

**Answering
Tough Questions
About
Israel**

**Produced by
StandWithUs**



Detail of Israel



Is Israel stealing water from the Palestinians?

Israel is at the forefront of innovations in water sustainability and a leader in seeking comprehensive, regional solutions to managing this vital but scarce resource. Israel is sharing, not stealing, water. It is giving its own water to Palestinians in significantly greater quantities than it agreed to under the Oslo Accords (40 percent more each year between 2008 and 2012). Nor does Israel use West Bank water. It uses the same water sources today that it used prior to 1967, and settlements are supplied by Israel's national water system. Furthermore, Israel helped Palestinians modernize their water systems after 1967, increasing the available fresh water supply by 275 percent and expanding the number of Palestinian towns connected to running water from four to 309. Some Palestinian communities do face water shortages today, but this is because Palestinian leaders have failed to maintain their water infrastructure properly, not because of Israel.



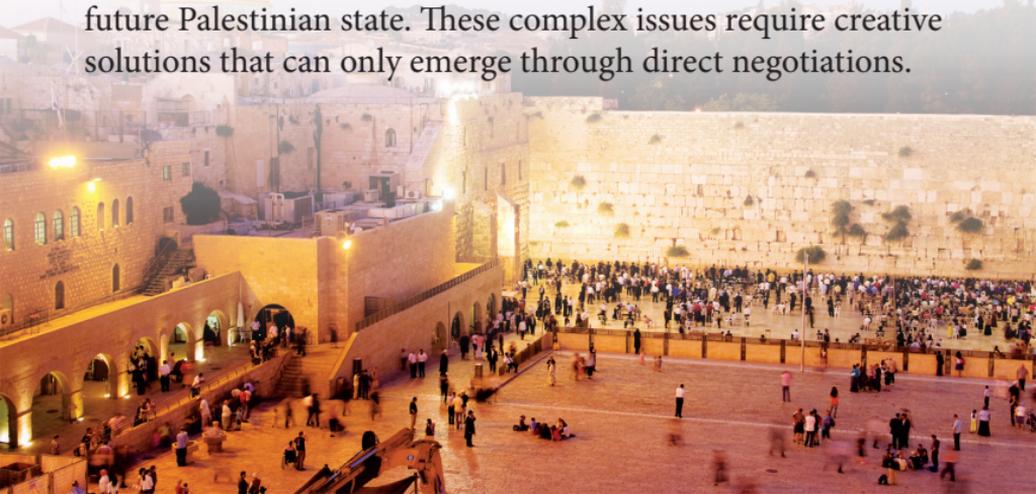
Does Israel evict Palestinians from their homes in eastern Jerusalem?

No people should ever be unfairly evicted from their homes. In Israel, a country ruled by law, evictions occur only when tenants don't pay rent or homes are built illegally, and the laws apply equally to Arabs and Jews. If evictions are issued unjustly, tenants can appeal to Israel's court system, which is respected for its independence and willingness to challenge government policy. Eastern Jerusalem's Arab residents can rent or buy homes throughout the city, and the Jerusalem municipality has set aside enough land to accommodate their housing needs through 2030.



Shouldn't Israel divide Jerusalem so Palestinians can have their capital in eastern Jerusalem?

Israel made such offers in 2000 and 2008, but Palestinian leaders said no. Dividing Jerusalem is not a simple process. The Jewish people have profound ties to the city, which has been their spiritual and physical capital for 3,000 years. It has never been the capital of any other people or nation. Furthermore, Jews again became the majority of the city's population over 150 years ago and have lived in eastern Jerusalem for centuries, except between 1948 and 1967, when Jordan illegally controlled the area, expelled all Jews, and desecrated Jewish holy sites. Only Israel has ensured freedom of worship and protection of holy sites for all religious groups. Finally, according to a 2011 poll, only 30 percent of Jerusalem's Arab residents want to become citizens of a future Palestinian state. These complex issues require creative solutions that can only emerge through direct negotiations.



Should the U.S. continue to give money to Israel when we have serious economic problems at home?

