

The Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Short History

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Introduction:

The Palestine/Israel conflict is a political conflict. Although the conflict has taken on a veneer of religious fanaticism by some Israeli Jews, as well as non-Israeli Jews, and Palestinian Islamists, in reality, it is not about religion. This will become evident as the history unfolds.

In the nineteenth century, a number of Jewish leaders in Europe concluded that anti-Semitism at the hands of European Christians was permanent and incurable. Although there were two strands of Zionism which emerged in Europe, i.e., cultural and political Zionism, it was political Zionism which became dominant. Cultural Zionism sought to create a cultural and spiritual renewal center in Palestine that would allow Jews to secure their traditions. Political Zionism, after exploring sites such as Libya, Cyprus and Uganda among others, fixed on, and sought to transform Palestine into a Jewish state. Chief political Zionist, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) conceptualized the Jewish State in his book, *Judenstat*, published in 1896. It was followed by the formation of the World Zionist Organization and the convening of the First Zionist Congress in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, thus launching the Zionist project.

The problem was that the indigenous population of Palestine was over 90 % Palestinian Arabs. Clearly, transforming Palestine into a Jewish State meant that Palestinians would have to be “transferred” out of Palestine, and Jews would have to be brought in. In fact, the concept of “transfer” was/is a constant theme in Zionist political literature and tracts.¹ Quoted below is one of many examples of the Zionist intent of moving out the indigenous Palestinians:

We cannot allow the Arabs to block so valuable a piece of historic reconstruction. ... And therefore we must gently persuade them to “trek.” After all, they have all Arabia with its million square miles. ... There is no particular reason for the Arabs to cling to these few kilometers. “To fold their tents” and “silently steal away” is their proverbial habit: let them exemplify it now. (Israel Zangwill)²

In fact, Palestinians were predominantly farmers, merchants, intellectuals, professional people, and small business owners.

¹ Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of “Transfer” in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948* (Washington, D.C., Institute of Palestine Studies, 1992).

² *Ibid*, p. 14.

Zionism, Jewish Identity, and British Imperial Interests

Israeli Psychologist, Benjamin Beit Hallahmi brilliantly exposes the way political Zionism remade Jewish identity from that derived in the state of “Diaspora” in Europe, i.e., a “weak-kneed, passive Jew of the ghetto, the human dust that made up the Jewish people”³ to one of a strong, assertive, self-sufficient, and modernized secular identity. In order to do this, Zionism had to somehow “claim continuity with the Jewish past, ... but it also attempts [attempted] to create discontinuity, through a new space of a national homeland and a new time of secular nationalism.”⁴ Beit Hallahmi explains how Zionism resolved the contradiction of the two identities. He notes that Zionism, i.e., its ideological leaders, created a new Jewish history that claimed that Jewish identity was fostered in Palestine, not in the Diaspora, and that they were exiled against their will, but yearned to return to the homeland. Further, Zionists arrested a particular time in the mythological version of Jewish history in Palestine and built its narrative on the claim that only that alleged period was the basis for identifying the “legitimate” owners of the land of Palestine. No people or period before or after that assumed period could have claim to the land.⁵ *Ipsa facto*, based on the Zionist narrative, the indigenous Palestinian Arabs have no authentic claim to their land. However, archeological debates about the alleged ancient Israel “... have become increasingly acrimonious because the aura of objectivity which has been projected to cover the collusion of biblical studies in the dispossession of Palestine has gradually been exposed.”⁶

The second hurdle that the Zionists had to overcome was to convince the British who had strategic interests in the region that the Zionists would maintain and promote those interests in return for the British facilitating the establishment of a Jewish homeland (read State). Indeed, the British embraced the Zionists, first by the issuance of the November 2, 1917 Balfour Declaration, which stated that “His Majesty’s Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,”⁷ and second by allowing the foundations of the state to be established during most of the Mandate period and earlier, especially 1920-1948.

³ Benjamin Beit Hallahmi, *Original Sins: Reflections on the History of Zionism and Israel* (London, Pluto Press, 1992) p. 46.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 47.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 47-48; also see Keith Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: the Silencing of Palestinian History* (London, Routledge, 1996).

⁶ *Ibid*. p. 72. Also see, Ze’ev Herzog, “The Holy Land, Archaeology, and the Bible: Deconstructing the Walls of Jericho,” **Haaretz**, Friday, October 29, 1999.

⁷ Quoted in Emory C. Bogle, *The Modern Middle East: From Imperialism to Freedom, 1800-1958* (Upper saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, c. 1996), 134.

The Broken Trust: The Betrayal of Palestine

As World War I spread to the Middle East, the British sought, and were offered the help of Arabs in confronting the combined forces of the Germans and the Ottoman Turks in the region. They turned to Sharif Husain of Mecca in the Hejaz (western Arabia, now part of Saudi Arabia), allegedly a descendent of the Prophet Mohammed, and then the leader of Arab Muslims. In a 1915-16 exchange of letters between Sharif Husain and Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner for Egypt and the Sudan, an agreement was reached between the parties. In return for Sharif Husain's ordering an Arab revolt against the Ottomans and Germans, the British would facilitate an independent Arab State basically in Greater Syria (Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine), Iraq, and the Arabian peninsula, excepting Aden. In further negotiations the British excluded specific areas that were of interest to the French, as well as areas related to specific British agreements with tribal chiefs. Nonetheless, Palestine was never excluded from the agreement, though the British attempted later to argue that it was.

