



National Geographic Kids Misleads Children on Israel

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The National Geographic Kids website features profiles of countries from around the world, teaching children basic facts about these places, their people, geography, and ecology. One of these is about Israel. The profile is divided into six sections: geography, people and culture, nature, government, ancient history, and modern history. While the page provides a useful overview of Israel’s geography and environment, the summaries of Israel’s history and government provided contain significant inaccuracies. In doing so, National Geographic smuggles antizionist propaganda into what should be a neutral overview of a country.

Government

Even though Israel controls access to the Occupied Territories, the people living there are still governed by Palestinian political organizations: Fatah, part of the Palestine Liberation Organization; and Hamas, which is considered a terrorist group by countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

The section on Israel’s government also discusses Palestinian government misrepresenting and whitewashing the problematic nature of the factions that govern Palestinians. National Geographic states, “Even though Israel controls access to the Occupied Territories, the people living there are still governed by Palestinian

political organizations: Fatah, part of the Palestine Liberation Organization; and Hamas, which is considered a terrorist group by countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany.” First, whether the territories are “occupied” is a matter of dispute. More importantly, referring to Fatah and Hamas as “political organizations” misrepresents the true nature of these groups. Fatah, which governs the West Bank, pays pensions to the families of terrorists. Hamas is considered a terrorist group by the U.S., the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Even Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE have banned the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is an offshoot. More importantly however, Hamas’ actions, most notoriously the October 7 terror attacks, demonstrate definitively that it is a terrorist organization. By only pointing to countries that have designated Hamas a terror group and not its actions, National Geographic is suggesting that Hamas’ identity is up for debate.

Ancient History

Around 5 B.C., this land became known as Palestine; the people who called it home were known as Palestinians. Because so many ancient cultures and religious groups claimed this region as their own, many people have fought over the land for thousands of years.



The ancient history section begins by inaccurately stating when the Land of Israel became known as Palestine, which it claims happened around 5 B.C. While it is unclear when the term “Palestine” originated, it did not become the official term for the Land until the Romans changed the name of the province to Syria-Palaestina from Judea in 137 A.D. as part of their efforts to de Judaize the Land following the Bar Kochba Revolt (135-137).

National Geographic then minimizes the continuous Jewish presence in the Land of Israel by framing the thousands of years of Jewish history in the Land as contested. Students are told: “Because so many ancient cultures and religious groups claimed this region as their own, many people have fought over the land for thousands of years.” National Geographic fails to explain that the Jewish people have been the only group to establish the region as their national homeland going back to antiquity. The Palestinian Arab national movement did not emerge until the 20th century. Other civilizations controlled the Land through imperial conquest and religious campaigns, but not as an expression of national self-determination.

Modern History

National Geographic’s most significant factual issues appear in the final section on Israel’s modern history which distorts the history of the State of Israel. The section begins by stating:

Between 1920 and 1948, the United Kingdom controlled Palestine, which then had a population that was mostly Arab (people who speak Arabic). Many Jews, who believed that this was their homeland, moved to the region during this time. But Palestinians believed that this was their homeland, too. As more Jews came to the region, fighting between the two groups increased.

Referring to all non-Jews in Palestine as Palestinians who are competing with Jews is an anachronism. Prior to Israel’s founding, everyone in the British Mandate was a Palestinian and the moniker was primarily used by the local Jews as an identifier. The Arab community did not formally embrace Palestine as a distinct identity until the mid-1960’s when the Palestine Liberation Organization was founded, prior to which most Palestinian Arabs identified more as Arab than “Palestinian.” The PLO cultivated a national identity for Palestinian Arabs to rally around when their “National Charter,” first adopted in 1964, called for an independent Palestinian state rather than for Palestine to be joined with another Arab country.

Because so many Jews had been forced to leave Europe, they believed that they needed their own country. In 1948, the British withdrew, and—with the support of the United Nations —Jews living in Palestine created the State of Israel. But Palestinians believed that the region should be run by Arabs, and a year-long conflict erupted.

National Geographic Kids also oversimplifies Jewish support for Zionism, attributing it entirely to Jewish suffering in the Holocaust, saying, “because



so many Jews had been forced to leave Europe, they believed that they needed their own country.” In fact, Jews supported Zionism because the Land of Israel is their ancestral homeland, not just because of the Holocaust. While the Holocaust was an important factor in Israel’s establishment just after World War II, Zionism has much deeper roots in Judaism, with the Land of Israel being a central focus of Jewish traditions and culture throughout history. There has been a Jewish community in the Land throughout the centuries and Jews from around the world immigrated there even before the modern Zionist movement.

Even though the Palestinians were backed by armies from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria, the Israelis won the war. In 1949, the territory was divided into the State of Israel for Jewish people, and the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip for Arabs. (At the time, the West Bank and East Jerusalem were controlled by Jordan, and Gaza by Egypt.)

