modern Zionists, and he, too, took practical steps to rebuild the land of Israel. His goal was to establish Israel as a homeland for the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe, as well as to improve the lives of the Jews already living in Israel. He believed that, like in biblical times, success in the land depended on agricultural achievements. With donations from Diaspora Jews, Kalischer planned to cultivate the land, open an agricultural school, and form a military group in order to guard the fragile new settlements. His book, *Derishat Zion*, sums up his philosophy: The Jews can only be saved if they help themselves, and they must do so by settling the land of Palestine.

This movement was called *Hovevei Zion*—literally—Lovers of Zion. It was a forerunner of the modern Zionist movement. Their goal was to promote immigration to Israel and advance existing Jewish settlements, specifically focusing on agricultural developments.

Rise of Zionism (1860–1880s)

Sympathy for the Zionist cause from powerful political figures such as Sir Moses Haim Montefiore, a high-ranking British Jew, and Baron Edmond Benjamin James de Rothschild, a French Jew of great standing, spurred Kalischer into action. He seized advantage of this newfound influence and launched a settlement movement. Kalischer traveled around Germany, establishing societies to come to Israel and cultivate the land. Kalischer's son, Wolf Kalischer, founded the *Mikve Israel* agricultural school, located near Tel Aviv, supported financially by Baron Rothschild. Kalischer's zeal and unceasing devotion to his cause, combined with his influence on the powerful men of the day, made him one of the cornerstones of the modern State of Israel.

Moshe Hess, a French philosopher and secular Jew active in the early 1860s, saw the rise of nationalism in Italy and Germany and predicted that the Germans would ultimately be intolerant of the nationalistic aspirations of others. His book, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Last National Question*, though mostly unnoticed in his time, declared that establishing a homeland for the Jews in Palestine was the only long-lasting solution to anti-Semitism. Hess



was honored retroactively for his role in establishing the State of Israel.

Despite these small glimmers of hope, anti-Semitism was on the rise in other places. Pogroms in Russia from 1881–1884 destroyed thousands of Jewish homes in 166 towns across the southern empire. While fatalities were few, many families were reduced to poverty. The tsar blamed the Jews for the pogroms and enacted harsh restrictions on them. In the years 1903–

Illustration of Jerusalem as a growing center of commerce and faith 1906, a much more brutal pogrom broke out, killing an estimated 2,000 Jews. Other riots broke out in Odessa from 1859 to 1905 leaving hundreds dead.

These attacks forced the Jews to change their perception of their status in Russia; immigration to the United States and Zionist ideology both experienced an increase following these pogroms. Though most of the Jews fleeing Russia went to the United States, some groups decided to make *aliyah*—a return to the Promised Land.

One of these groups was called *Bilu*. The name is an acronym of a verse in Isaiah 2, which exhorts the “House of Jacob” to “go up.” The goal of Bilu was to reestablish a Jewish community in Israel, thereby “redeeming” it. The first group of Biluim was founded by a group of university students who traveled to Palestine in 1882. They quickly joined the earlier group, Hovevei Zion, and established the agricultural cooperative of Rishon LeZion. Although it initially failed, due to lack of fresh water, Baron Rothschild stepped in and funded a winery in Rishon, which eventually became a profitable business. Baron Rothschild also helped the Biluim establish the city of Zichron Yaacov.

Leon Pinsker, a Polish physician and Zionist who lived in the mid 1800s, was at first convinced by the Enlightenment movement that the solution to anti-Semitism was assimilation. However, the wave of Russian pogroms in the 1870s and 1880s changed his thinking, and he became a proponent of a Jewish state, stating that the perpetually homeless Jews, persecuted for centuries, could only find peace in the land of Israel. His book, *Auto*

Emancipation, unlike Hess' work, made a splash and provoked strong responses. Pinsker, too, became one of the founders of the Hovevei Zion movement funded by Baron Rothschild.

These early Zionists, known as "Proto Zionists," paved the way for the massive waves of immigration to Israel beginning at the end of the 19th century.