In any case, the British and French, the main negotiators of the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement (Russia was also involved related to some of the Turkish areas), secretly agreed on how they would split up Greater Syria and Iraq after the war. Palestine would basically be in the British zone, especially the port cities of Haifa and Acre.⁸ The Sykes-Picot agreement was followed by the 1917 Balfour Declaration, noted above. Both the Sykes-Picot agreement and the Balfour Declaration were in direct conflict with the 1915-16 Husain-McMahon agreement. It was indeed a broken trust, a betrayal of Palestine. The British had come to the conclusion that a Jewish homeland (read state) in Palestine would serve British interests better than allowing Palestine to be part of an independent Arab state, or to facilitate separate statehood for Palestine in accordance with Article 22, paragraph 4 of the League of Nations Covenant regarding the mandate system.⁹ Indeed, the British kept secret the Declaration's text from Palestinians for several years so as not to alert them to the betrayal.

President Wilson and the King Crane Commission of 1919¹⁰

Known as the "champion" of self-determination in his speeches from 1916-1919, President Wilson admitted to partiality in the way self-determination was to be applied. He took care not to advocate its application if it would step on British and French colonial interests in the Middle East.

⁸ For a map of the Sykes Picot agreement and a discussion of its specifics, see George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (New York: Capricorn Books edition, 1965 – originally published in 1938), pp. 243-275.

⁹ Article 22, section 4 is quoted in and analyzed by W.T. Mallison, Jr., "The Balfour Declaration: An Appraisal in International Law," in Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (Ed.), *The Transformation of Palestine* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 97.

¹⁰ This section draws heavily on the meticulous research of Hisham H. Ahmed in his "Roots of Denial: American Stand on Palestinian Self-Determination from the Balfour Declaration to World War Two," in Michael W. Suleiman (Editor), *U.S. Policy on Palestine from Wilson to Clinton* (Normal, IL: AAUG, 1995), pp.27-57.

Moreover, Wilson was greatly influenced by American Zionist, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, who worked closely with the British. He convinced the President to champion Zionism in his own foreign policy. Six months before the November 1917 Balfour Declaration, Brandeis presented a document from London of Zionist thinking to the US State Department. The document espoused the denial of the right of the indigenous people of Palestine to self-determination in just about every one of its provisions. “Palestinian Self-Determination could not be, to use the words of Wilson’s Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, ‘harmonized with Zionism, to which the President is practically committed.’”¹¹

Clearly, Wilson had made up his mind on supporting Zionism well before the 1919 Paris Peace Conference debates on Palestine. Reports received by Wilson at the conference from the U.S. Consul in Jerusalem warned him that the “... implementation of Zionist goals would lead to bloodshed in the area.”¹² Wilson was pressured into sending a commission to investigate the situation in the fallen Ottoman Empire, which became known as the King-Crane Commission. However, Wilson emphasized to the Commission “... that the questions of Palestine and Mesopotamia [Iraq] were virtually”¹³ closed by the powers. The area was under occupation by the victorious British and French who had their own colonial designs on the strategic area.

The Commission found that the Jewish minority (1/10th of the population of Palestine in 1919) favored a Jewish national home in Palestine, while the majority Arabs opposed what they called “the usurpation” of their homeland. The latter preferred to be reunited with Greater Syria, or to have an independent Palestinian state. The Commission recommended reuniting Palestine with Greater Syria and granting it independence, a demand that emanated from the July 1919 meeting of the democratically elected Syrian National Congress composed of representatives from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. The Commission emphasized “... that increasing colonial immigration of Jews from Europe into Palestine would deprive the indigenous people of their right to self-determination and would destabilize the situation in the country and thus endanger Palestinian lives.”¹⁴ In any case, the Commission’s report, as the 1917 Balfour Declaration, was kept secret for several years. The Commission’s recommendations conflicted with French and British intentions and interests in the area as originally embodied in the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, and with the British embrace of the Zionist designs on Palestine.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 35.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 36

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 37. Also see Harry N. Howard, *The King-Crane Commission: An American Inquiry in the Middle East* (Beirut: Khayats, 1963).

The World Zionist Organization presented what it considered to be the minimal map of the territorial dimensions of a viable Jewish State to the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Water resources were a main concern in drawing the dimensions of this map. It included all of Palestine, South Lebanon up to city of Sidon (including the Litani River), the headwaters of the Jordan River in Syria and Lebanon, i.e., the Syrian Golan Heights, the Hauran Plain of Syria including the southern town of Deraa, control over the Hijaz Railway from Deraa to Amman to Maan in Jordan, and control over the Gulf of Aqaba, i.e., a large area on the eastern bank of the Jordan River. Various Zionists had other maps which included the area from the Nile in the West to the Euphrates in the East, or, for example, one that included Palestine, Lebanon, and western Syria, including part of Southern Turkey¹⁵.

The British Mandate: the Interwar Years in Palestine

The San Remo Conference: April 1920. The World War I allies met in San Remo, Italy to determine the fate of the fallen Ottoman Empire. The British and French were deeply concerned that their plans for the area were falling apart. Sharif Husain's son, Feisal, was elected by the Syrian National Congress as King of Syria (Greater Syria) in March 1920, and his brother Abdullah was nominated to be King of Iraq. Rioting was occurring in Palestine. The region in general was in disarray, especially on the eve of Ataturk's rebellion to salvage the Ottoman core area of Anatolia, today's state of Turkey. The conference resulted in the establishment of the Mandate System under the January 1920-formed League of Nations. "At the conclusion of the San Remo conference on April 24, the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire learned that the Great Powers planned to retain dominion over their region through a new device called a mandate."¹⁶ Britain and France justified this arrangement on the basis that the Arabs were not sufficiently prepared to govern themselves without experiencing a period of European guidance. Although it took until 1922 for the mandatory system to develop in Syria and Palestine (formally implemented in Palestine in September 1923), and till 1924 in Iraq, the French and British asserted their authority in the area immediately after San Remo.

The French managed to pressure Feisal out of Syria. He went to Palestine. Ultimately, the British established Feisal as King of Iraq, but under strict British control and authority. They created Trans-Jordan (now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) and placed Abdullah on the throne there. Abdullah was also beholden to the British. Neither monarch was popular, but Abdullah became the

¹⁵ All of the proposed maps were assembled from Zionist sources and put out in collected form by The Arab Women's Information Committee in their publication, "From the Nile to the Euphrates," in *The Facts: About the Palestine Problem* (Beirut: 1968).

