**MORE FACTS ON THE MYTH OF “THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE”**

By Michael Brown

My May 28th article, “Five Simple Truths about the Mideast Conflict,” elicited some passionate responses from those on both sides of the debate, with the first point in particular proving to be the most controversial: “There is no such thing as a historic ‘Palestinian people” living in the Middle East.’”

Let’s unpack two of the most common assertions, separating myth from fact. Are these statements true or false? We all know that there are several million people living in the West Bank and Gaza who identify as Palestinians today, and regardless of their historic pedigree, they are human beings with real needs. But when a misleading “history” is presented so as to delegitimize Jewish claims to the Israel, the falsehoods must be exposed.

1. The modern Palestinians can trace their lineage back to the ancient Philistines, who were living in the land of Canaan (= Palestine) long before the Israelites had arrived on the scene. True or false? This is completely false as to any lineal or ethnic connection between modern Palestinians and ancient Philistines.

First, the Philistines were Aegean (or Cypriot) sea peoples who migrated to the southern coast of Israel/Canaan in the 12th century BC. It is unclear what relationship they bear with the Philistines who are mentioned in Genesis, hundreds of years earlier. In short, they were not a Semitic people, as the Israelites and Arabs were. Second, from the 8th-5th centuries BC, they were crushed by the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians, ultimately being absorbed by these populations and entirely disappearing from history. In other words, there was a distinct, end of the line for the Philistines roughly 2,500 years ago.

Third, six hundred years after the extinction of the Philistines, and after putting down a Jewish revolt, the Romans changed the name of Judea to Palaestina (in Latin) in order to discourage Jewish patriotism. So, there was no lineal or ethnic connection between the (earlier) Philistine people and the (later) land called Palestine. In fact, the Philistines had previously lived in the western part of the country, on the Mediterranean coast, whereas Palestine originally referred to the eastern part of the country, on the West Bank of the Jordan river.

Fourth. some Muslim leaders have claimed that there was a continuous Arab presence in Palestine dating back to Muslim conquests in the 7th century AD. But this dubious claim, even if true , would still mean that the continuous Jewish presence in the land predated the first major Arab presence by at least 2,000 years, and it would also underscore the fact that there is no connection between the later Arabs and the earlier (extinct) Philistines.

2. Your whole argument about there being no historic, “Palestinian people” is meaningless, since there’s is no such thing as a historic Iraqi people either. Borders were artificially created after World War I.” True or false? False, as to the overall argument, partially true about the artificial borders.

Anyone who knows the history of the modern Middle East will recognize the names of nation-states that existed as such before (such as United Arab Emirates). But not all national identities in the Middle East are of recent origin.

There has certainly been an ancient, historic Egyptian people in the region, to the south of Israel, and an ancient, historic Syrian-Lebanese people, to the north of Israel, while the Iraqi people often traced their heritage back to the ancient kings of Babylon as well as to the golden age of Islam that flourished in their region 700 years ago. In contrast, the Arabs living in Palestine had no such national identity because they had no such ancient, historic roots, not to mention the fact that there were dozens of other (non-Arab) peoples living in Palestine, some of whom had ruled the region for centuries.

In the oft-quoted words of the celebrated Arab-American historian and Princeton University professor, Philip Hitti, testifying before the Anglo-American Committee in 1946, “There is no such thing as ‘Palestine’ in history, absolutely not.” And so, if there was no “Palestine” in the pre-1948 Arab consciousness, there was no Palestinian people. The only people living in Palestine who traced their pedigree back to ancient, biblical times and who awaited the restoration of their ancient homeland were the Jewish people.

But why bother with facts? The old myths and lies are so much more effective.