Modern Zionism (1894–1939)

Theodor Herzl, Father of the State of Israel

In 1894, Theodor Herzl, an assimilated Jewish Viennese journalist, was in France covering the trial of Alfred Dreyfus for his newspaper. Dreyfus, a Jew and captain in the French army, was accused of trumped-up charges of spying for Germany. The trial inflamed anti-Semitic feelings across France. Herzl was traumatized that such outbursts of hatred toward Jews could take place in one of the most cultured countries of Europe at the time. The Dreyfus Affair, as it became known, became a turning point in Herzl's life, and consequently, in the Zionist movement.

Unaware of the earlier Zionist writings of people like Hess and Pinsker, Herzl formulated his own ideas in his book, *The Jewish State*:



Theodor Herzl

We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us. In vain we are loyal patriots, sometimes superloyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens.

As cited in Eliezar Ehrmann, *Readings in Jewish History: From the American Revolution to the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 44.

It was time, declared Herzl, to put the Zionist plan into action. In 1897, Herzl called for a world Zionist convention to take place in Basel, Switzerland. Hundreds of delegates from throughout the world attended, prompting Herzl to write, "In Basel, I created the Jewish state. Were I to say this aloud I would be greeted by universal laughter. But five years hence, certainly fifty years hence, everyone will perceive it." Herzl, who died at the age of 44 in 1904 before his dream of a Jewish state was actualized, missed predicting the declaration of the State of Israel by one year.

Two Schools of Thought

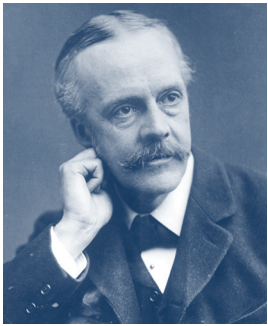
Two schools of Zionist thought arose in the early 19th century—one sought to create a national Jewish homeland that would serve as a refuge and haven for oppressed Jewry, and a second maintained that Israel should not merely be a place of Jewish refuge, but primarily a spiritual and cultural center for the Jewish people and, indeed, for the world. While the two schools are generally compatible, the views did clash in the early 1900s.

In 1903, the Zionist movement became deeply divided over whether to accept the offer of Uganda, Africa, as a temporary Jewish haven. The idea was particularly attractive because Jews in Russia were suffering from terrible persecution. And while many Zionists were eager to accept the offer, the notion of "only Palestine," the Holy Land of the Bible, prevailed.

Balfour Declaration

In 1917 Britain, shortly after receiving control of Palestine from the Turks following the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the close of World War I, issued the famous Balfour Declaration. Lord Arthur Balfour was a former Prime Minister of England and later its Foreign Minister. *The Balfour Declaration* stated Great Britain's commitment to establish a "national homeland for the Jewish people." While it stopped short of declaring Palestine *the* homeland of the Jews, it was the first time Zionist aspirations were realized. In 1922, the Balfour Declaration was formally recognized by the League of Nations, which allocated Palestine as a "British Mandate" (i.e., under British regional administration) and reiterated the promise of establishing a homeland for the Jewish

people in Palestine. The government stipulated that the emerging Jewish nation appoint an agency to run Jewish affairs in Palestine, and the Jewish Agency was born.



Lord Arthur Balfour

As the Jewish population in Palestine grew, Arab resistance became more vocal and more violent. After the explosive “Jaffa riots” of 1921, in which dozens of Jews were brutally killed and over a hundred wounded during a two-day period in May, the British government decided to restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine, on the grounds that the Jewish population was a disruption to the economy. In 1929, another Arab riot broke out in Jerusalem due to escalating tensions over the Western Wall, and a riot in Hebron, also killing dozens of Jews, ended in the evacuation of the Jewish population of Hebron by the British police forces. The Haganah (forerunner of the Israel Defense Forces) and the Irgun, an underground military organization founded by Ze’ev Jabotinsky, were created in response to this decade of violence.

While Jewish immigration slowed through the 1920s, it increased again with the rise of the Third Reich and the subsequent persecution of Jews in Europe prior to the Holocaust. The new surge in immigration again led to intense Arab riots, which lasted from 1936–1939. Though the Haganah and Irgun fought back to protect the Jews, by the end, hundreds of Jews had been murdered in British Mandate Palestine. Approximately 5,000 Arabs had been killed, as well. The riots were politically devastating also, leading to the issuance of the 1939 White Paper, which limited Jewish immigration and promised to create an independent Arab state within ten years.