¹⁶ Emory C. Bogle, *The Modern Middle East*, pp. 142-143.

most hated for his collusion with the Zionists after the 1948 war, his annexation of the West Bank, and for his attempt to make Palestine geographically and linguistically disappear.¹⁷ He was assassinated by a Palestinian in 1951 in Jerusalem. His son Talal succeeded him for a year, but was dethroned by Abdullah's old advisers allegedly because of a mental disorder, but more likely for being too much of an Arab nationalist. His son Hussein became King at the age of eighteen, and continued his and Jordan's dependence on the British (now the USA). Attempts were made to assassinate Jordan's King Hussein for the secret meetings he had with Israeli leaders, and his dependence on the USA. He survived, and now his son, King Abdullah II reigns in Jordan.

The British Mandate Period in Palestine. Although the Mandate was formally issued in September 1923, in effect the British Mandate began in 1920 with the appointment of the first High Commissioner for Palestine, Herbert Samuel, himself Jewish. Palestine was placed under the British Colonial Office, foretelling its further colonization by Jews. During WW I and after, Chaim Weizman, later to be the first president of Israel, established strong relationships with the British, assuring them always that a Jewish State would be in Britain's best interest in the region. Weizmann was concerned about Samuel's appointment because he did not know if he was one of the liberal British Jews who opposed Zionism. Later he found out that Samuel had written a 1915 memorandum on the subject of a Jewish State in Palestine. Hence, Samuel's appointment (1920-25) was an important victory for Zionists to initiate the transformation of Palestine.¹⁸

Contrary to traditional accounts portraying Samuel as a consummate British official, he actually used his position to lay the foundations for a Jewish State in Palestine. He was not impartial. Among his many actions and policies are the following:

- He assured a liberal Jewish immigration policy aimed at demographic density.
- He facilitated Jewish land acquisition, including altering the Ottoman "land use" definition of ownership of state lands (lands held by the state in ownership trust for the land users), which were acquired by the British as the Mandate Authority of Palestine. He separated "land use" from "land ownership" so that when Jews acquired some of that land, they could evict the Palestinian "land use" owners and amass territorial and economic footing in Palestine.
- He facilitated contiguous Jewish settlements for political and economic development of the Jewish community.

¹⁷ See Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) and Mary Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 reprint edition).

¹⁸ A major resource on this period is written by Sahar Huneidi, *A Broken Trust: Herbert Samuel, Zionism and the Palestinians* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

- He adopted a policy of large public investments and deficit financing to employ the economically unabsorbed Jewish immigrants.
- He developed a favorable customs policies to allow Jews to import needed materials cheaply to develop a Jewish economy.
- He consulted regularly with Chaim Weizmann.
- He worked closely in Palestine with the Zionist Commission, the National Council for Jews, and the Jewish Constituent Assembly (Va'ad Leumi), precursor of the Israeli Knesset. Simultaneously, he blocked every effort by the majority Palestinians to gain authoritative representation, while granting the Zionist minority considerable power. In fact, he gave new Jewish immigrants immediate provisional citizenship so that they would have electoral impact. He tried to create collaborationist Palestinian parties (as other colonial powers have done in their colonies) to divide the Palestinians and provide a façade of Palestinian political participation.¹⁹

In the end, the Zionists acquired less than 6% of the land of Palestine, with an added 1% of land leased to the Zionists by the British, i.e., less than a total of 7%.

Riots, Violence, and Strike in Palestine: The 1936 Peel Commission and the 1937 Partition

Plan. Palestinians became increasingly aware of the fact that the Zionists were forging a takeover of Palestine. The Zionists had established proto-state institutional structures in Palestine, with paramilitary organizations at the ready. By this time, David Ben-Gurion, leader of the Labor Socialist Party had become the dominant Zionist figure in Palestine. Ben Gurion was a brilliant strategist and tactician.

Ben-Gurion, and the rest of the left-wing leadership, always looked moderate and reasonable, denying either a conflict with the Arabs or the wish for a Jewish state. This was a brilliant ruse, a great tactical posture, but behind it he knew that the only way to defeat the Palestinians was through military force [a position that has defined Israel's Arab policy of force and more force to bring the Arabs to heel], which he created. While right-wing leaders made fiery speeches about a great Jewish army, Ben-Gurion quietly created it.²⁰

He [Ben-Gurion] knew very little about socialist theories and did not need to study socialism [the idealized Zionist construction of return to the land, Jewish self-sufficiency, etc. which appealed to European Jews immigrating to Palestine] to achieve his goal, which was the goal of the movement: Jewish sovereignty in Palestine.²¹

Palestinians kept pressing the British to live up to the 1915-16 agreement and to League of Nations Covenant, Article 22, paragraph 4, which stated:

Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering

¹⁹ *Ibid.* passim. See also my review of Huneida's book in *The Middle East Journal* (56:1, Winter 2002), pp. 175-76; and *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann, First President of Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1949).

