

“Criticizing Israel is not anti-Semitic, and saying so is vile. But singling out Israel for opprobrium and international sanction out of all proportion to any other party in the Middle East is anti-Semitic, and not saying so is dishonest.”

— Thomas L. Friedman

**Consider the quote by Thomas Friedman. To what extent are the problems in the Middle East a product of anti-Semitism, and to what extent are they a product of Nationalism?**

Thomas Friedman explains that “criticizing Israel is not anti-semitic” and in fact Middle Eastern issues have very little to do with anti-semitism. Nationalism has been a far more significant contributor to contemporary middle eastern issues. While anti-semitism was a key factor that would lead to the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel, nationalism would play a very important role in the creation of Israel and the tensions which arose as a result. Furthermore, conflict in the middle east since 1948 has been largely attributable to Israeli and Palestinian nationalism.

Anti-semitism was a fairly important component leading to the the establishment of Israel. Jews faced persecution for many centuries in Europe. They were almost universally isolated and discriminated against. The most significant and blatant example of the anti-semitism which had plagued Europe for so long was the holocaust. 6 million of Europe’s Jews were murdered and the remaining population was left without a home in which they could feel safe. Jews were in dire need of a place they could feel secure and protected but this required a homeland. In 1948, the UN would partition Israel, creating the first Jewish state and although this seemed like the perfect solution and appeasement for the atrocious anti-semitism the world’s Jewish population had endured, the people who had lived in Israel for the preceding 2000 years were not accounted for in the decision.

Leading up to and following the establishment of Israel, nationalism on behalf of both parties has been the primary reason for issues surrounding that region. Zionism (Jewish nationalism) was a driving force behind the creation of Israel. Since the land was partitioned in 1948, palestinian nationalism has also played a very important role in the conflicts. Many palestinians were uprooted from their homes to make room for the Israeli settlers. Consequently, many palestinians were left refugees. Without homes or jobs, often the palestinians turned to terrorism to protect the land they believe was and still is theirs. The tension between the two parties, both ultra-nationalistic and under the belief that they are entitled to the land of Israel, has made the region a hotbed for terrorism and war.

Because of the extremely nationalistic sentiment from either side, both the palestinians and israelis (in general) have been unable to see the legitimacy in each other’s narrative. As a result, there have been multiple wars between the two after the creation of Israel. SOme of the most significant include the first arab israeli war in 1948, the second arab-israeli war in ‘56, the six day war of ‘67 and the yom kippur war of ‘73. While most of these wars played out in Israel’s favour, all these conflicts are a result of each parties nationalistic sentiments and their inability to reach a two state solution because of it, but until both sides are able to recognize and understand the other’s struggle, conflict in the region will persist.

While anti-semitism played a fairly significant role in the need to create the state of Israel, nationalism be a far more important factor in middle eastern issues. Both israelis and palestinians believe they are entitled to land that they've fought over relentlessly since Israel's creation and thus the middle east has been plagued with tension and conflict. While anti-semitism is prevalent, one might argue that it is more of a byproduct of middle eastern issues as opposed to a driving force behind them.