The U.S. assists Israel because Israel is a critical strategic and economic asset, and it is our only democratic ally in the Middle East. Israel and the U.S. share fundamental values, and the relationship provides a wealth of mutual benefits in trade, strategic interests, cutting-edge medical and technological research, and other fields. Aid to Israel is a boon for the U.S. economy. It helps protect Israeli businesses, which have created countless jobs in America since 2000 by investing over \$60 billion in the U.S. economy. Israel must also spend 75 percent of the aid it receives in the U.S., providing contracts worth billions of dollars and jobs for tens of thousands of Americans in 47 states. The U.S. spends hundreds of billions on other regions and governments all over the world—from Egypt to the Palestinian Authority, from Europe to South Korea—providing economic aid, military assistance, and defense.



The UN has repeatedly condemned Israeli actions. Why does the U.S. keep protecting Israel at the UN?

The UN should condemn Hamas, other terrorist groups, and dictatorial regimes, not Israel. Hamas denies its people in Gaza personal freedom, has assassinated or imprisoned hundreds of its political rivals to set up a fundamentalist Islamic state, persecutes LGBT people and Christians, and repeatedly chooses violence against Israel, forcing Israel to defend its citizens militarily. The UN should protect Palestinians and Israelis by condemning and working to disarm Hamas. Unfortunately, many UN member states that regularly condemn Israel actually support human rights abusers like Hamas. As such, the U.S. regularly opposes anti-Israel resolutions to uphold international law and human rights.



Don't Palestinians have a right to ask the UN to establish an independent Palestinian state?

The Palestinians' unilateral bid for statehood through the UN was an effort to bypass negotiations with Israel and avoid making the tough compromises necessary for peace, which include recognizing Jewish rights to self-determination. Their unilateral move also violates all international treaties the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) has signed with Israel as well as UN resolutions 242 and 338, which call for negotiations to establish borders. The only path to a Palestinian state is a negotiated peace agreement with Israel, which recognizes the rights of both peoples to statehood and self-determination.



Aren't the Jews in Israel white European colonialists?

The Jewish people are indigenous to Israel, the birthplace of their identity and unique culture, and have maintained a documented presence there for over 3,000 years. Half of modern Israel's Jews returned home to Israel from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Jews who came from Europe were not colonialists. They did not represent a foreign power and rejected any identification with European nations. They were idealists who sought to restore and preserve their unique heritage and fought for the same rights that are granted to all peoples: self-determination and independence in their ancestral home. Over 150 years ago, Jews returned in ever-larger numbers, again became the majority in Jerusalem in the 1860s, and established Tel Aviv in 1909. In 1920 the international community officially recognized the indigenous rights of the Jewish people and endorsed the restoration of the Jewish homeland.



Wasn't the establishment of Israel a grave injustice to the Palestinians?

In an act of historical justice, the international community recognized that after millennia of persecution and expulsions, the Jewish people had a right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland, like all other unique national groups. The Jewish people accepted the fact that others now also lived in their land and supported the UN's 1947 recommendation to partition the Jewish homeland so Palestinian Arabs could establish history's first Palestinian state, and Israel granted equal rights to all Arabs in its borders. Unfortunately, Arab leaders refused to accept a Jewish state, no matter how small, and dismissed any compromises that would allow both Jews and Palestinian Arabs to fulfill their aspirations to self-determination. Instead, they launched an unsuccessful war to seize the whole territory, with disastrous consequences for the majority of Palestinians. The violent rejectionism of Palestinian and Arab leaders was, and continues to be, an injustice to Israelis and Palestinians alike.





Hasn't Israeli intransigence been the main obstacle to a two-state solution?

A two-state solution requires mutual recognition and mutual respect. Over the past 80 years, Israel has repeatedly shown its willingness to make far-reaching compromises and accept a two-state solution. It accepted two-state partition proposals in 1937 and 1947, and it offered the Palestinians land for peace in 2000 and 2008. Unfortunately, Palestinian and Arab leaders have rejected all of these peace plans and refused to accept the existence of a Jewish state in any territory. Israel is eager to invest in peace as long as it has assurances that Palestinian leaders will control terrorist groups like Hamas, end incitement to hatred and violence, and uphold a genuine, lasting agreement. When Palestinian leaders say yes to real peace based on mutual recognition and respect, the aspirations of both peoples to statehood and self-determination can be fulfilled.

Why won't Israel simply leave the West Bank?