²⁰ Beit-Hallahmi, *Original Sins*, p. 105.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 104.

of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principle consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.²²

In November 1934, Palestinians approached the British High Commissioner about "...the formation of a Legislative Council as a first step toward Palestinian self-government envisioned in the mandate."²³

In November 1936, the Palestinians submitted a list of demands to the High Commissioner. These included:

- 1. The establishment of democratic government in accordance with the Covenant of the League of Nations and Article 2 of the Palestine Mandate.**
- 2. Prohibition of the transfer of Arab lands to Jews ...**
- 3. The immediate cessation of Jewish immigration and the formation of a competent committee to determine the absorptive capacity of the country and lay down principles for immigration.**²⁴

The Palestinians understood that unrestrained Jewish immigration, combined with Zionist political and military institutional development, was leading to the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish state at their expense. By this time, Palestinians were conscious of the 1917 Balfour Declaration and other secret documents aimed at dispossessing them. In 1936, Palestinians rebelled, called for a strike, and violent disturbances broke out. The British sent the Peel Commission to investigate the causes of the violence. The Peel Commission concluded in its July 1937 report that the desire for an independent Palestinian state could not be reconciled with Jewish nationalism. Partition of Palestine and the termination of the British Mandate were recommended. Ben-Gurion accepted the partition plan as a tactical step toward acquiring all of Palestine. His Zionist detractors criticized him for accepting the idea of a Jewish state in part of Palestine. "Lecturing to Mapai activists on 29 October 1937, Ben-Gurion explained that the realization of the Jewish state would come in two stages: the first, 'the period of building and laying foundations,' would last ten to fifteen years and would be but the prelude to the second state, 'the period of expansion.'"²⁵ In any case, the plan was never implemented, especially as war loomed on the horizon.

In 1939, George Antonius was part of the Palestinian delegation that went to King James Court to argue for Britain's implementation of the legal commitment made to Sharif Husain in 1915-16. His 1938 book, *The Arab Awakening*, provided all of the irrefutable legal evidence of Britain's promises to the Arabs with detailed analysis and maps. However, "No matter how Antonius caught the British by the legal and moral tail, Great Britain continued to favor the Zionists, whose legal case was basically

²² Mallison, "The Balfour Declaration" in Abu-Lughod (Editor), *Transformation.*, p. 97.

²³ Barbara Kalkas, "The Revolt of 1936: A Chronicle of Events," in *Ibid.* p. 237

²⁴ Kalkas, *Ibid.* p. 238.

²⁵ Walid Khalidi, "Revisiting the UNGA Partition Resolution," in *Journal of Palestine Studies* (XXVII: 1, Autumn, 1997), pp. 6-7. Khalidi quotes Ben-Gurion from his biographer, Shabatai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

nil.”²⁶ The Jewish Agency was also invited to the same 1939 conference to search for a solution in lieu of the 1937 Partition Plan, unacceptable to Arabs, and the Zionists were unenthusiastic about it. As a result, the British, growing ever more concerned about war, issued a White Paper aimed at placating both parties. It stipulated

... that (1) Britain would continue to rule Palestine for a ten-year period. If the Arabs and Jews were able to work together satisfactorily during this period, they would be given an increasing role in the Palestine government, and Palestine would be established as an independent state within ten years. Otherwise, independence would be postponed. (2) Seventy-five thousand Jewish immigrants would be allowed to enter Palestine over a five-year period. Any immigration after that would be subject to the acquiescence of the Arabs. (3) Stringent restrictions would be placed on land sales to Jews in certain areas and complete prohibition in other areas.²⁷

WW II postponed further thinking on Palestine.

Post-World War II: Violence, The 1946 Anglo-American Committee Report, the UNGA Partition Resolution, and the 1948 War.

Violence and the Anglo-American Committee Report. At the close of the war, violence resurged in Palestine. The Zionists pushed for allowing unrestricted Jewish immigration. The Arabs feared becoming a minority in their own country, and feared more that they would lose their country entirely. Exhausted by war, Britain found it increasingly difficult to control the situation in Palestine.

In October 1945, Britain persuaded US President Truman to undertake a joint study of the Palestine problem. They formed the Anglo-American Committee and submitted their report on May 1, 1946. Their basic recommendations were to issue for 1946, 100,000 permit entries to Jews to immigrate to Palestine; to call for a binational state in Palestine with equal representation for Jews and Palestinians; to make Palestine a UN Trust Territory, which would prepare the two communities for independence in a binational state; and to base future immigration to Palestine on mutual agreement. Truman accepted only those parts of the recommendations favorable to Zionists; Britain favored the whole but said that it could not admit 100,000 refugees into Palestine until the Zionist paramilitary groups were disbanded and disarmed. Ben-Gurion rejected the whole report, focusing instead on Jewish statehood, not binationalism. He was not interested in sharing the state with Palestinians, although Jewish intellectuals like Buber and Magnes were.²⁸

The Zionists paramilitary organizations, including the Zionist Irgun (headed by Menachem Begin) and Stern Gang terrorist groups, continued their campaign against the British. As Khalidi notes:

²⁶ Quoted from my review of Susan Silsby Boyle, *Betrayal of Palestine: The Story of George Antonius* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001) in *Middle East Journal* (55:3, Summer 2001), p. 513.

²⁷ Fred J. Khouri, *The Arab-Israeli Dilemma* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968), pp. 26-27.

²⁸ For a good discussion of this period, see *Ibid.* pp. 16-42.

The Jewish campaign against the British did not mean that Ben-Gurion considered his relationship with the British to be a “military” one or that he sought an all-out confrontation with them. Quite the contrary, as we are assured by Teveth [Ben-Gurion’s biographer] that he saw the relationship as an exclusively “political” one. In other words, all Ben-Gurion wanted from Britain at this stage was to clear out the way so that he could pursue his “military” relationship with the Palestinians and the Arab countries. And pursue it he did, ..., in a massive program of arms acquisition and military buildup²⁹

The UNGA Partition Resolution of November 1947. Before the UNGA Resolution 181 calling for the Partition of Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State with Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum* administered by the UN was acted upon, the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was sent to Palestine. The committee recommended to the General Assembly that the Jewish refugee problem be considered an international responsibility. However, neither the UN as a whole, nor the United States responded to this. In fact, the Zionists made every effort to restrict refugee migration to countries other than Palestine, with the intent of increasing demographic density in Palestine.³⁰ While war was still raging, President Roosevelt favored an immigration plan that would open the doors of various countries to European refugees –especially Jews –, each country designating a specific number it would be able to absorb. He lined up several. Roosevelt’s representative, Morris Ernst, was sent to Great Britain during the war to determine how many the British could take. The British said they would take 150,000 if the US would take the same. Roosevelt knew the US would be a hard sell given the labor unions fear of foreign workers, but in any case, the plan fell through. Ernst explained the defeat of the plan as follows:

I do not intend to ... suggest that my appraisal of the defeat would agree in every detail with his [FDR]. But to me it seemed that the failure of the leading Jewish groups to support with zeal this immigration program may have caused the President not to push forward with it at that time.