National Geographic also fails to describe the diversity of the Israeli citizenry. In describing the aftermath of the Israeli War of Independence, National Geographic says, “in 1949, the territory was divided into the State of Israel for Jewish people, and the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip for Arabs,” which is untrue. The State of Israel was not only for Jews. From the very beginning Druze, Christians, and Muslims were granted Israeli citizenship. In contrast, Jews were driven from their homes both in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank and East Jerusalem and from the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip. In addition, Egypt and Jordan did not occupy those territories

on behalf of Palestinian Arabs as the article implies, but for their own territorial ambitions.

But dividing the region didn’t lead to peace, and disputes over land boundaries and shipping routes escalated. In 1967–

National Geographic attempts to soften the genocidal goals of the Arab states during the Arab Israeli conflict. When describing the lead-up to the 1967 Six Day War, they write, “but dividing the region didn’t lead to peace, and disputes over land boundaries and shipping routes escalated.” This suggests that the Arab-Israeli conflict was about borders and trade routes rather than Israel’s very existence. The Arab states’ stated goal following their failure to prevent Israel’s establishment was to destroy her. The trade disputes National Geographic refers to such as Egypt closing the Straits of Tiran leading up to the Six Day War was one such means to that end as Egyptian President Nasser declared, “The battle will be a general one and our basic objective will be to destroy Israel.”

National Geographic misrepresents the legal status of Palestinians, stating:

Most Palestinians believe that they are mistreated by the Israeli government. They aren’t protected by Israeli law, and many can’t freely move between the territories and Israel, or from one Palestinian territory to the other. Israel also allowed Jewish settlers to live in the West Bank, which led Palestinians to feel like their land was being taken away from them. This led to many armed conflicts between the Arabs and Jews.



This description regurgitates mainstream Palestinian antizionist doctrine which has been used to justify violence against civilians. Palestinians are citizens of the Palestinian Authority and are protected by Palestinian civil law, not Israeli law. Applying Israeli law would be in violation of the Oslo Accords as it would, in effect, apply Israeli sovereignty over the disputed territories.

Palestinians who commit crimes against Israeli citizens are tried in Israel's military courts under the legal framework governing occupation, which Israel adopted as a pragmatic mechanism of administration. This system was not adopted because Israel accepts that it is an occupier as a matter of legal right or that Palestinians hold full and final sovereign claims, but as a temporary arrangement meant to remain in place until a negotiated settlement is reached.

Israeli restrictions on Palestinian movement were only instituted following the Second Intifada, in which over one thousand Israeli civilians were killed in terrorist attacks committed by Palestinian terrorists. Jewish Israelis are subjected to similar restrictions and are not allowed to set foot in over 90% of the West Bank as well as any part of Gaza. National Geographic is suggesting that Israel is to blame for the conflict when in fact many of the Israeli actions it blames for Palestinian terrorism were only implemented due to Palestinian terrorism.

In 2005, the country pulled Israeli troops and settlers out of the Gaza Strip, where they had been for 38 years, in an attempt to bring peace. But Israel still maintained control over the movement of people and goods through Gaza's borders, which angered Palestinians. Two years later, the political party Hamas—considered by many a terrorist group—won an election there and kicked out the more moderate group, Fatah.

National Geographic misleads readers about Gaza and Hamas' takeover. They describe the 2005 Israeli Disengagement as follows, "but Israel still maintained control over the movement of people and goods through Gaza's borders, which angered Palestinians," once again blaming Israel for Palestinian terrorism. The author(s) continue by stating that "two years later, the political party Hamas—considered by many a terrorist group—won an election there and kicked out the more moderate group, Fatah." In reality, there was no Israeli blockade for the first year of Gazan independence. Israel only instituted it following Hamas's violent seizure of power which enabled them to immediately turn their conquered territory into one giant rocket launching pad and terrorist military conclave that they have used to target Israeli civilians ever since. National Geographic ignores this so it can falsely imply that Israel controls the lives of Gazans and is the only party responsible for their safety and quality of life.

In retaliation, the Israeli government declared war on Hamas and launched its own strikes, killing and injuring many more. Israel also closed off the border to Gaza, preventing essential goods from entering. A ground operation launched into the territory in late October.



Finally, when discussing the war sparked by Hamas’s mass of terror attacks on October 7, 2023, National Geographic claims that Israel “closed off the border to Gaza, preventing essential goods from entering.” In fact, Israel has facilitated over 2.1 million tons of aid into Gaza since the start of the war. In fact, the IDF stopped fighting to administer polio vaccines to 600,000 Gazan children during the war and so far, all accusations of purposeful starvation have been thoroughly discredited.

Conclusion

Rather than serving as an accessible and accurate introduction to a complex conflict, *National Geographic Kids* provides an entry point into a particular ideological narrative that serves to delegitimize Jewish connection to the Land of Israel and to hold Israel solely responsible for the on-going conflict. In doing so, it falls short of National Geographic’s longstanding reputation as a neutral and trusted source on global people and issues.