

I feel compelled to respond to the MESC report as a scholar, an elder in PCUSA and an individual who knows and loves many on the multiple sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Who am I for, the Israelis or the Palestinians? Both. When I teach the Arab-Israeli conflict to my students, I impress on them that this is a protracted conflict - one that has gone on for much longer than the 62-year old state of Israel. War does not produce a single side that is virtually blameless and a single side that carries almost all the responsibility.

PCUSA seeks to promote peace in the Middle East. The quality and content of the "Breaking Down the Walls" report works directly against a mission of peace. Rather than an objective, scholarly report, below is a mere sampling of the poor scholarship, critical omissions and misleading and incorrect information in the MESC report.

First and foremost, reputable academic journal articles and books undergo a process known as "blind peer-review". Submissions to a publisher have the author's identity removed and experts in the field of study assess the work on variety of criteria. The most important is the presence of anything beyond a minor error that could not be explained without partisan or even malicious intent. A single example is sufficient to reject a submission. Thanks in large part to the Internet, popular press and popular media, most of the information available today does not undergo this examination. Many webpages and presses only put forward partisan propaganda that meets an ideological litmus test, such as ultra-Palestinian and anti-Israeli. However, a first-year college student learns to discern solid academic sources from those that are partisan and with little or no academic value. The MESC report has over ten pages with 250 endnotes of sources. A grand total of nine sources that can be established as academic, peer-reviewed representing seven authors are used. Two -- Ilan Pappé and Benny Morris -- are leaders of the "New Historians". The New Historians are Israeli revisionist historians, a highly controversial movement born out of the first Intifada at the end of the 1980s. They are staunchly critical of the existing histories of Israel's birth as a modern nation. Should their views be heard? Absolutely, but not at the report's complete exclusion of long-standing traditional narratives.

Second, the report is rife with bias. Maps and artwork that are included pursue a single agenda. For example, consider the maps on page 62, which I use in my own classes, from the Palestinian Academic Society. However, I show an additional map from the Israeli Ministry of Affairs, to illustrate the importance of knowing sources (see below). The maps used in the report show land in 1949 "seized by Israel", while the last map indicates land "under Jordanian rule" and "under Egyptian rule", i.e. seized. Neither Jordan nor Egypt ever intended to give one square inch away to the Palestinians. In fact, the now infamous name "Black September" originated in September 1970, when King Hussein of Jordan cracked down upon and eventually expelled the Palestinian leadership from his kingdom. This decision was in response to acts including a Palestinian plot to assassinate the king and take over Jordan as a Palestinian state. (Jordan finally relinquished its claims to the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1994 as part of its peace treaty with Israel.)

Third, information is misleading to the point of deception. For example, "In June 1967, Israel attacked Egypt, Jordan, and Syria" (page 64). Partly right, grossly misleading. Consider the following statement, "On June 6, 1944, armed forces of the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom invaded France." Technically correct, grossly misleading. A researcher cannot swing a dead laptop without hitting highly regarded and vetted sources on the Six Day War. In May of

1967, existing cross-border clashes escalated between Israel and Syria. Nasser of Egypt blocked passage of Israeli ships through the Straits of Tiran, demanded the removal of UN peacekeepers in the Sinai and called for the destruction of Israel. By the end of the month, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Algeria had amassed 547,000 troops, 2504 tanks and 957 combat aircraft along the Israeli border. Against Egypt, Israel fired the first shot. Jordan fired first at Israel.

Please note, the three first Arab-Israeli wars (1948-49, 1956 and 1967) all occurred before there were disputed territories. Clearly, more has been going on than an occupation, and an end to the occupation (alone) will not ensure peace.

In a report that has cherry-picked its way through history, perhaps the most embarrassing example of poor scholarship and research omission is found buried in footnote 76 on page 30.

“The MESC was not able to gain access to Gaza due to the recent war and blockade, under which Israeli forces have prevented most church representatives from entering that territory; and therefore we did not have the opportunity to hear the voice of Hamas. Our time limitations did not permit us to have conversations with members of the Likud in Israel or Hezbollah in Lebanon. From the time of the appointment of this committee in February 2009 until the submission of this report on March 5, 2010, the committee has attempted to make the best use of the limited time and resources that we have been provided.”

Inexcusable. The report does list six contacts made in Syria, but failed to meet with Hamas leaders there, including the current top leader, Khaled Mashel, who lives in Damascus (perhaps that is why Hamas TV maintains a studio there). In addition, the primary target of any attempt to alter a nation’s policies is their government. Perhaps if Likud members had been contacted, the report might have mentioned the landmark speech made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in June 2009 endorsing the creation of a Palestinian state. Considering the extreme assertions and recommendations made in this report, again, this is inexcusable for any reputable research effort.