Israel has repeatedly offered territorial compromises, but Palestinian and Arab leaders have consistently said no to establishing the first Palestinian state in history. They said no in 1937, 1947, 2000, and 2008 because saying yes would have meant accepting Jewish rights to self-determination. Israel is in the West Bank because Palestinian leaders have refused to make peace, terrorists from the area continue to endanger Israeli civilians, and Israel has no assurances that the Palestinian Authority can maintain law and order. In addition, Israel has legitimate claims to the territory, which is located in the heart of the Jewish people's ancestral homeland. When Palestinian leaders make establishing their own state a higher priority than destroying Israel, there can be compromises that will lead to peaceful coexistence.



Doesn't Israel realize that its presence in the West Bank is illegal?

Its presence is not illegal. Israel entered the West Bank only after being attacked by Jordan in 1967. Under customary law and the Hague Conventions, Israel was obligated to administer the area until peace was achieved. UN Resolution 242 (1967) assumed Israel would administer the territories until Arab countries were willing to negotiate new, more secure borders, as Egypt did in 1979 and Jordan did in 1994. Unfortunately, Palestinian leaders have rejected every Israeli offer of peace and territorial compromise and have delayed continuing negotiations to determine borders. In the meantime, terrorists in the area continue to threaten Israeli civilians, forcing Israel to maintain its security activity as agreed upon in the Oslo Accords. When Palestinian leaders finally say yes to peace, Israel's presence will no longer be necessary.

UN RESOLUTION
242

Are Israel's settlements in the West Bank illegal?

The settlements are politically contentious both inside and outside of Israel, but they are legal according to numerous legal scholars. Israel has legal, historic, and security claims to the West Bank, the cradle of Jewish history, which Palestinians want for their future state. These factors and the legal background of the area have led many scholars, including former Dean of Yale Law School Eugene Rostow, to consider the settlements entirely legal and the West Bank as disputed, not occupied, territory. Settlements do not violate UN Resolution 242 or Palestinian-Israeli agreements signed in the Oslo Accords. Even so, Israel has not authorized new settlements since the 1993 Oslo Accords, and it even agreed to freeze building in existing settlements during negotiations in 2010. Settlements, which cover less than 1.7 percent of West Bank land, are one of many issues to be resolved in peace talks. Israel's peace offers reflect its acceptance of Palestinian aspirations for statehood. When Palestinian leaders also recognize the Jewish people's rights to statehood, the conflict can be resolved.



Aren't West Bank settlements the main obstacle to peace?

Settlements are a symptom, not a cause, of the conflict. There were no settlements when Palestinian leaders began violence against Jews in 1920 or when Arab and Palestinian leaders launched wars and terrorism against Israel between 1948 and 1967. Israel sought territorial compromise and peace in 2005 when it evacuated all settlements in Gaza and four large settlements in the West Bank, but instead terrorism and hostility increased. Israel offered to dismantle many West Bank settlements for peace in 2000 and 2008, but Palestinian leaders said no. When Palestinian leaders return to the negotiating table in good faith, the settlements, which comprise less than 2 percent of West Bank land, and other outstanding issues can be resolved.



Why is Israel maintaining its illegal blockade of Gaza and imposing collective punishment on Gaza's civilians?

Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist organization controlling Gaza, is violating international law and inflicting collective punishment on both Palestinian and Israeli civilians. The hard fact is that Hamas (whose charter calls for the murder of Jews and “obliteration” of Israel) is engaged in a genocidal war against Israel and has fired over 17,000 rockets and mortars at Israeli civilians since 2005, when Israel completely withdrew from the area. The UN Palmer Report confirmed that Israel’s blockade to prevent weapons transfers is legal and appropriate under international law. The Red Cross and WHO reported that there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza, in part because Israel facilitates the weekly shipment of thousands of tons of aid. The blockade merely requires Israeli inspection of shipments to ensure that terrorist groups are not importing weaponry. Gaza experienced significant economic growth in previous years even with the blockade, but Palestinians will not be able to fully prosper until Hamas ends its war against Israel.



How can Israel claim it no longer occupies Gaza when it controls Gaza's airspace, waters, and borders?