I was amazed and even felt insulted when active Jewish leaders decried, sneered and then attacked me as if I were a traitor. ... I was openly accused of furthering this plan for freer immigration in order to undermine political Zionism

I think I know the reason for much of the opposition. There is a deep genuine, often fanatical emotional vested interest in putting over the Palestinian movement [i.e., the Zionist project in Palestine].³¹

After all the Zionist efforts to increase population density, Jews formed only one third of the population in Palestine when the UNGA partition plan was passed on November 29, 1947.

The U.S. had pressured countries that had misgivings about the partition plan to vote for it. The USSR voted for it also because it saw it as a quick way to get Britain out of the M.E. The Soviets also hoped that the communist and socialist Jews in Palestine would join with Palestinians on the basis

²⁹ Khalidi, “Revisiting,” p. 8.

³⁰ For a discussion of this, see, Morris Ernst, “F.D.R.’s International Immigration Plan for Jewish Refugees,” in Walid Khalidi (Editor), *From Conquest to Haven: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1971), pp. 489-494, reprinted from Morris L. Ernst, *So Far So Good* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), pp. 170-77.

³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 492-493

of class, overthrow nationalist Zionists, and establish a pro-Soviet country in Palestine. That of course did not happen.

The Arab States challenged the legality of the UNGA partition plan and its provisions.

Among the requests made by the Arabs were that

“... the International Court of Justice be asked for its opinion on ... a) whether or not Palestine was included in the Arab territories that had been promised independence by Britain at the end of World War I; ... c) whether partition was consistent with the principles of the UN Charter; d) whether its adoption and forcible execution were within the competence or jurisdiction of the UN; and e) whether it lay within the power of any UN member or group of members to implement partition without the consent of the majority of the people living within the country.”³²

The Arab challenge went down to a US-pressured 21 to 20 vote on a counter challenge that insisted that the UN did have authority to partition. In any case, the Zionists accepted the 1947 partition plan as a tactical move that would lead to establishing a “legal” foothold in Palestine from which to expand into all of Palestine and beyond. Ben Gurion was on record in the 1942 Biltmore Hotel meeting of the World Zionist Organization as committed to the establishment of Palestine as a Jewish commonwealth as contrasted to the notion of partition calling for a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. However, by 1946, he reverted to his tactical acceptance of partition. He explained his acceptance to his fellow Zionists as simply a first step toward fulfilling the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish Commonwealth. “Teveh [Ben Gurion’s biographer] paraphrases Ben-Gurion’s thoughts as follows: ‘Only those with deep Zionism would appreciate his doctrine of gradual implementation of the ideology.’”³³ The Arabs rejected the partition plan. A few figures will demonstrate just how unfair the partition plan was. Under the plan:

- Jews got 55% of the best land in Palestine, while owning less than 7% in all of Palestine, and less than 11% in the allotted area, while Palestinians were allotted 45% of their land.
- The proposed Palestinian state would have 818,000 Palestinians, including the 71,000 Palestinians in the seacoast city of Jaffa, surrounded by what would be the Jewish state, and less than 10,000 Jews. The Jerusalem *corpus separatum* would have 105,000 Palestinians and 100,000 Jews. The Jewish state would have about 499,000 Jews and about 438,000 Palestinians.
- 80% of the land in the Jewish state was owned by Palestinians, whereas only 1% of the Palestinian land was owned by Jews.
- The best lands were incorporated into the Jewish state where Palestinians had citrus and cereal production areas, their main exports. Moreover, 40% of Palestinian industry and the major sources of the country’s electrical supply fell within the envisaged Jewish state.

³² Khalidi, “Revisiting,” p. 9.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 17.

- The plan also left Palestinians without air access, or harbors and port facilities, except for isolated Jaffa.³⁴

Mainstream Zionists demanded what they felt was realistic in the 1940s, a Jewish State in the greater part of Palestine, which the partition plan offered. Palestinian Historian, Walid Khalidi, notes that the Zionist acceptance of the partition plan was in essence acceptance of the Zionists' own demand. He states further: "It is difficult to see why a moral kudos appertains to the party that accepts its own program, and eternal opprobrium attaches to the party that rejects a transaction it perceives to threaten its national existence."³⁵ Since that time, Israelis have said continuously that had the Palestinians accepted the partition plan, they would have a Palestinian state today. However, given the fact that the 1947 proposed Jewish state had almost an equal number of Palestinians in the area allotted to the Zionists, it would not have been the Jewish state called for in Zionist congresses and literature but a binational state, a concept earlier rejected by Ben Gurion. Moreover, given our contemporary knowledge of the planned expulsions, massacres, expansion strategy, and efforts today to deny Palestinian statehood on the 1967 Israeli-occupied territories, such pronouncements ring hollow.

The 1948 War. The UNGA 181 (II) was never implemented. In March 1948, the Zionist Plan Dalet [aka Plan D] was finalized. Building on previous Plans, Plan Dalet was designed to secure the areas designated as the Jewish State in the partition plan as well as to secure areas beyond those borders.³⁶ Well before the 1948 war, Palestinians were resisting what they considered to be Zionist colonialism, while Zionists preferred to call it a civil war. On May 14, 1948, the Jewish People's Council, representing Jews in Palestine and the Zionist Movement, declared the establishment of the state of Israel. They rooted the declaration in that part of UNGA 181 (II) that called for a Jewish state while ignoring the parts that called for an Arab State and the internationalization of Jerusalem. Ben Gurion resisted initiatives that could have prevented the war that followed the declaration because he feared they would lead to a Palestinian state as well. "It was only Ben-Gurion's profound opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state that undermined the Palestinians resistance to the Mufti's call [to launch a war against the Zionist forces]."³⁷

³⁴ See the full text of UNGA 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 in George J. Tomeh (Editor), *United Nations Resolutions on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1947-1974* (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, c. 1975), pp. 4-14; and *Ibid.* pp. 11-14.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 16.

