



**Committee for Accuracy in
Middle East Reporting in America**

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Abbas Rewrites History in *NY Times*

It's not particularly surprising that Mahmoud Abbas, often [dubbed "moderate"](#) by the media (as opposed, for instance, to the "[hawkish](#)" Netanyahu), would fabricate about the past, contradicting a clear historical record.

Moreover, given [the direction of the New York Times coverage](#) in recent months, and given its [record of using its Op-Ed page as a platform for anti-Israel propagandists](#), it's not even surprising that the paper would allow Abbas to fabricate in its pages. It's not surprising, but it's also not excusable. Abbas has an [Op-Ed](#) today in the former "Paper of Record," claiming:

SIXTY-THREE years ago, a 13-year-old Palestinian boy was forced to leave his home in the Galilean city of Safed and flee with his family to Syria. He took up shelter in a canvas tent provided to all the arriving refugees. Though he and his family wished for decades to return to their home and homeland, they were denied that most basic of human rights. That child's story, like that of so many other Palestinians, is mine.

It's a sad story, but it's not his story. As blogger [Daled Amos](#) points out, Abbas once let it slip in an Arabic newspaper that his family was not expelled, but left under different circumstances. Daled Amos blogs:

In a *Jerusalem Post* article, Sarah Honig writes about Abbas and his admission that he and his family left Safed on their own:

Fatah's cofounder reminisced at length about his Safed origins and haphazardly let the truth slip out. "Until the nakba" (calamity in Arabic - the loaded synonym for Israeli independence), he recounted, his family "was well-off in Safed." When Abbas was 13, "we left on foot at night to the Jordan River... Eventually we settled in Damascus... My father had money, and he spent his money methodically. After a year, when the money ran out, we began to work. "People were motivated to run away... They feared retribution from Zionist terrorist organizations - particularly from the Safed ones. Those of us from Safed especially feared that the Jews harbored old desires to avenge what happened during the 1929 uprising [Muslim pogroms instigated by the Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, known later for his Nazi sympathies]. This was in the memory of our families and parents... They realized the balance of forces was shifting and therefore the whole town was abandoned on the basis of this rationale - saving our lives and our belongings."

In his *New York Times* Op-Ed, Abbas continues with his historical revisionism:

It is important to note that the last time the question of Palestinian statehood took center stage at the General Assembly, the question posed to the international community was whether our homeland should be partitioned into two states. In November 1947, the General Assembly made its recommendation and answered in the affirmative. Shortly thereafter, Zionist forces expelled Palestinian Arabs to ensure a decisive Jewish majority in the future state of Israel, and Arab armies intervened. War and further expulsions ensued. Indeed, it was the descendants of these expelled Palestinians who were shot and wounded by Israeli forces on Sunday as they tried to symbolically exercise their right to return to their families' homes.

Minutes after the State of Israel was established on May 14, 1948, the United States granted it recognition. Our Palestinian state, however, remains a promise unfulfilled.

Abbas of course doesn't mention why the promise is unfulfilled. Although Palestine's Jews accepted the partition plan, Palestinian Arabs rejected it. Had the plan been accepted by the Arab side, it would have been implemented, and a Palestinian state would have been a fulfilled promise 63 years ago. And even after the rejection of the plan and the Arab war against Israel in 1948, a state of Palestine could have been founded on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, then occupied by Jordan and Egypt respectively. It was not. A Palestinian state would already exist today, moreover, if Yasir Arafat accepted Bill Clinton's offer of a state, or if Mahmoud Abbas himself accepted Ehud Olmert's offer.

The avoidance in Abbas's Op-Ed of any mention of Arab responsibility for Palestinian statelessness is not surprising. Lack of reflection or [self-criticism](#) is a motif of the Op-Ed. Consider Abbas's assertion, quoted above, that the General Assembly partition recommendation was quickly followed by "Zionist forces expell[ing] Palestinian Arabs to ensure a Jewish majority."

In fact, what followed the UN vote was a bloody campaign of Palestinian violence against Jewish civilians.

Historian Benny Morris has noted that

the Palestinian Arab leaders, headed by the exiled AHC chief and Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al Husayni, rejected Partition and launched a three-day general strike, accompanied by a wave of anti-Jewish terrorism in the cities and on the roads. [...]

The United Nations General Assembly vote of 29 November 1947, which supported the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, prompted Arab attacks and sniping against Jewish passers-by in the big towns, and on Jewish traffic on the roads, the following day. The [Arab Higher Committee], which completely rejected Partition, declared a three-day general strike ... thus releasing the Arab urban masses for action. On 2 December an Arab mob, unobstructed by British security forces, stormed through the Jewish commercial centre of Jerusalem, looting and burning shops and attacking Jews. Arab and Jewish snipers exchanged fire in Haifa and attacks were launched on the [Jewish] neighbourhoods in Tel Aviv which adjoined Jaffa and its suburbs. (*The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, pgs 6, 29)

The Palestinian Arab Higher Committee representative to the United Nations admitted as much in April 1948. "The representative of the Jewish Agency told us yesterday that they were not the attackers, that the Arabs had begun the fighting," he said before the UN Security Council. "We did not deny this. We told the whole world that we were going to fight."

Morris further notes that from the end of 1947 to April 1948, Jewish forces opted for a defensive strategy in hopes of maintaining good relations with the Palestinian Arabs. But by April, it became clear the strategy of restraint had failed militarily. The Jews, facing the prospect of being wiped out in the anticipated invasion by neighboring countries, finally switched to offensive operations.

By this point, Professor Ephraim Karsh has pointed out, about 100,000 Palestinian Arabs had already left their homes, some at the urging of their leaders, and some despite appeals by their Jewish neighbors that they remain. Even by mid-May 1948, when Arab countries attacked Israel, and nearly five months after the UN partition vote, almost all of the 300,000 Palestinians who left their homes did so [on their own accord](#) (*Palestine Betrayed*, 237).

Abbas's formulation, then, is ridiculous, as is his claim that Arab armies "intervened" due to the supposed expulsions. They went to war against Israel because they opposed, openly and loudly, the existence of a Jewish state. As Egypt's King Faruq told the *New York Times* a few days before his army joined five other Arab armies to attack the newly declared state of Israel, "I cannot and will not tolerate a Zionist State in the Middle East...."

Ultimately, the Palestinian refugee crisis was one result of this uncompromising and belligerent attitude. One prominent Palestinian, speaking about his dispersed countrymen, noted that "Arab armies ... forced them to emigrate and to leave their homeland, imposed upon them a political and ideological blockade and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which the Jews used to live in Eastern Europe The Arab States succeeded in scattering the Palestinian people and in destroying their unity." The [assertion](#) was made 35 years ago by none other than Mahmoud Abbas.