Israel has had no presence in Gaza since 2005. Gaza is ruled exclusively by Palestinians and also shares borders with Egypt, where Israel has no control. Hamas, which controls Gaza, is in an ongoing state of war with Israel, constantly targeting innocent Israelis with rocket fire. Israel controls its own borders with Gaza, along with Gaza's airspace and coastline, to protect civilians and stop Hamas and its affiliates from importing weapons for terrorism. When the government of Gaza is no longer at war with Israel, these measures will become unnecessary, and the Gaza Strip, which is located on the same beautiful Mediterranean coast as Tel Aviv, will be able to flourish.



When will Israel remove checkpoints, which inconvenience the Palestinian people?

Checkpoints save lives. They were a direct response to the brutal wave of violence unleashed by terrorists against Israel in the second intifada. As terrorism has decreased in recent years, checkpoints were removed. By 2012 only 10 remained, and the human rights group B'Tselem reported that Palestinians could move relatively freely in the West Bank. The checkpoints that still exist remain vital to the safety of Israeli civilians because there are still frequent attempts to attack Israelis and smuggle weapons into Israel. Forcing innocent Palestinians to go through checkpoints is not what Israel wants, any more than the U.S. wants to inconvenience travelers at airports, but as long as terrorists hide among the civilian population, Israel has no choice but to maintain its safety measures. Checkpoints will no longer be necessary once terrorism ends and a genuine peace emerges between Israelis and Palestinians. This is why peace negotiations are so crucial.





Why does Israel believe it has a right to possess nuclear weapons but that Iran does not?

Israel is the only country in the world that has been openly threatened with extinction by its neighbors since its rebirth in 1948. Discussion about Israel's nuclear weapons should begin only when Israel's existence is accepted in the region. Any nuclear weapons Israel may have would only be used as a last resort to defend against an imminent threat to its survival. In contrast, the regime in Iran has been publicly threatening to annihilate Israel for years and is promising to enrich enough uranium to do so. There is a difference. Israel is not threatening its neighbors with genocide. Iran is.

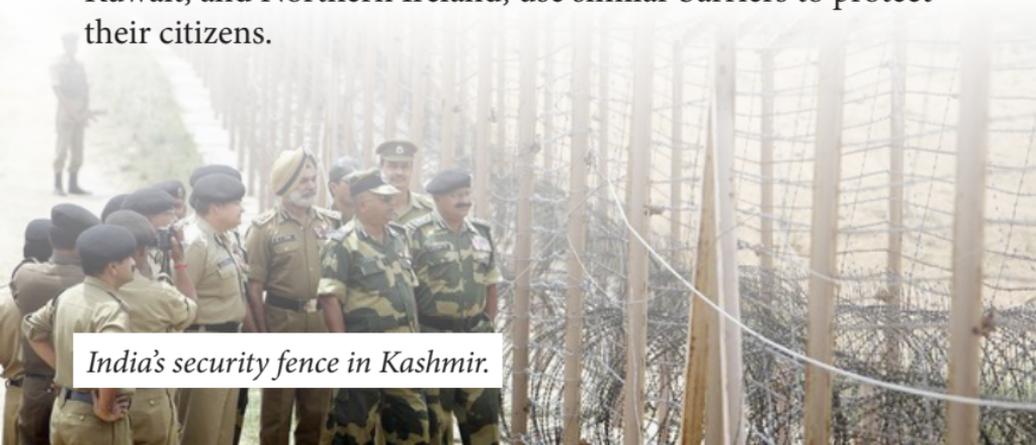


Does Israel use disproportionate force during its military operations?

The legal term “disproportionate force” does not refer to equivalence in casualties or weaponry but to military actions that cause more civilian harm than is warranted by the military gains. Knowing that civilians always suffer from wars, Israel has practiced restraint despite Hamas’ relentless attacks against Israeli citizens though most countries would not tolerate even one rocket attack. Israel has been widely praised for attempting to minimize harm to Palestinian civilians during military operations by warning of impending attacks, aborting operations if civilians are in target zones, and ensuring delivery of humanitarian goods. Israel’s policies prompted British military expert Col. (ret.) Richard Kemp to testify that Israel does more “to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare.” Conversely, Israel’s terrorist enemies use Palestinians as human shields, fight from civilian centers, and target Israeli civilians, tragically increasing civilian casualties.

Isn't Israel's wall illegal according to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and a violation of human rights?