In 1940, the British government banned Jews from purchasing land in most of Palestine. Despite the restrictions and the shift in British policy, the Jewish Agency officially decided to support Britain against Nazi aggression in WWII. This was the general policy of the Zionists, wherever they lived. Palestine was bombed by the Italians, in the hopes of striking against British interests in the Middle East. However, a small group broke from the Haganah and fought against the British in Palestine. The group, called the Lehi or Stern Gang, was led by Avraham Stern, whose parents had been on a boat heading for Palestine, which was turned away by the British. They consequently died at the hands of the Nazis. The Lehi operated for many years, working toward its twin goals of evacuating the British from Palestine and allowing unrestricted immigration for the Jews. Eventually, it was absorbed into the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in May 1948.

Birth of Israel (1946–1948)

Following World War II, Britain maintained its policy of limited immigration in an attempt to appease the Arab world. Zionist groups organized illegal immigration, and small boats carrying homeless, paper-less Jews arrived in the shores of Palestine. These Jews, overwhelmingly survivors of the Holocaust, were looking to start over again in their homeland; however, thousands of these illegal immigrants were denied entry to Palestine and sent to Cyprus internment camps.

They waited there for years, in the hopes of eventually being allowed into their homeland. The Jewish population, incensed over Britain’s actions, especially in light of the depth of the tragedy of the Holocaust, began to retaliate against British rule. The resistance culminated in the 1946 bombing of the British headquarters, which had been housed in the King David Hotel. However, the resistance crumbled after the bombing, due to international outrage and controversy and condemnation within the Zionist community. Over 100,000 Jews were arrested and interrogated. After this debacle, Great Britain decided to hand over the question of the Jewish state to the United Nations.

The UN appointed a special committee, the Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the UN voted—with thirty-three countries in favor, thirteen against, and ten abstaining—to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, with Jerusalem remaining under UN



Illegal Jewish immigrants arriving at the Haifa Port in 1946

control. The Partition Plan detailed its non-binding recommendations for the state borders. The Jewish state would consist of the land stretching from Haifa to Rehovot, the Eastern Galilee, and the Negev, including Eilat.

The Arab land would include the Western Galilee, the town of Acre, the Samaritan and Judean highlands, and the southern coast from Ashdod through the Gaza Strip. The land given to the Jews included the areas heavily populated with Jews; the Arab lands consisted of areas with mostly Arab populations. The Arabs received most of the water sources. The Jews received a bigger percentage of Mandatory Palestine, to accommodate for projected growth in immigration, but much of that was the Negev, which was not arable.

Immediately following the UN decision, the Arab States declared that any attempt to construct a Jewish state within Palestine was tantamount to war, and they responded in kind. As the British forces slowly withdrew, a war broke out between the Jewish and Arab communities within Palestine.

Though at first the Arab army had the advantage, as the fighting continued, it became clear that the Jews,

who were better organized and better financed due to their own government and taxation system, were not going to succumb easily.

As the Jewish army, led by the Palmach (the fighting force of the Haganah) began to overpower their Arab adversaries, Palestinian Arabs began to leave in droves, fearing Jewish revenge. Before the official declaration of an Israeli state, over 200,000 Arabs had fled Palestine. Most of them, anticipating an Arab victory, planned to return.

On May 14, 1948, after the last of the British forces left Palestine, David Ben-Gurion declared the creation of the State of Israel. The new state was recognized immediately by U.S. President Harry S. Truman and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. The neighboring Arab countries—Egypt,



Illegal Jewish immigrants aboard the Hagana ship 'Jewish State' at Haifa Port in 1947

TransJordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq—immediately rejected the state and declared war, adding the forces of actual countries to what had previously been only a “civil” war in Palestine between Arabs and Jews.

In 1949, an armistice was signed, bringing an end to the Israeli War of Independence. Despite the tremendous odds favoring the Arab allies, both in terms of numbers and military might, Israel miraculously drove off the attacking enemies and thwarted their attempts to destroy the fledgling Jewish state. According to the terms of the agreement, Israel reconquered much of its land—approximately 50 percent more than had been allotted to the Jews in the UN Partition Plan. Egypt gained control of the Gaza Strip, and Jordan occupied the West Bank.

