



As college students across the United States head off to campus, many may encounter heated discussion about events in Israel and Gaza over the summer. From late-night dorm room chatter and social media, to the lecture hall and quad, here are the five things every college student should know about Israel:

1. Israel withdrew completely from Gaza in 2005. And Israel had one overriding objective in exchange for giving local residents their first chance in history to govern themselves, something not accorded them by the Ottomans, the British, or the Egyptians—Israel wanted quiet on its border. However, since Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007 after a bloody coup against the Palestinian Authority, involving scores of deaths, the terrorist group has continued to target Israeli civilians. Instead of focusing on the construction of Gaza, Hamas has concentrated on the destruction of Israel, launching thousands of rockets and building dozens of cross-border terror tunnels, with the clear intention to kill as many Israelis as possible.

2. In contrast to Hamas, Israel takes every precaution to minimize harm to civilians in combat. Often forced to confront terrorist organizations such as Hamas, Israel frequently faces the challenge of combatting an enemy that aspires to maximize civilian casualties. In response to this vile practice, Israel has continued to strive to do the exact opposite—minimize the impact of warfare on local civilian populations.

In Operation Protective Edge, Israel dropped leaflets that warned local residents of imminent attacks. Many strikes were called off after Hamas assembled civilian shields to protect legitimate military targets. Additionally, the IDF frequently calls local residents to ask them to vacate a planned mission's target area. These tactics reflect only a small portion of the great lengths to which Israel goes in order to minimize harm to civilian populations in wartime. For all of Israel's efforts to avoid civilian casualties, in all wars waged by democratic countries, including the U.S., there are mistakes. It is a sad, but unavoidable part of conflict. Israel expresses regret for innocent loss of life, which stands in stark contrast to the celebrations and gunfire heard from Hamas after Israeli casualties.

3. Hamas is part of the same terrorist “family tree” as ISIS, Boko Haram and Al Qaeda. Hamas was designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. in 1997, and later by the EU and others for its terror attacks using suicide bombers and car bombs that killed hundreds and injured thousands of Israeli civilians. Its tactics are brutally similar to those employed by groups like ISIS, including extrajudicial executions of political opponents.

Hamas is also a serial violator of human rights. The British government's 2014 annual rights assessment states: “Hamas has also steadily increased the number of Islamic restrictions imposed on Gazan life, including directives on clothing for university students, gender segregation in schools, a ban on the employment of male teachers at female schools, and preventing women from running in a UN-

sponsored marathon.” The U.S. State Department’s 2014 Human Rights report states that women may not walk with an unrelated male in Gaza. There is also official leniency for so-called “honor killings” of women when the murderers apologize. To get a clear sense of the terrorist group, [read its charter](#) (authored by Hamas itself!), which is the clearest proof of the group’s anti-Western, anti-Semitic, misogynistic nature.

4. Israel has sought peace with its neighbors since its founding. It is important to remember that Israel did not set out to govern the Palestinians. Israel came to rule over Gaza and the West Bank not by choice, but in a defensive war in June 1967, when neighboring Arab states — particularly Egypt and Syria — threatened time and again to overrun and destroy the young country. Israel has tried relentlessly to find negotiating partners to exchange land for peace. Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties in 1979 and 1994. The Palestinian leadership rebuffed Israel’s substantial peace offers, supported by the U.S., for the creation of a Palestinian state in 2000, in 2001, and again in 2008. Most recently, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’s decision to form a ‘unity government’ with Hamas, a terrorist organization committed to Israel’s destruction, epitomizes the challenges that Israel has faced in its quest for peace.

5. As a democratic state, Israel seeks to create equal opportunities for all of its citizens. Jewish, Arab, and other members of society work in all spheres of the business world, serve in a wide range of governmental bodies, and study together in universities across Israel. Indeed, 22% of all medical students in Israel are Arab, matching almost precisely their share of the general population. At the Technion, Israel’s equivalent of MIT, 19.5% of students are Arab. And at the University of Haifa, one-third of the students are Arab.

Moreover, Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Baha’i, and other religious establishments practice freely and openly in Israeli society. Israeli law does not dictate different codes of conduct for females or males, and has among the most progressive records on gay rights. A survey by Gaycities.com and American Airlines recently ranked Tel Aviv as the world’s most gay-friendly city. Like all democratic societies, there is work to be done. But, there is no country in the Middle East that comes close to Israel when it comes to the democratic protections we enjoy in the U.S.—gender equality, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, right to peaceful assembly, free and fair elections, peaceful transitions of power, vibrant NGOs, and an independent judiciary.

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