

# Why Romney Insulted the Palestinians

**Exclusive:** A favorite neocon theme is that the superiority of Western culture explains the world's wealth disparities, not the accident of natural resources and the aggressive use of military force. Mitt Romney echoed those neocon sentiments in touting Israel and disparaging the Palestinians, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Some pundits are excusing Mitt Romney's comment about why Palestinians are so much poorer than Israelis as a slip of the tongue caused by a shortage of staff on his overseas trip, but the Republican presidential candidate makes the same point in his book, *No Apology*, which he claims to have written himself.

While discussing his thoughts about world travel, he wrote, "I wondered how such vast differences could exist between countries that were literally next door to each other. How could Americans be so rich and Mexicans so poor? How could Israelis have created a highly developed, technology-based economy while their Palestinian neighbors had not yet even begun to move to an industrial economy?"

In his book, Romney praised the writings of Harvard professor David Landes, who in *Wealth and Poverty of Nations* said "culture makes all the difference."

Romney added that "What people believe, value, strive for, and sacrifice for profoundly shape the nature of their society and affect its prosperity and security. So while America's abundant natural resources certainly facilitated its ascent, it is America's culture that enabled the nation to become and remain the most powerful and beneficent country in the history of humankind."

Then, Romney cited some cultural aspects possessed by countries that prosper contrasted with those that don't including a strong work ethic, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, cooperation, commitment to education, faith in God, devotion to family, patriotism, honor, trust in the law, and respect for life.

"There are cultures where life is cheap, but thankfully, ours is not one of them," Romney wrote.

## Wealth from Culture

Overall, Romney makes clear that he views American culture and those of U.S. allies like Israel as superior to those of other nations. That superiority is then reflected in the greater wealth of the citizenry, Romney maintains.

While Romney touts this superiority to praise the United States and Israel as he

sought to do in his remarks on Monday to a group of Jewish-American backers in Jerusalem the comments have a disparaging side when applied to those who are judged as being poorer due to a lack of these positive characteristics.

To say that one nation thrives because of its magnificent culture means that another one fails because of its deficient culture. For the Palestinians, that assessment is particularly hard to swallow since much of their poverty relates directly to the harsh conditions from decades of Israeli occupation, including barriers to outside trade.

Saeb Erekat, a top aide to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, told The Associated Press that Romney's comment was "a racist statement" and ignorant of the facts.

"This man doesn't realize that the Palestinian economy cannot reach its potential because there is an Israeli occupation," Erekat said. "It seems to me this man lacks information, knowledge, vision and understanding of this region and its people."

In his speech in Jerusalem, Romney also misstated how great a discrepancy there was between what the average Israeli makes versus the average Palestinian. He claimed the difference was about 2 to 1, when it is more like 20 to 1.

In citing Landes's book, Romney asserted that "culture makes all the difference. And as I come here and I look out over this city and consider the accomplishments of the people of this nation, I recognize the power of at least culture and a few other things," an apparent reference to divine intervention on Israel's behalf.

"As you come here and you see the G.D.P. per capita, for instance, in Israel, which is about \$21,000 and compare that with the G.D.P. per capita just across the areas managed by the Palestinian Authority, which is more like \$10,000 per capita, you notice such a dramatically stark difference in economic vitality."

According to the World Bank, Israel's per capita G.D.P. actually is \$31,282, compared to a Palestinian per capita G.D.P. of around \$1,600.

Romney's campaign denied that his remark was intended to slight the Palestinians. However, Palestinian leaders were so outraged that some analysts suggested that the comment could come back to haunt Romney if, as President, he seeks to act as a negotiator between the two sides.

But that seemed to be the least of Romney's concerns as he has pandered incessantly to the Israelis in a presumed strategy to drive a wedge between Jewish-American voters and President Barack Obama, who has criticized the

Israeli government's policies of expanding Jewish settlements in the Occupied West Bank.

### **Moral Superiority**

The idea of cultural and even moral superiority as explaining success is a dominant theme in Romney's book, *No Apology*, for both countries and individuals. The book, which is subtitled "The Case for American Greatness," returns again and again to the theme of U.S. cultural superiority.

For instance, Romney is disdainful of "progressives" who offer more culturally neutral judgments about differing nations and ethnic groups. He wrote:

"During the 1960s, the idea set associated with progressivism gained ascendancy in educational circles. Our classical education tradition had held for decades that we should imbue each generation with the wisdom of the ages and the discoveries of modernity.

"Progressives, on the other hand, rejected the notion of universal truths, objective judgments, and, ironically, progress itself, embracing neutrality among competing belief sets and rejecting the primacy of Western civilization, the great thinkers of the ages, and the principles espoused by the Founding Parents of the nation. In their view, all cultures are of equal value."