³⁶ Lieutenant-Colonel Netanel Lorch, "Plan Dalet," in Khalidi (Editor), *From Haven to Conquest*, pp. 755-760.

³⁷ Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), p. 9.

War between the Arab armies and the forces of the newly declared Israel ensued. By the time the war ended, Israel had conquered 78% of Mandatory Palestine, and had expelled or made to flee some 750,000 [Israel says less; Palestinians say more] Palestinians of the 900,000 who had originally resided in that 78%. Some 150,000 managed to stay within what became Israel. The Palestinian refugees ended up primarily in camps in the remainder of Palestine, i.e., Gaza and the West Bank, and in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Some 400-500, depending on whether sub-sections of larger villages were counted as villages, were demolished, and Hebrew names given to the areas.³⁸ Within what became Israel, a number of those who managed to stay became internal refugees, i.e., dispossessed of their lands. The total number of Palestinian refugees today is approximately 5 million, including those displaced in the 1967 war, 3.6 million of which are registered for aid with the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA). They constitute 62.5% of the estimated 8 million Palestinian Arabs.

On December 11, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 194 (III), which has come to be known as the Right of Return resolution, although it also sought to reverse Israeli occupation and transformation of West Jerusalem and to place the whole of Jerusalem under a UN trusteeship. A special legal regime was established by this resolution to deal with the refugee problem. First, it called specifically and solely for the return of the refugees to their original homes and properties in what became Israel. Second, compensation should be paid to those not wanting to return, but also to those returning “for loss of, or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.”³⁹ Third, a special UN agency was created, the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP) to “... facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation ...”⁴⁰ In recognition that the refugees required assistance until such time as 194 (III) could be implemented, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 302 (IV) on December 8, 1949 establishing the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).⁴¹ This agency was meant to be temporary until the repatriation of refugees was effected.

The UNCCP was unable to get the Israelis to recognize and implement UNGA 194(III) nor to reverse its occupation and transformation of West Jerusalem. Israel was admitted to the United

³⁸ Salman Abu-Sitta, *Palestine 1948: 50 Years After al Nakba – Towns and Villages Depopulated by the Zionist Invasion of 1948* (London: Palestine Return Center, 1998), a map showing the villages and towns with other data. Also see, Walid Khalidi (Editor), *All that Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

³⁹ Tomeh (Editor), *United Nations Resolutions*, Paragraph 11, Resolution 194(III), p. 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp. 18-20.

Nations in 1949 after agreeing to do both things. It did neither, and within months declared West Jerusalem the capital of Israel.

The 1967 War and Its Aftermath: Stage Two Expansion and the Demographic Dilemma for Israel

On June 5, 1967, Israel initiated a preventive war against Egypt, Jordan and Syria. It handily defeated all three within a matter of days, occupying the Egyptian Sinai (returned to Egypt after the 1978 Peace Treaty with Israel), the Syrian Golan Heights (annexed to Israel in 1981), and the remainder of Mandatory Palestine, i.e., Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem (22% of Palestine).⁴² Israel began to place settlements, i.e., colonize the Golan Heights and the Palestinian territories.

Unlike 1948, the majority of the Palestinians managed to remain on the land in the newly conquered territories, although there were 300,000 “displaced” persons.

Given the fact that Israel ultimately intended to keep the Occupied Territories, the existence of a large Palestinian population there recreated Israel’s original demographic problem. A Whole Land of Israel Movement issued a Manifesto in 1967 affirming that ‘no government in Israel is entitled to give up [the conquered territories which Zionists define as part of the whole of Israel, i.e., *Eretz Israel*] this entirety, which represents the inherent and inalienable right to our people from the beginning of its history.’ [quoted in Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians* (London: Pluto Press, 2000)pp. 28-29] Today, there are 3.2 million Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and over 1 million [the descendants of those 150,000 who managed to stay in Israel in 1948-49] within Israel proper. The Jewish population numbers some 5 million. Hence the ratio is approximately 4 Palestinians to every 5 Israeli Jews in Israel and the Occupied Territories.⁴³

Given the Israeli dilemma of wanting to keep the land but not the Palestinian people residing on it, a debate took place in Israel regarding a solution to this dilemma. The “solutions” ranged from dependent autonomy for the Palestinians in areas of the territories while Israel retained control over the land and would annex border areas, to engineered emigration (read ethnic cleansing) and *de facto* annexation of the territories. The former was most often associated with Labor Party leader, Yigal Allon, and the latter was favored by Ariel Sharon and Yitzhak Shamir. In fact, no real action was taken to formalize a “solution”.⁴⁴ Camp David I produced a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1978, but failed on the Palestinian issue since P.M. Begin insisted on the concept of autonomy only for

⁴² For an excellent discussion of the 1967 war, see Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London and New York: Verso, 1995), Chapter 5, “To Live or Perish: Abba Eban ‘Reconstructs’ the June 1967 War,” pp.123-149.

⁴³ Elaine C. Hagopian, “Palestinian Refugees: Victims of Zionist Ideology,” in Maurine and Robert Tobin (Editors), *How Long O Lord? Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Voices from the Ground and Visions for the Future in Israel/Palestine* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2002), pp. 39-40. NB: The ratio may now be 4.5 Palestinians to every 5.5 Israeli Jews.