The International Court of Justice decision was a nonbinding advisory opinion, which had no practical impact on international law. Furthermore, the legitimacy of this decision was highly questionable because Israel did not provide testimony about its side of the issue and nearly every liberal democracy objected to the ICJ even hearing the case. For example, the U.S. Congress stated that the ICJ was being used to promote a narrow, anti-Israel political agenda. The security barrier was built only to ensure human rights for Israelis of all religions and ethnicities and to separate terrorists from their intended victims. This is why international law experts have stated that the barrier is in fact a legal self-defense measure. Many other countries, including South Korea, India, Cyprus, Kuwait, and Northern Ireland, use similar barriers to protect their citizens.



India's security fence in Kashmir.



If the “apartheid wall” exists only to protect Israeli civilians, why does it cut through Palestinian towns and annex Palestinian land?

The barrier was built because of the brutal terrorist campaign launched by Palestinian terrorists in 2000. Innocent Israelis of all religions and ethnicities were targeted in schools, buses, restaurants, and dance clubs. Israel had to act to protect them. The barrier has reduced terrorism fatalities by close to 100 percent, and leading Palestinian terrorists admitted that it obstructed suicide-bombing operations. The barrier cuts into the West Bank only to protect Israeli communities, not to annex territory. When sections are located on land privately owned by Palestinians, they are offered compensation and can file legal suits to have it rerouted, and many have done so successfully. The barrier negatively affects some innocent Palestinians—an outcome Israel did not want—but without an end to terrorism and a peace agreement, Israel has no other way to ensure its citizens’ safety. When a peace agreement is reached, the route of the barrier can be adjusted to conform to new border arrangements.

Does Israel practice apartheid?

Israel is the opposite of an apartheid state. It is a multicultural democracy and the only free country in the Middle East according to the human rights watchdog Freedom House, is the opposite of an apartheid state. Labeling Israel as practicing “apartheid” justifiably offends Israelis and many victims of real apartheid regimes. Israeli law enshrines equal rights for all citizens, and minorities participate fully in public life. While Israel, like other multi-ethnic democracies, struggles with minority disadvantages, its laws try to eradicate inequality. Nor does Israel practice apartheid in the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians are not citizens of the Jewish state, and the vast majority do not want to be. They are governed by their own leaders— Hamas and the Palestinian Authority—and wish to have self-determination in their own state. Israeli measures like checkpoints and the security barrier do not exist to separate people based on religion or ethnicity but rather to protect Israeli civilians of all backgrounds from terrorists. When Palestinian leaders say yes to peace, these measures will become unnecessary.



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STATE OF ISRAEL IS BORN

The first independent Jewish State in 19 centuries was born in Tel Aviv as the British Mandate over Palestine came to an end at midnight on Friday, and it was immediately subjected to the test of fire. As "Medinat Yisrael" (State of Israel) was proclaimed, the battle for Jerusalem raged, with most of the city falling to the Jews. At the

same time, President Truman announced that the United States would accord recognition to the new State. A few hours later, Palestine was invaded by Moslem armies from the south, east and north, and Tel Aviv was raided from the air. On Friday the United Nations Special Assembly adjourned after adopting a resolution to appoint a committee

later but without taking any action on the Partition Resolution of November 29.

Yesterday the battle for the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road was still under way, and two Arab villages were taken. In the north, Acre town was captured, and the Jewish Army consolidated its positions in Western Galilee.

Isn't a Jewish state, by definition, racist and undemocratic?

Jews, both secular and religious, are a people who have the right to self-determination. What is racist is denying Jews a right granted to all other peoples bound together by shared identity and heritage. The Jewish people established a democratic government for their state in 1948. When the UN recommended establishing a Jewish state in 1947 and admitted Israel as a member in 1949, it saw no contradiction between Israel's Jewish and democratic identity. Israel grants people of Jewish heritage a fast track to citizenship, just like Poland, Finland, Greece, and other nations grant citizenship based on ethnic ancestry. Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, is one of the world's most diverse and progressive countries. Non-Jewish Israelis, who make up 24 percent of the population, have equal rights under the law. Over 15 religions are officially recognized, women and LGBT people are legally protected from discrimination, and affirmative action programs exist to help minorities overcome the disadvantages they face.