Despite internationally guaranteed assurances to the contrary, Jordan expelled all the Jews and restricted them from visiting their holy sites in Jordanian-held land. This state of affairs continued until after the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel regained control of the West Bank. Only then could Jews pray at the “Wailing Wall”—the Western Wall of the Second Temple—again. Only then under Jewish rule all religions could be assured that their holy sites would receive proper treatment and that free access to these sites would be maintained.

Building a New Nation (1950s–1960s)

Young Israel had to contend with a massive influx of new immigrants. After its gates were opened following the war, thousands and thousands of Jews made *aliyah*. Between 1948 and 1951, over 680,000 new immigrants arrived on the shores of Israel; by the end of 1958, Israel’s tenth anniversary, the population had grown from 800,000 to nearly two million. The new immigrants were mainly Holocaust survivors and Jews fleeing Arab lands due to increased persecution.

Many arrived with little or no possessions and were housed in *ma’abarot* (refugee camps). The *ma’abarot* were crowded and lacked adequate sanitation facilities to accommodate the tremendous population. Eventually, the camps were absorbed into the surrounding towns or became towns on their own. *Ma’abarot* became towns including Kiryat Shmona, Sderot, and Yokneam. The last camps were closed in 1963.

Doubling the young country's population in the course of a few short years caused a massive strain on Israel's economy. Israel's first decade is known as the Austerity Period (*Tkufat HaTsena*). In order to provide for the burgeoning population, Israel rationed food, clothes, and furniture. Aid, though, flowed into the country, mainly from the U.S. government, Jewish organizations worldwide, and reparations from post-war Germany.

The last, occurring after Ben-Gurion signed a reparations agreement with West Germany, caused an outbreak of controversy, stemming from many who strongly felt Israel should conduct no business with Germany.

By the end of the first decade, Israel had made great strides in creating a modern industrialized nation. Improvements and modernization were made in every sector, from housing, to agriculture, to the road system, to telecommunications, to electrical networks. Israel had a growing shipping fleet and a national airline (El-Al), and continued to develop its industry and its existing natural resources.

Fragile Relationships and Security

Though business and industry boomed, the country was still fraught with security problems. Diplomatically, Israel was relatively isolated, since none of its Arab neighbors would recognize Israel as a country. The Arab countries received large quantities of arms from the Soviet Union and instituted a boycott against Israel to demoralize and impoverish the young country. Israel sought to combat the isolation by forming allegiances with emerging African countries and with France; France became Israel's leading supplier of arms. And though Israel had signed armistice agreements, the treaties did not end the hostilities.

During the 1950s, Israel was frequently attacked, mainly from *fedayeen*—terrorists entering the country through Egyptian-occupied Gaza Strip. In the 1950s, efforts toward a peaceable treaty with Egypt were dashed when Egypt discovered an Israeli spy ring, which was trying to blow up an American information agency in Egypt, in the hopes of creating tension between the United States and Egypt. The debacle, called the “Lavon Affair,” after then-Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon, struck a blow to Egypt-Israel relations.

The relationship deteriorated even further when Egypt blockaded the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran, near Eilat, effectively preventing Israel from importing or exporting goods, which threatened to damage Israel's economy. Terrorist attacks increased, and Israel became increasingly alarmed that the Sinai Peninsula was being transformed into an Egyptian military base. When Egypt, Syria, and Jordan signed a military alliance, Israel's fears were confirmed. In 1956, Israel conducted a pre-emptive strike on Egypt, with the support of Britain and France. Israel was quickly able to capture the Sinai Peninsula. However, under pressure from the United States and the Soviet Union, Israel gradually withdrew its forces, and the UN stationed an emergency force there (UNEF) to ensure Israel's access to shipping rights.