Progressive scholars respond to such criticism by noting that their duty is to present history and cultures objectively, not to indoctrinate students with propaganda that ignores the wrongdoing and hypocrisies of any group, including the fact that some of America's white Founders professed liberty for all while owning slaves.

There is also the inconvenient truth that the U.S. government engaged in genocide against Native Americans, stole large tracts of Western land from Mexico, and insisted on placing U.S. military bases all over the world.

A key point of *No Apology* is to disparage President Obama for supposedly "apologizing" for America, though Romney is short of specifics as to exactly what Obama has said that would constitute an apology, rather than just the occasional recognition that the U.S. government hasn't always been perfect. Oddly, Romney makes the same point in the book, writing:

"That doesn't mean, of course, that America is a perfect country. We have made mistakes and committed grave offenses over the centuries. Too often we have failed to live up to our ideals. But to say that is to say that we live in this fallen world rather than a perfect one, a world composed not of angels but of flawed and imperfect beings.

“And, crucially, our past faults and errors have long been acknowledged and do not deserve the repetition that suggests either that we have been reluctant to remedy them or that we are inclined to repeat them. What we should say and repeat is this: No nation has shed more blood for more noble causes than the United States. Its beneficence and benevolence are unmatched by any nation on earth, and by any nation in history.”

Romney insisted that he actually wrote his own book, although he acknowledged assistance and advice from many of America’s leading neoconservatives, including Robert and Frederick Kagan, and from a variety of right-wing think tanks.

**To read more of Robert Parry’s writings, you can now order his last two books, *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, at the discount price of only \$16 for both. For details on the special offer, [click here.](#)]**

**Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](http://neckdeepbook.com). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & ‘Project Truth’* are also available there.**

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## Romney’s Clueless Remark on Palestine

Republican Mitt Romney pandered to a right-wing pro-Israeli audience by claiming Israel’s economic success, relative to the widespread poverty in Palestine, reflected superior cultural values and possibly divine preference, a statement that ignored the impact of the longtime occupation, says ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

I seldom feel much sympathy for those who claim to be offended by someone else’s politically inspired remark. Remarks, however, that not only are offensive but also reveal a profound misunderstanding of an important situation or a destructive approach toward dealing with that situation, or both, should not be allowed to pass unnoticed.

In an exclusive big-money fund-raiser in Jerusalem on Monday, [Mitt Romney presented a discourse](#) on why Israel is more prosperous than the Palestinian territories. He couched this subject as an intellectual debate between the

scholars Jared Diamond, who explains differences in economic success in terms of geography and natural resources, and David Landes, who explains such differences in terms of culture.

It's culture, said Romney. "I recognize the power," he said, "of at least culture and a few other things." The only "other thing" he mentioned was "the hand of providence," which preceded a further discourse about Israel as a "promised land" in which Israelis, relying on "themselves and the arm of God," recognize "the purpose in this place."

Conspicuously missing was any mention of the huge, elephant-in-the-room reason for the dismal state of the Palestinian economy: the systematic Israeli suppression of Palestinian economic activity.

That suppression has included in the Gaza Strip a suffocating blockade and in the West Bank (the explicit subject of Romney's comparison) a less all-encompassing but still pervasive system of restricting transportation, separating people's homes from their livelihoods, denying access to natural markets, requiring and denying permission for the simplest transactions, and countless additional ways of turning into a struggle the daily task of earning a living.

A recent World Bank report on the Palestinian economy stated, "The major constraints to private sector activity are the tight Israeli restrictions, and growth will not be sustainable until Palestinians have access to resources and are allowed to move freely."

We should not be surprised anymore that Romney, in his effort to win whatever votes he thinks he can win by posing as the most unquestioning and uncompromising lover of Israel in the presidential race, should offer such an absurdly biased and truncated picture of economic realities on the ground.

On this trip he has spoken of his "passion" for Israel, thereby sticking a finger in the eye of George Washington, who in one of the sagest pieces of advice he offered in his farewell address warned that "a passionate attachment of one nation for another produces a variety of evils," with some of the evils he enumerated being a remarkably prescient description of what we see today in U.S. relations and standing in the Middle East.

As for not only Palestinian economic activity but also Palestinian political and civil rights and national aspirations, Romney has effectively photoshopped them out of the pictures he has provided, including in a major address and interview before his current trip. And although he said he wasn't going to try to make new foreign policy while on this trip, he did so by declaring Jerusalem to be the

capital of Israel, even though the United States and nearly every other country in the world does not recognize it as such but instead considers it disputed territory.

Palestinian reaction to Romney's latest comment was understandable. Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat said, "It is a racist statement and this man doesn't realize that the Palestinian economy cannot reach its potential because there is an Israeli occupation. It seems to me this man lacks information, knowledge, vision and understanding of this region and its people."

