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Fact, Fallacy, and Foreign Policy: A Conversation about Israel and the Truth

BY NICHOLAS ROMANOW ON DECEMBER 12, 2018 • (LEAVE A COMMENT)

In legal settlements of contentious disputes, the road to resolution begins with establishing facts. This is intuitive, as assessing wrongdoing and responsibility is nearly impossible without an objective assessment of the who, what, when, where, and why. On November 14, influential pro-Israel lobbyist and President of the Zionist Organization of America, **Morton Klein** (<https://zoa.org/about/morton-a-klein/>), came to the University of Texas at Austin to share his **perspectives** (<https://www.breitbart.com/author/mortonklein/>) on the contentious conflict between Israel and Palestine. A conversation with him before his address to the Young Conservatives of Texas revealed that the “discovery” stage of this dispute is very far from complete.

Klein began by preceding his talk with a list of “myths” he intends to dispel. He says — and has previously **written** (<https://www.breitbart.com/the-media/2018/09/30/morton-klein-palestinian-state/>) — that Palestinian statehood is not the fundamental issue, as the Palestinians have been offered statehood numerous times since 1936; the historical record largely corroborates this, though some would argue that the Palestinian side has refused these agreements as a result of other elements of the offers.

“The truth (is) that there is no occupation. Israel has given away all of Gaza (and) 40 percent of Judea/Samaria. That’s where the majority of the Palestinians live. They have their own parliament, their own schools, their own police, their own media, their own newspapers, TV, (and) radio. They control their own lives. The only thing they don’t control is security, and the only

reason Israeli personnel still has to be there for security reasons is that there are still terrorist cells coming to Israel to kill Jews.”

However, Israel’s own Supreme Court **found**

(http://elyon1.court.gov.il/Files_ENG/04/560/020/A28/04020560.A28.pdf) that Judea and Samaria — commonly referred to as the West Bank — are under belligerent occupation by Israeli forces; this ruling gave the Israeli Defense Forces permission to certain activities in occupied territories as allowed by international law, such as seizing land for military purposes. Whether or not these actions are justified, even the Israeli government states that there is an occupation insofar as there is a military force behaving as an occupying force rather than as an extension of domestic law enforcement.

Klein also rejects the issue of Israeli settlements in Palestinian land and said that “There hasn’t been a single new Jewish community built since (the) Oslo (Accord) in (19)93.” This too is contradicted by the state of Israel. The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics **records**

(http://www.cbs.gov.il/ts/IDfcb5bd5fb1415/databank/series_func_e_v1.html?level_1=44&level_2=2&level_3=3) thousands of new construction projects in Judea and Samaria every year since 1995. **Data derived** (<http://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population>) from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics shows that settlement populations have risen from about 100,000 in 1993 to over 400,000 today. Another **report**

(<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/state/law/pages/summary%20of%20opinion%20concerning%20unauthorized%20outposts%20-%20talya%20sason%20adv.aspx#background>) by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledges the creation of illegal outposts in the West Bank and the role of some Israeli agencies aiding such endeavors.

The ability to establish fact is relatively difficult when establishing myth is second nature. One way this is achieved is by diluting and redefining the most basic terms. For instance, Klein balks at the term “Israel-Palestine conflict” and instead insists the situation is an “Arab-Islamic war” against Israel. He questions the legitimacy of Palestine on the grounds that “it was the Romans who renamed Judea-Samaria (as) Palestine when they captured it from the Jews.” These revisions are tricky because they are hard to refute. Yes, it is true that “Palestine (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/origin-of-quot-palestine-quot>)” is a Roman name. Yet, this does not establish new facts about the nature and legitimacy of Palestine versus seeking to signal animosity toward the “enemies” of Israel.

Many students of the University of Texas at Austin are familiar with the vitriol of this issue. There are a number of student organizations that represent various sides of the conflict, and the **campus**

(<https://thetexasorator.com/2018/04/02/2018-4-2-holy-land-common-ground-introduction/>) is no stranger to protests and demonstrations from all sides. “One reason (the Israel-Palestine Conflict) has become a hot topic,” according to Klein, “is because there are certain Arab countries who have hired full-time professionals to go

on campus — these are not students, they are full-time professionals — to organize hatred against the Jewish state.” The dismissal of certain sentiments as mere propaganda is a well-worn tactic; it is employed on an almost daily basis in American left-right politics. Yet, in this situation, the stakes are much higher. While those in Washington bicker over how far to cut our taxes, decisions made in the Levant often result in death and destruction.

This makes the scarcity of facts an even more dire problem. Tautologies are effective because they seem so logical. Making a slight semantic specification might seem harmless, but these tactics provide a false sense of rationality that can quickly lead to chaos. Military operations that result in harm require careful cost-benefit analysis. Exciting lies spread much quicker than boring truths. This presents a grave hazard for democracies: a system of self-government infiltrated by falsehood cannot make moral or rational choices.

An even graver danger lies within what Klein sees as the necessary next step. When asked about the recent exchange in rocket-fire between Gaza and Israel, Klein opposed the subsequent ceasefire and argued that “Israel should have responded with enormous force” and that “it is time to crush the Hamas regime, so they won’t ever dream of hitting Israel again.” His outlook was neither rosy nor hopeful. Klein believes that an escalation by Israel would “increase the likelihood of peace.”

Klein’s Zionist Organization of America is a formidable force in shaping American policy toward Israel. In the words of the group’s president, “I don’t think there is any other significant Jewish organization that has made it clear how much they support the President the way ZOA does.” The ZOA recently gave an award to John Bolton, President Trump’s national security advisor, and last year, they **hosted** (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?436770-2/steve-bannon-addresses-zionist-organization-america-dinner>) former Trump strategist Steve Bannon as a speaker at an event.

College students, especially at UT, are exposed to the Israel-Palestine conflict’s rancor and emotion, not its history and its importance. The mere association of Donald Trump with the pro-Israel cause makes some recoil and others cheer. This is the nature of today’s tribal politics which operate off guilt by association. These trends bode poorly for the future of the conflict. Morton Klein is undoubtedly an opinionated individual who has managed to secure considerable influence. Many students will take issue with his sentiments. The task is not only to find out who is right, but to discover who has the courage to question, examine, and speak out.

The importance of truth cannot be understated. We know from **history** (<https://thetexasorator.com/2018/10/11/when-diplomacy-gets-dangerous/>) what happens when foreign policy is made without a basis of fact. This is why the Constitution was framed so that Congress, not the president, has the power to declare wars and ratify treaties. Yet, the responsibility for sound foreign policy doesn’t fall at the feet of legislators alone; rather, it is incumbent upon the citizen to play his or

her vital role in the statecraft of a republic. Especially within the most influential democracy the world has ever seen, the struggle between fact and fallacy must be fought by citizens and for citizens, and not left to the powerful few.



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