Six-Day War (June 1967)

The end of 1964 brought more war and terror to Israel's borders, starting with the founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which encouraged and supported guerrilla tactics against Israelis. In 1964, Israel completed work on the National Water Carrier, which would divert water from the Jordan River into the south of Israel, fulfilling Ben-Gurion's dream of cultivating the Negev region. The Water Carrier became a source of tension between Israel and Syria, though, as the Arabs attempted to divert the water out of Israel's reach. Terrorist raids across the Jordanian and Egyptian borders increased, and again, Egypt moved large amounts of troops into the Sinai Peninsula and blocked Israel's access to the Straits of Tiran. Israel faced hostility on three borders—



A column of armored half-tracks manned by IDF reservists during the Six-Day War in 1967

from the Egyptians, Jordanians, and Syrians.

Instead of waiting for an attack, Israel, now led by Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, made a pre-emptive strike, and early one June morning in 1967, succeeded in wiping out most of Egypt's air force.

Within six days, the Israeli forces had struck a devastating blow to the three Arab countries and succeeded in gaining the Golan Heights from Syria, the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the Old City of Jerusalem from Jordan.

Despite its overwhelming victory in the Six-Day War, Israel found itself facing another war—a War of Attrition. From 1967–1970, Israel had to fend off sporadic fighting from the Egyptian forces and the PLO, whose numbers had increased following Palestinian flight into Jordan during the Six-Day War. Egypt was determined to gain back the Sinai Peninsula, the PLO was determined to eradicate the “Zionist entity,” and the attacks led to heavy fighting, mainly on the borders of the Suez Canal.

Israel responded to the military attacks, and both sides suffered heavy casualties. During this war, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol died in office of a heart attack and was succeeded by Golda Meir, who was the first female Prime Minister of Israel, and the only woman to have led a Middle Eastern state in modern times. Finally, the War of Attrition came to an end in 1970, as Egypt and Israel signed another cease-fire agreement. Egypt had gained nothing during the war, as the cease-fire lines remained the same as they did after 1967.



Young Druzes from Dalyat El Carmel express their solidarity for Israel during the Six-Day War

Rise of the PLO

The Palestinian Liberation Organization—the PLO—is perhaps the most legitimized, the most recognized, and the best-financed terrorist organization in the world. Founded in 1964 in the West Bank, its goal was the liberation of Palestine and the destruction of the “Zionist entity.” In 1974, the UN recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. The PLO called for the right of return for all Palestinian refugees and, like the Arab states that backed it, refused to recognize Israel's right to exist.

The PLO advocated guerrilla warfare tactics to weaken and demoralize the Israelis. The PLO instigated incursions into Israel from the border countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as from inside Israel entering from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

After the debacle of the Six-Day War, in which the Arab countries suffered massive losses of forces and weaponry, support for the PLO increased, and the path to leadership was wide open for then-chairman Yasser Arafat.

During the War of Attrition, from 1967–1970, the PLO, which was then based in Jordan, launched attacks on the Beit Shean region. Israel responded by entering Jordan with force, retreating only under Jordanian military pressure. In September 1970, known as Black September, King Hussein of Jordan launched an attack on the PLO, hoping to reestablish his monarchy over the land, as the Palestinians in Jordan were severely undermining the rule of law in that country.



Yasser Arafat was the most well known of the PLO leaders

As a consequence, the PLO was expelled from Jordan. Both the Jordanians and PLO members suffered heavy losses, with as many as 3,000–5,000 Palestinians killed by the Jordanians. The PLO then established itself in Lebanon.

In 1974, the PLO made the decision to shift from a tactic of pure warfare to that of diplomacy. Arafat and his Fatah group became the dominant faction, although other parties within the PLO formed the more militant Rejectionist Front, which claimed that the PLO was not doing enough to reach its goals. At this point, once it advocated diplomatic tactics, the UN recognized the PLO as a legitimate group. Fatah created the Ten Point Program, which called for Palestinian autonomy over any piece of land determined to be part of Palestine, and an eventual creation of a bi-national state in which all citizens would enjoy equal rights and status. Though

it seemed like a tentative step toward peace, many Israelis felt that the Ten Point Program was simply camouflaging the PLO's true agenda, which was to improve its ability to attack Israel.