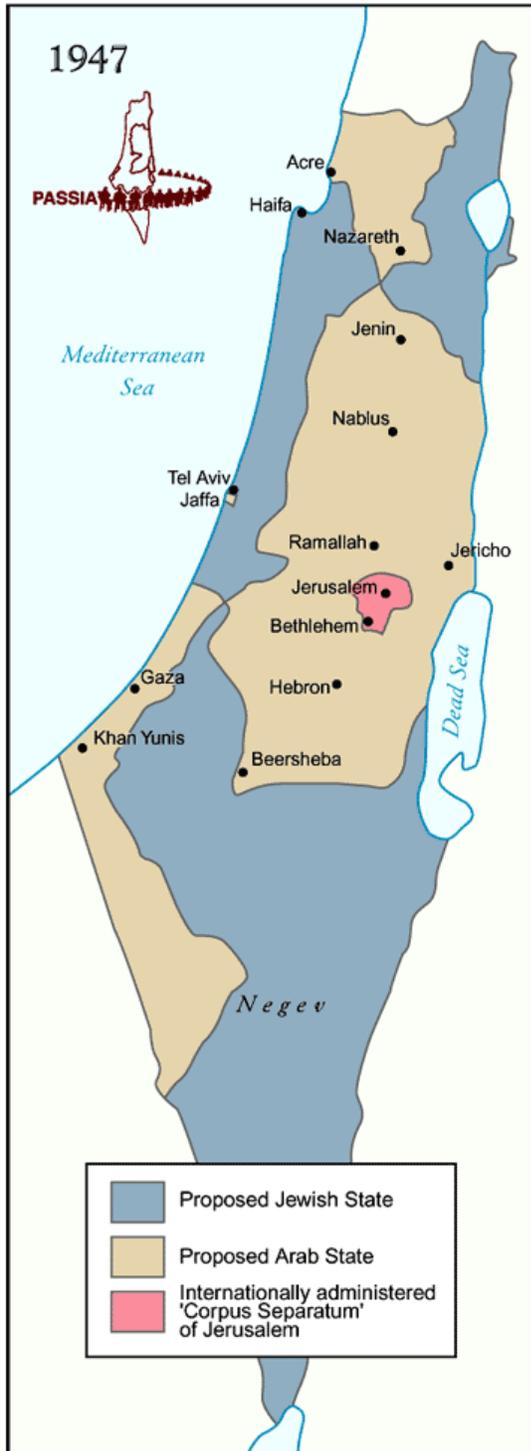
Critiques of this report could go on for hundreds of pages. To end on a more positive note, on one point I hope we all can agree - the community of PCUSA truly wants peace in the Middle East and are willing to work hard toward it, no matter how long it takes. The Presbyterian Church (USA) has always upheld a standard of educational excellence and the concomitant search for truth, knowledge, wisdom and grace. Any report that wants to be a starting point for informing church membership and makes powerful recommendations to the General Assembly should itself be reviewed by experts in the history, politics, religions and cultures of the relevant peoples and governments. Does that mean we all will agree someday? No. But PCUSA can rest assured that we do not make a tragic situation worse based on a single, highly problematic report. The very best academic work always notes opposing points of view and, per my first observation, uses academic, peer-reviewed sources throughout. Short of engaging in such an effort and the subsequent open debate, it would be reckless to become a partisan actor in the conflict.

In Christ’s love,

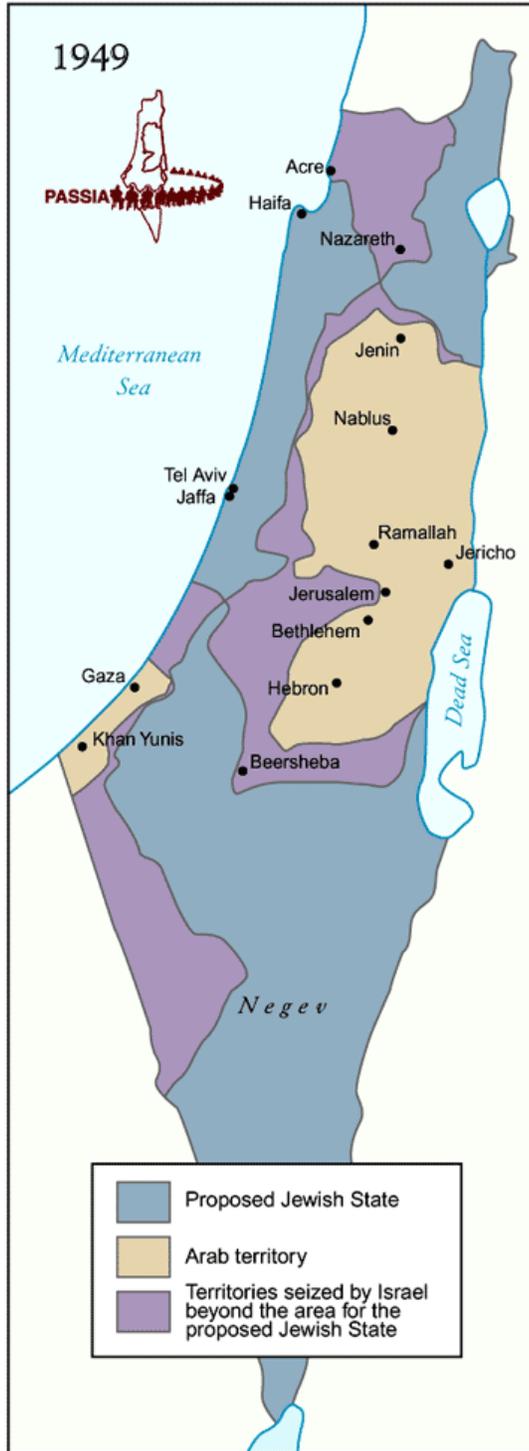
Elder Carolyn C. James, PhD
*Ojai Presbyterian Church, CA

*Congregation listed for purposes of identification only.

United Nations Partition Plan
UN Resolution 181



Rhodes Armistice Line



**Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs
(PASSIA)**



Armistice Lines, 1949