But the significance of Romney's discourse goes beyond its offensiveness, racist or not, and its implications for any chance that as president he could be respected as an honest broker in dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It indicates a failure, deliberate or not, to recognize a significant moral, legal and humanitarian issue that festers almost within earshot of where he was speaking.

Romney's campaign claimed that negative reaction to his comments involved taking them out of context; the campaign noted that he made comparisons not only between Israel and the West Bank but also between the United States and Mexico and between Chile and Ecuador. That he did.

It is interesting that the differences in economic status in those other comparisons are of a similar order of magnitude as the approximately 2:1 ratio that Romney asserted was the case with Israel and the West Bank. As some observers promptly noted, Romney was way off in his figures. The World Bank estimates that GDP per capita in the Palestinian territories is about \$1,500, not the \$10,000 that Romney gave, and the relative difference with Israel is not 2:1 but more than 10:1.

We are not dealing here with one more indiscretion that is counted as a candidate's gaffe, like that silly business about the Olympics in Britain. It is instead the indication of a fundamentally wrong-headed and destructive approach to a long-running conflict that is very bad for the Palestinians, bad for any hope for peace in the Middle East, for that reason also bad for Israel, and for all of those reasons and the consequences that flow from them, bad for the United States.

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# Hiding America's Recent History

Between the shallowness of even the "serious" mainstream news media and the sophistication of political spin, it is no wonder the U.S. public is so thoroughly uninformed and misinformed, observes Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

Some years ago, I meet a major in American intelligence, a member of the "Red Cell Unit." As he explained it to me, his unit was actually charged with assessing other spy shops by offering other views, critiquing intelligence estimates and perhaps even evaluating security systems like the specialists who test airport systems by probing for their soft spots and vulnerabilities, and seeing if they can beat them.

This officer had been sent as one more gung-ho officer into the war in Iraq only to return, like many, if not disillusioned, aware that all was not working well. He was actually involved in guarding so-called HVT's (imprisoned High Value Targets) including Saddam Hussein himself. The officer came to respect Hussein for his intelligence before his untimely demise with a rope around his neck. Saddam's many crimes and errors were often dwarfed by our own.



The United States today has a vast intelligence apparatus on the ground, in the sky and even in space. Technically, it puts to shame the old Soviet Union's ability to monitor what people are doing and saying. The U.S. system sucks up millions of terabytes of data daily.

But, that doesn't mean that what is reported is understood. The analysts seek to

make sense of it, but the policy-makers are often so locked into templates of action and pre-formulated strategies that insure the input doesn't lead to course corrections or changes in direction. The policy-makers operate with a kind of intellectual "locked-in" disease that freezes out new ideas.

The system is manned by ideologists and choked with ideology, constantly leading to so-called intelligence "failures" that fill many library shelves. Yet even when post mortems are filed, few in the commanding heights of the U.S. national security apparatus are willing to look back and draw lessons. They are too busy, lazy or just hacks (as opposed to hackers.)

One reason: so much money is invested in covert media operations that spin and distort reality that the people inside the "deception machine" believe the news that they themselves plant and fabricate. Perception guides reality more than reality guiding perception. Media institutions play a big role in echoing embellished government claims often relying on leaks and plants that come from disinformation bureaucracies and their media assets,

The "uprisings" by the "rebels" in Syria and Libya are cases in point. In both countries, discontent was mined; and military units were recruited, trained, armed and deployed by foreign interests. Some are even working with the very jihadis that the West has been denouncing for at least the past decade.

The United States and Britain took the lead with an assist from the French and NATO. Countries like Qatar and Saudi Arabia recycled some of their oil profits to fund these interventions while trying to keep a public distance. Ironically, some of the people they armed are in Al Qaeda-linked terror groups who have always been described as our "enemy." So much for consistency!

Years later, government hacks and historians write about these events, usually rationalizing the policy choices that drove U.S. policy but sometimes critiquing it especially when it imploded. No one in this world has yet to adequately explain Washington's biggest failure of all: how they "missed" the Iranian Revolution.

National Public Radio recently interviewed one such government historian, David Crist, who has written a book called *The Twilight War*, detailing the "secret history" of America's 30-year conflict with Iran.

NPR reports: "The book, based on interviews with hundreds of officials as well as classified military archives, details how the covert war has spanned five American presidential terms and repeatedly threatened to bring the two nations into open warfare."

Crist is no Daniel Ellsberg. He is still a believer in America's crusade against



Iran and advocates tougher action. He tells about a close call between American and Iranian naval vessels in 2003, when he was a member of special operations forces.