⁴⁴ Sheila Ryan, “Plans to Regularize the Occupation,” in Naseer H. Aruri (Editor), *Occupation: Israel Over Palestine* (Belmont, MA: AAUG, 1983), pp. 339-375.

the residents of the occupied territories without territorial sovereignty. Refugee Palestinians were not considered at all. Israel continued building settlements in the territories and in Israeli-expanded East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed after the 1967 war, united it with West Jerusalem, and declared the whole the “eternal capital of Israel.” Israel integrated the water resources and electric grid of the territories, placing them under Israeli control. More importantly, Israel embarked on a process of what scholar Sara Roy coined as “de-development” with the intention of precluding the growth of a viable economy in the territories which could undergird a possible Palestinian state.⁴⁵

During the period from 1967 to the end of the first Gulf War in 1991, Palestinians resisted occupation, while the Palestine Liberation Organization operating outside of Israel and the occupied territories conducted operations against Israel, and continued to advocate for Palestinian rights. The PLO ultimately agreed to a two-state solution publicly in 1974. It was made explicit when the Palestine National Council (Palestinian policy body) of the PLO declared a Palestinian state in 1988, rooting its legitimacy in the 1947 partition plan resolution UNGA 181 (II), but to be located in the 1967-occupied territories, i.e., 22% of Palestine instead of the 45% in the partition resolution. As part of that declaration, the PNC/PLO accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242, thereby recognizing Israel in the 78% of Palestine it conquered in 1948. There is nothing in UNSC 242 that calls for a Palestinian state, hence the reason for rooting the declaration in UNGA 181 (II). PLO moderation was not embraced by the Israeli Government given that Israel wanted to keep the 1967 occupied territories. Nonetheless, the first President Bush insisted that the time was opportune in the aftermath of the first Gulf War to “resolve” once and for all the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The “peace process” was initiated in Madrid, October 31, 1991 with UN Security Council Resolution 242 as the sole legal framework.⁴⁶ Secretary of State James Baker sent letters of assurance to the peace delegations. It was obvious from reading the letter to the Israelis that the US accepted Israel’s claim that UNSC 242 did not call for Israel’s full withdrawal from the territories.⁴⁷ Moreover, territories were defined by Israel as administered territories, not as occupied territories. The international community did not accept this definition, but US backing allowed Israel to maintain it. Palestinians were denied representation by the PLO, which represented all Palestinians in the diaspora and under occupation.

⁴⁵ Sara Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2nd edition, 2001, c. 1995).

⁴⁶ Tomeh, *United Nations Resolutions*, p. 143. UNSC 242 was unusual in the sense that it did not refer back to extant resolution on the conflict.

⁴⁷ See the Special Document File on “The Madrid Peace Conference,” in **Journal of Palestine Studies** (Washington, D.C.: XXI:2, Winter 1992), pp.117-149. The letter to Israel appears on p. 120. Two key commitments made by Baker were: “The U.S. will not support the creation of an independent Palestinian state.” [and] “Israel holds its own interpretation of Security Council Resolution 242, alongside other interpretations.”

The Palestinian delegation was made up of Palestinians in the 1967 Israeli-occupied territories only (where the demographic problem existed), and was made part of the Jordanian delegation. The Madrid “process” failed because the Palestinian delegation insisted that the negotiations should be about removing the Israeli occupation, militarily as well as the illegal settlements. The Palestinians refused to accept dependent autonomy in the territories with no end result of a viable state. That is when the backdoor channel was open to PLO head, Yasir Arafat in Oslo. Arafat, by accepting the Declaration of Principles, which did not guarantee a Palestinian state, and by accepting the Gaza/Jericho first proposal, *de facto* conceded to Israel the “right” to determine from which if any land it would withdraw. Moreover, the terms set for allowing a Palestinian Authority in the territories were clearly defined to give Israel ultimate control and veto power over the Authority and its institutions. The Israeli intent was to rid themselves of responsibility for the occupied Palestinians (the demographic problem), but to keep control over the land and resources.⁴⁸ Once the Palestinian Authority was established in the territories, the PLO, representing all Palestinians, declined in its ability to advocate for the rights of all Palestinians, including the diaspora refugees. Arafat remained as head of the PLO, but in effect the PLO was “collapsed” into the Authority.

The Oslo “process” led to worsened conditions for the Palestinians. Israelis worked diligently to assure that a “solution” would not lead to a viable Palestinian state or any loss of control of the territories by Israel. The symbols of sovereignty, e.g., passport issuance, stamps, etc., were allowed but within the context of dependent autonomy. It is not necessary here to review the stages of the disintegration of Oslo. Sara Roy’s excellent “Oslo Autopsy” covers this well.⁴⁹

Under the present [July 2004] Israeli Government led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Israel is

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the Oslo fiasco, see Elaine C. Hagopian, “Is the Peace Process a Process for Peace? A Retrospective Analysis of Oslo,” in William W. Haddad, et al (Editors), *The June 1967 War after Three Decades* (Washington, D.C.: AAUG, 1999), pp. 51-78.

⁴⁹ Sara Roy, “Why Peace Failed – An Oslo Autopsy,” in **Current History** (100:651, January 8, 2002), and which was reprinted in Tobin (Editors), *How Long O Lord?* pp. 11-28. Countering Barak’s “generous offer” claim, and “there is no Palestinian partner for peace” are the following important articles: Robert Malley & Hussein Agha, “Camp David: The Tragedy of Errors,” in **The New York Review of Books** (48:13, August 9, 2001) and Uri Avnery, “Irreversible Mental Damage,” in **Palestine Chronicle**, June 22, 2004 and posted on Znet: www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=5760§ionID=22. In it Avnery notes: “This is the culmination of a process that began with the return of the then Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, from the 2000 Camp David summit. After the failure of that meeting, he coined the mantra that has since become the cornerstone of the policy of successive Israeli governments: ‘I have turned every stone on the way to peace/ I have offered the Palestinians more generous proposals than any of my predecessors/ The Palestinians have rejected all my offers/ Arafat wants to throw us into the sea/ We have no partner for peace.’ This mantra is based on a series of lies that have been exploded long ago. American eye-witnesses like Robert Malley, President Clinton’s advisor at Camp David, as well as some of the Israeli participants and international researchers have published detailed reports that prove that Barak himself was responsible for the failure at least as much as Arafat – in fact, far more.”

