

Don't know much about Middle Eastern history

Hamas supporters' ignorance is appalling



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Veteran newsman Brit Hume noted over the weekend that he's been watching interviews with students participating in pro-Palestinian demonstrations and has found them "truly discouraging. The level of ignorance of the history of the region and even the events of the past month is breathtaking."

Why are these young people seething with anger over a situation they don't begin to understand?

I'll leave that troubling question for another day. Instead, I'm going to address less impassioned readers who may not know much about Middle Eastern history for the very good reason that they have jobs and families and a multitude of other concerns.

If that's you, give me five minutes to draw you a map of the long and winding trail that has led to the current conflict.

Start with this observation by the late Charles Krauthammer: Israel "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."

Jews may have also been the earliest anti-imperialists.

Punishments for their rebellion against the Roman Empire in 132 C.E. included slaughter, slavery and expulsion.

Adding insult to injury, Emperor Hadrian renamed Judea, the land of the Jews, "Provincia Syria Palaestina."

Palestine referred to the Philistines, a seafaring people from Greece who settled in the coastal territory of Canaan and became enemies of the Jews. Think David and Goliath, Samson and Delilah.

The Philistines would later be defeated by the Assyrians and the Babylonians and cease to exist as a separate people.

It was not until the seventh century C.E. that an army from Arabia, fired by the new religion of Islam, conquered, occupied and ruled what Jews and Christians had come to call the Holy Land.

Over the centuries that followed, one empire after another ruled Jerusalem, also known as Zion, and the territories around it. Small communities of Jews remained and survived in Palestine, which never became an independent nation-state.

Jews forced to flee to other lands and their descendants reminded themselves of their roots by closing Passover dinners with “Next Year in Jerusalem” and facing the ruins of the Temple of Solomon when praying.

Early in the 16th century, the Ottoman Turks conquered and ruled the land, using their own names for their provinces.

In the late 19th century, Jews in Europe, increasingly subject to pogroms and other forms of persecution, began returning to their ancient homeland, where they bought land, irrigated deserts, drained swamps, and built collective farms known as kibbutzim.

In 1909, they founded a city on a sand dune north of Jaffa and called it Tel Aviv. The economic opportunities they created attracted immigrants, not least Arabs, from surrounding nations.

After World War I, the British Empire displaced the Ottoman Empire, and with a hat tip to the Romans renamed the land Palestine.

In 1921, the British awarded the eastern 77% of Palestine to the Hashemites, the clan that had for centuries ruled Mecca but whose continuing presence in Arabia would not be tolerated by the ascendant royal House of Saud.

Under a mandate from the League of Nations, the British were to develop in the remainder of Palestine a “Jewish National Home” in recognition of “the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine.”

ILLUSTRATION BY HUNTER

The goal, Winston Churchill said in 1922, was “the further development of the existing Jewish community” that is “in Palestine as of right and not on sufferance.”

In 1947, after World War II and the Holocaust, the U.N. proposed partitioning western Palestine into two states: one for the Jews and one for the Arabs.

Jewish leaders agreed. Arab leaders did not and, joined by five neighboring Arab nations, waged a war to kill the fledgling Jewish state. They failed and called their failure the Nakba, the catastrophe.

In the years that followed, Jews were driven out of Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Yemen and other countries where they had lived since before the advent of Islam.

Israel absorbed the refugees. Today, only about 30% of Israelis are from families who emigrated from Europe.

Egypt, Syria and Jordan waged another fullfl edged war to wipe Israel off the map in 1967. Again, the Israelis prevailed, dislodging Egyptians from Gaza and Jordanians from the West Bank — formerly known as Judea and Samaria — including east Jerusalem from which, after 1948, the Jordanians had expelled the Jews they didn't kill.

The Israelis suggested a “land for peace” deal. But the Arab League issued “The Three No's”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel.

In 2005, the Israelis did something unprecedented: In the hope of peaceful coexistence, they voluntarily withdrew from Gaza, uprooting almost 9,000 Israeli citizens from a territory that had a long Jewish history.

After defeating its rival, Fatah — first in an election and then militarily — Hamas could have made Gaza free from the Israeli border to the sea.

But killing Israelis was its obsession, with support from Iran's rulers who for 44 years have threatened the Jewish-majority state with genocide because, in the brave new empire they intend to establish, there cannot be self-determination for infidels.

In response to the 21st-century holocaust of Oct. 7, Israeli soldiers are stripping Hamas of its military capabilities, so that never again can these savages engage in murderous terrorism on Israeli soil.

To express their opposition to this mission, supporters of Hamas and Tehran and their knownothing fellow travelers spent Veterans Day in New York City pulling down American flags, and Remembrance Day in London draping Palestinian flags over war monuments.

They may not know much about Middle Eastern history and the events of the past month, but we know what they will destroy if we let them.

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