The PLO became a victim of internal strife. The Arafat-led Fatah faction called for diplomatic measures, while the hard-line Rejectionist Front rebuffed such calls. During the Lebanese Civil War, the PLO fought against the Syrian-supported Lebanese militia (which had originally supported the PLO but changed alliances midway), the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon were besieged, and supporters of Arafat exiled. Thousands of Palestinians died during the civil war.

Following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 to deal with the PLO, the organization officially relocated to Tunis. In 1985, Israel's air force bombed the PLO headquarters there; the PLO subsequently became decentralized and less effective.

In 1988, during the First Intifada, the Palestinian National Council declared an independent State of Palestine. Arafat attempted to continue his diplomatic efforts and agreed to recognize Israel's right to exist within pre-1967 borders, and he renounced PLO terrorism. In 1993, the Oslo Accords were signed. The Palestinian Authority was created, with Arafat at its helm, and the Palestinians were granted autonomy in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank City of Jericho.

The headquarters were moved to Ramallah, and the PLO remained the dominant faction within the Palestinian Authority. In a letter written by Arafat in 1993, he officially committed to ceasing all acts of terrorism and violence. The softening of the PLO's stance led disillusioned Palestinian youth to join the terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah.

In 2007, fighting between Fatah and Hamas led to the Battle of Gaza, in which the militant Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip and forced out Fatah. The Palestinian leadership became divided into the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority-controlled West Bank. The fierce battles killed or wounded hundreds of Palestinians and were condemned by Human Rights Watch for violating humanitarian law.



IDF forces are in a state of constant alert along the borders with Gaza, Lebanon, and the West Bank where Hamas and their terrorist stronghold camps are positioned

Defending Israel's Right to Exist (2008–Today)



Hamas rockets launched from Gaza hit the city of Haifa in Israel

In the ensuing years, Hamas factions have kept up a steady reign of terrorist attacks against Israel. On December 27, 2008, the Israeli air force struck hard against the terrorist infrastructure in Gaza, in an attempt to bring a decisive end to incessant terrorist rocket attacks that for years have caused death, injury, and trauma to Israeli citizens living in the region near Gaza.

While Israel has acted against Hamas in the past, those limited operations were dwarfed by this military action dubbed "Operation Cast Lead."

Initial air strikes targeted Hamas bases, rocket launchers, and weapons caches, as well as the extensive system of smuggling tunnels through which Hamas secures its armaments. Israel estimated that it successfully destroyed nearly fifty percent of Hamas' rocket and missile arsenal. Meanwhile, the IDF positioned artillery batteries and troops along the Gaza border and called up thousands of military reservists, indicating that a ground attack may be imminent.

Rather than ending their attacks, Hamas responded by raining down rockets on southern Israel, killing several



Palestinians protest by burning Israeli and American flags, falsely accusing America and Israel of being the leaders of world terrorism

engaged in an act of aggression against Israel. Israel has responded.” German Chancellor Angela Merkel added her voice, laying the blame for violence at the feet of Hamas.

The words of support from world leaders are welcome and encouraging. Israel’s military actions come after a long period of patience and restraint. Since 2001, thousands of rockets have been fired by Gaza terrorists at Israeli targets. Despite the existence of a “ceasefire” that extended from June until December of 2008, Hamas and its terrorist allies fired over a thousand rockets and mortars at Israel during 2008 alone.

Given Hamas’ continued aggression, and inability and unwillingness to curb attacks on Israel originating from Gaza, Israel has no choice but to stand up and defend her people.

Israelis and injuring and traumatizing scores more. They have promised even more widespread violence.

Reaction in the Arab and Muslim world has been predictable. In Jordan, Syria, Iraq, the Palestinian territories, and elsewhere, protesters burned American and Israeli flags and carried placards expressing ugly sentiments such as “America and the Zionists are the leaders of world terrorism” and “Gaza is Auschwitz.”

But there were encouraging signs as well, as Israel’s allies expressed their support for Israel’s right to defend itself. Of its attackers, a White House spokesman said, “These people are nothing but thugs, so Israel is going to defend its people against terrorists like Hamas.”

Australia’s Deputy Prime Minister called on “Hamas and other militants to cease shelling southern Israel. Obviously they have broken the cease-fire and