pursuing the preferred Sharon “solution” of progressive engineered emigration by imprisoning Palestinians behind an apartheid wall aimed at producing conditions that will induce Palestinians to leave over time, Jordan being the obvious destination. The Likud always maintained that “Jordan is Palestine” in any case. Sharon has destroyed Palestinian infrastructure and institutions in the territories and has crippled Palestinian security forces. In his effort, he has managed to apply the label of terrorism to the Palestinians, in place of legitimate Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation and colonialism, and to do it under the American umbrella of the “war on terrorism.” The recent endorsement of Sharon’s plans by President Bush and US House of Representatives give full public clarity to what has been the implicit American position. Hence the Road Map and the unofficial Geneva Initiative, which were but slight variations of Oslo, join Oslo on the junk heap of failed proposals. They do so because they did not call for the removal of the occupation and recognition of the inalienable rights of the refugees, and also because their terms implicitly sought to reward Israeli colonialism by allowing for more annexation of prime land in the West Bank, in exchange for land unequal in quality.

All peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians have foundered on two issues: the establishment of a viable Palestinian state (a collective right), and on Palestinian refugees’ right of return to their homes and properties in what became Israel after 1948 (Palestinian individual right). Statehood represents the collective right of Palestinians to self-determination as embodied in a number of United Nations General assembly Resolutions: 181 (II) (1947); 2787 (1971); 2955 (XXVIII) (1972); and 3236 (XXIX) (1974), as well as the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Statehood in no way vitiates the individual right of refugees to return to their homes and properties in post-1948 Israel.

In all the “peace” negotiations and initiatives, Israel sought to limit the Palestinian collective right to a non-contiguous area in the West Bank and Gaza controlled by Israel politically and economically. Israel further sought to fold Palestinian refugees’ individual rights into the collective right allegedly “offered” by Israel during the Oslo process. That is, Israel attempted to get Palestinian leadership to sign on to a Bantustan “statelet”, to close the file on refugee claims by accepting to absorb refugees into the “statelet”, and to agree to minimal repatriation [basically non-child bearing refugees] to be granted as an Israeli humanitarian gesture. Given Sharon’s policies and the apartheid wall, a two state solution is no longer possible. The United States has failed to be an honest broker in this conflict, both in terms of neither supporting the establishment of a viable Palestinian state nor in encouraging Israel to accept legal responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugees, and all that the latter entails under the relevant UN resolutions, international refugee conventions and international

humanitarian laws. Having expelled the majority of the refugees in 1948 to transform the demographics, and having conquered all of the land by June 1967, Israel has aggressively fought refugee return and sharing the land of Palestine with Palestinians. In fact, Professor Benny Morris, whose scholarship revealed in detail the extent of Zionist use of terror to expel Palestinians, bemoans the fact that Ben-Gurion did not complete the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the 1948 war.⁵⁰

In the end, however, Israel cannot go on forever using force to deny Palestinians their rights and to destroy their lives in order to maintain a Jewish state. Such an effort has already taken a high moral toll on Israeli society and Palestinian lives and society. Sharing the land within a political formula that guarantees the collective national and cultural rights of both peoples is the ultimate answer for a durable peace.

Conclusion

Clearly, the Political Zionists drew on the rich mythical symbolism of the alleged ancient Israel, which they combined with a new forceful Jewish identity, in order to promote their goals in Palestine and have them appear as legitimate and inevitable. The majority of the Israelis, however, are secular. In order not to expose the contradiction, the Zionist never produced a constitution in which an identity would usually be proclaimed. Nonetheless, a number of settler movements, such as Gush Emunim preach a biblical fundamentalism that claims Palestine as ancient Israel. They are vocal, but a minority nonetheless. Palestinians have basically been secular in their social and political life. However, with the continuous Israeli effort to destroy Palestinian secular resistance, both armed and non-violent, the Islamist resistance movement, which can reach people through religious institutions, has grown. This movement has unfortunately been welcomed by Sharon's government because it provides the opportunity to lump Hamas and Islamic Jihad with the fringe "Islamic" terror networks operating cross-borders. The misguided and immoral use of suicide bombers in the name of a distorted Islam has been particularly repulsive, even though such martyrs are considered one of the remaining means to resist Israeli aggression and occupation. The use of terror tactics against civilians, as contrasted with state or cross-border terrorism, has unfortunately been part and parcel of earlier anti-colonial movements of resistance. Think, for example, of the Algerian resistance to the French, or the Mau Mau resistance to the British in Kenya. One must ask what level of desperation is experienced to produce this form of resistance.

⁵⁰ See Ari Shavit's interview with Benny Morris entitled "Survival of the Fittest," in **Haaretz**, January 9, 2004.

Thus on the one hand, there is a small group claiming ownership of Palestine through mythological biblical prophesy, and a growing minority that invokes *jihad* through martyrdom to resist the occupation of Palestine. Hamas has made proposed long-term ceasefire agreements to Israel, only to be rebuffed by Sharon's government and to have its spiritual and political leadership assassinated.

In spite of the religious veneer, however, the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is a political conflict over land. The Zionists succeeded up to a point in transforming Palestine demographically and territorially into a Jewish state in control of all of Palestine. The Palestinians have resisted their dispossession and dispersal, and seek to exercise their national collective and individual rights in their indigenous homeland in Palestine. The majority of the Palestinians still on the land and in the diaspora are willing to share Palestine with Israeli Jews on an equal basis, but not to be excluded from their homeland to accommodate an exclusive Jewish state. Law and morality argue for a just solution.