"We were about an hour into the mission when all of a sudden, three Iranian Revolutionary Guard boats come streaming across from the other side of the river, stop just in front of us, unmask their guns and point them straight at us and then proceeded to bombard us with a hail of choice American obscenities," he says.

"Our commander at the time was a Navy Seal who had lived in Tehran until he was 16 and he tried to talk with them. He even rigged an Italian flag turned sideways which looked liked an Iranian flag to show we had no hostile intent. We unmasked our guns, we called for our airpower and I thought we were on the absolute brink of a major shooting war with Iran."

Crist and his fellow troops were ordered to withdraw and not antagonize the Iranians by high-level military officials.

"So we pulled back with the Iranians trailing us, and what I didn't realize at the time was that that was a pretty significant mistake," he says. "By doing so, we surrendered that entire waterway to the Iranians and they were in the process of the counter-invasion of Iraq. And they were flooding southern Iraq with forces [and arming the Shiite militias]. And what these three boats were doing was trying to prevent us from interfering with that counter-invasion."

Crist says the U.S. should have stopped the Iranians or made a more concerted effort to stop the Iranians. His animus towards Iran is unconcealed. His bias is blatant. "By backing down, we acquiesced to them," he says. "And it goes far beyond this one boat incident. ... We missed an opportunity, I think, for reducing the amount of influence Iran was going to have in Iraq afterwards."

The more you read his account the weirder and more uninformed it becomes, but because of his intelligence connections, media outlets like NPR assume Crist is an intelligent "expert" and give him air time. Here's another snatch of the interview conducted by Terry Gross on the show "Fresh Air":

GROSS: The U.S. has had several secret war plans to attack Iran. What's the earliest one that you came across?

CRIST: The earliest one was actually in the very early 1980s, about 1980. And oddly enough, it really wasn't geared towards Iran. It was geared towards the Soviet Union. Iran was actually the chessboard on which the U.S. and Soviet Union were going to play. And the amazing thing is through the plan, as the U.S. was discussing ways to counter a Soviet invasion of Iran, which was going to be

a precursor to seizing Persian Gulf oil, the whole role and attitude of the Iranians never even figured into the plan.

GROSS: What do you mean the role of the Iranians never figured into the plan?

CRIST: There was no thought about how the Iranians were going to react to either the U.S. or the Soviet invasion. It was if they were sort of a neutral territory, which we're going to play a war on. It's not until about three years later that the United States starts taking a hard look at, you know, the Iranians really don't like either us or the Soviet Union. How do we know they're going to welcome us with open arms if we try to invade them on the precursor that it's to try to stop the Soviets?

GROSS: So this war plan was to invade Iran if the Soviets had invaded or to prevent an imminent Soviet invasion during the Cold War?

CRIST: That's absolutely correct.

His view is accepted as expressed. No one who is critical of U.S. policy is on the show. No one in the know challenges him. Is this some big revelation? Not really. But that's not all, Christ later admits he is not even allowed to make what he knows of current history public.

CRIST: I've also been an advisor recently to senior leadership. So, yeah, there's a lot I know that I can't have in this book.

GROSS: So you're writing books for the Defense Department that end up in vaults. When do they – when do those vaults end up getting opened?

CRIST: Well, we're just now – my office is just now getting, I think, the Ford administration reviewed for declassification. So you're about 30 years behind the times. So it's a good long time to let the sensitivity of a lot of the issues drop off and also it's long enough that you can then go back and relook at an issue with sort of a more objective eye than you might have had writing about an essentially current event.

GROSS: And the histories you're writing about are based on classified documents?

CRIST: Yes.

GROSS: What an unusual and interesting job.

CRIST: Oh, it's fascinating. It's the best job for a historian, in my view.

GROSS: Better if you had readers, though, right?

CRIST: I'm sorry?

GROSS: It would be better if you had readers.

CRIST: It is much better. Nobody reads this.

And it goes on. This is the drivel that passes for in-depth news analysis. Intelligence “experts” with nothing to say, or, probably, not allowed to say what they know. Is it any wonder that Americans are so uninformed about U.S.-Iranian relations? Is this really “interesting” (Gross) or “fascinating?” (Crist?)

It’s time to call the Red Cell Unit, because my brain cells are melting.

**News Dissector Danny Schechter blogs at [Newsdissector.net](http://Newsdissector.net). His latest books are *Occupy: Dissecting Occupy Wall Street*, and *Blogothon* (Cosimo Books.) He hosts a show on [ProgressiveRadioNetwork.com](http://ProgressiveRadioNetwork.com) (PRN.fm) This essay first appeared on [PressTV.com](http://PressTV.com). Comments to [dissector@mediachannel.org](mailto:dissector@mediachannel.org)**

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