Why does Israel have racist policies against African migrants?

Race is not the main issue when it comes to the 55,000 African migrants in Israel. Israel may be the only nation in history to bring Africans out of Africa to live as equal citizens. (It brought nearly 100,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel between the 1970s and 2014 and has accepted Sudanese refugees though Sudan has declared itself an enemy state of Israel.) The main issue is illegal immigration—a global phenomenon that Israel and many other liberal democracies are struggling with. Israel's challenge is to determine who entered the country illegally for economic reasons and who is a refugee deserving of asylum, all while enforcing its immigration laws and addressing the concerns of its legal citizens. Israel's policies, while certainly not perfect, are more humane than those of liberal democracies like the U.S., the UK, Australia, France, Italy, and Switzerland, among others.



Didn't Israel sterilize Ethiopian women because of anti-black racism?

Israel did not and has never sterilized Ethiopian women. This slander stems from a scandal in which an Israeli NGO gave small numbers of Ethiopian immigrants temporary birth control shots without properly explaining their effects. While this may have been a case of medical misconduct, it certainly was not “sterilization” or proof of institutionalized racism in Israel. When asked, one of the Ethiopian women who came forward with the original complaint clearly stated that no one was preventing her from having more children in Israel.



Why does Israel keep Palestinian political prisoners, including children, in humiliating conditions?

Democratic Israel does not take political prisoners. It imprisons only those who are involved in violence against Israelis after convicting them in a court of law. Unfortunately, terrorist groups recruit and pay Palestinian children to engage in violence, forcing Israel to detain minors in some cases. However, Israel does not imprison minors under the age of 14 and detains very few under the age of 16. Israeli prison conditions meet or surpass those of other liberal democracies according to numerous reports. During the July 2014 conflict with Hamas in Gaza, Israel moved Palestinian prisoners away from a facility in the south to keep them safe from rocket fire.

Isn't the boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign against Israel (BDS) the best way to promote peace, justice, and human rights in Israel/Palestine?

BDS uses social justice rhetoric to promote what would be a grave injustice: the elimination of Israel and the violation of Jewish rights to self-determination. BDS is a global propaganda campaign that uses slander and misinformation to isolate and delegitimize Israel, all under the guise of human rights. A core BDS demand is the Palestinian refugees' "right of return" to Israel, which, in the words of President Barack Obama, "would extinguish Israel as a Jewish state." Indeed, BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti declared, "We oppose a Jewish state in any part of Palestine." People of conscience should acknowledge that Palestinians can have human rights and justice without making Jews a stateless people once again.



DID YOU KNOW



Size:

Israel is smaller than the state of New Jersey.
It is 1/800 the size of the Arab world.

Roots:

Jews are indigenous to Israel and have maintained a continuous presence for over 3,000 years according to archeological and historical evidence.

Zionism:

Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people who sought to restore their freedom and independence in their ancestral homeland.

Number of Countries by Religious Majority:

67 Roman Catholic, 49 Islamic, 49 Protestant,
14 Eastern Orthodox, 3 Hindu, and 1 Jewish.

Tel Aviv Was Founded in 1909:

Tel Aviv is over 100 years old. This simple fact shows that the Jewish people were engaged in nation-building long before Israel's rebirth in 1948.

Security Threats:

Iranian leaders are racing to build nuclear weapons while calling for Israel to be "wiped off the map." Hamas and Hezbollah are terrorist groups supported by Iran, Qatar, and Turkey. Iran is deemed the world's leading state sponsor of global terrorism. Violent extremism, from ISIS to Al Qaeda, is destabilizing the region.

Palestinian Communities in the West Bank:

Over 95 percent of the Palestinian population lives on 40 percent of the land in the West Bank, leaving over 50 percent of the area virtually empty.

Israeli Communities in the West Bank:

Built-up areas of Israeli settlements now cover less than 1.7 percent of the West Bank. Five to 8 percent of West Bank land is on the west side or "Israeli side" of the security barrier.

Jewish Refugees from Arab/Muslim Lands:

After the 1948 war over 850,000 Jews fled rising persecution or were expelled from Arab and Muslim countries. By 2000 only 50,000 remained. Israel welcomed and resettled 600,000 of the Jewish refugees.



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