

THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE.

I. THE ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM:

European Persecution of the Jews, Zionism and the Zionist Emigration to Palestine, The British Mandate Period, The 1947-49 Arab-Israeli War, and The 1967 War

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I. Introduction: The Palestinian Refugees.

[See the appended “Israel” Map] To put the origin of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in perspective, let me begin with a personal experience. In Aug. 1999 I spent three weeks as a volunteer with the Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) in Hebron on the West Bank, participating in their peacemaking efforts in that very troubled community. (I shall say more about CPT in a later lecture.)

During the first week of my time with the CPT-Hebron team, we toured the Deheisheh refugee camp, a camp located southwest of Bethlehem. We were guided through the camp by a young Palestinian resident named Atallah, who was born and raised in the camp. Deheisheh is a typical refugee camp; narrow, unpaved streets; small, crowded, mostly unpainted cement block homes; extreme overcrowding. The crowded streets climb haphazardly up a small hill. Many of the homes now have several rooms and some have more than one floor, but at the top of the hill Atallah took us to one of the original tiny houses with its two 8 by 10 foot rooms. For many years after the 1947-49 war, such rooms often had to house two large families. Deheisheh was established after the 1948 war by the residents of four Palestinian villages which were situated near the present Israeli city of Beit Shemesh in the foothills of the Judean mountains west of Jerusalem. Many of the residents still possess the keys to the homes from which they were expelled by the advancing Israeli troops, homes which no longer exist since after the 1947-49 war the Israelis bulldozed them into oblivion. Almost 1,700,000 refugees now live in almost 30 such camps in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with another 1,700,000 in camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, the conditions of some of which are far worse than Deheisheh. How is one to think about the process that made these people refugees and how is one to think about their situation today?

II. The Official Zionist Version

One answer to this is given by the official Israeli, Zionist version of what happened. History, writes Israeli historian Avi Shlaim, is in a sense “the propaganda of the victors.” Now Israel resoundingly won the 1948 war, which gave it independence and determined for decades thereafter the fate of the Arabs of Palestine. So Israel was able to put forth its own version of its history. This history was written for the most part not by independent professional historians, but by official state or military personnel, participants in the events, politicians, soldiers and journalists. These people had an axe to grind, namely, to make what happened acceptable in the eyes of the world. According to Israel’s present day historians, few of them even pretended to objectivity. The central claims of this official Zionist history are as follows:

I. Zionist Statements about Their Policies in General

1. The Zionist movement was incomparably just and moral and its leaders were wise and humane.
2. Zionism's birth was a result of Gentile persecution in Europe.
3. The Zionists intended no ill to the Palestinians, nor did they intend to displace them

II. Zionist Claims about the 1947-49 war:

1. The war was purely defensive on the Zionists part.
2. The Zionists did not intend to expel the Palestinians, but the Palestinian and Arab leaders broadcast radio orders for the Palestinians to flee in order to leave the field clear for the Arab armies, thus Israel has no responsibilities for the refugees.
3. The few dreadful and offensive actions in the 1947-49 war were only the results of the stresses of war.

Americans and most U.S. policymakers accepted this version of history. Israel was a new, small, and seemingly heavily besieged state fighting off the Arab Goliath and building a nation out of what the Zionists portrayed as a barren desert. This was an image that brought out Americans' memories of their own heroic revolution and pioneer history. And that this nation-building was being accomplished by Jews in the aftermath of the horrors of the Holocaust aroused Americans' compassion as little else ever had. And if this were not enough, the fact that this courageous new Jewish nation looked so much like us, while their opponents, the Palestinian Arabs, looked and acted so differently from us, almost automatically signaled who were the villains of the piece. Consequently, Americans and their government uncritically and almost without question believed and supported the official Zionist history and dismissed any Palestinian claims to the contrary, and have done so ever since.

III. What Really Happened

A. The Revision of Israeli History

In the 1980's, however, it was revealed that this official Zionist version of their history was seriously in error and in a number of its assertions simply a falsification of the record. This occurred because Israel declassified its military and political archives, including the unedited memoirs, memoranda and letters of the Zionist political and military leaders from the earliest times on down. When this happened, a group of young, professional, Jewish and especially Israeli historians (for example, Norman Finkelstein, Simha Flapan, Ilan Pappé, Benny Morris and Avi Shlaim) began to publish studies of Zionist and Israeli history. These studies presented a much different story than the official version. The results of this revised history are virtually unknown to ordinary Americans, and the official Zionist version is still the stock in trade.

B. Historical Causes

1. Persecution of Jews in Europe

Clearly, we must begin by noting that the Zionist decision to seek a home in Palestine, right or wrong, good or bad, was a reaction to persecution at the hands of Christian Europe. Particularly terrible were the pogroms that swept through Eastern

Europe, especially in Russia, from 1881 through 1905, in which thousands of Jews in their ghettos were systematically robbed and murdered by fanatical mobs. The distinguishing characteristic of these pogroms was that they were instigated and organized by governments. In order to deflect criticism of the failure of their own policies, Eastern European governments cynically fomented and used the widespread anti-Semitism so deeply rooted in the common people of Europe. This combination of widespread anti-Semitism galvanized into action by governments culminated in WW II in the unmitigated and unthinkable horror of Haman's spiritual descendants, Hitler and his Nazi minions, who, unlike Haman, succeeded in the Holocaust in annihilating 6 million of the 7 million Jews of Europe and virtually exterminating European Jewish culture.

And we cannot simply point the finger at Europe. Anti-Semitism was rampant in the U.S. also, especially in the 20's and 30's. In the 1930's, the racist Loughlin report of the U. S. Congress led to laws prohibiting the entrance of European Jews into the U. S. As a result, thousands of Jewish refugees encountered immigration officials in New York Harbor who forced their ships to return to Germany or seek refuge elsewhere, such as Palestine.

So, the claim of the Zionists that Zionism's birth was a result of Gentile persecution in Europe is true. Indeed, it must be remembered in fairness to both sides in the conflict that, if there had not been centuries of terrible persecution of Jews in Christian Europe, the Zionist idea that their only hope was a state of their own would never have arisen. And certainly what happened 40 years after Zionism arose when the Nazis conceived and implemented the Holocaust as their solution to "the Jewish question" demonstrates that the Zionists were addressing no inconsequential threat. One of the truly tragic ironies of this conflict is that the Palestinians have been made to suffer for Europe's crimes.

2. The colonialist policies and attitudes of Zionism and the European powers, especially Britain.

Let us now turn to review the colonialist policies of Zionism and the European powers from Zionism's beginnings in the 1880's to 1939, the eve of WW II. I want to do this in order to see that what has happened to the Palestinians is not only due to the actions of the Zionist Jews, but also to the duplicitous and callous colonial policies of the European powers, especially Britain.

A. British Colonial Policies

Out of the vortex of the terrible pogroms of 1880 to 1900 in Europe that we have just noted, the movement known as Zionism was born. Beginning in 1882, Russian Jews formed a movement called "Lovers of Zion" and by 1900 several thousand Russian and Romanian Jews had immigrated to Palestine and had begun a mainly agricultural colonization of the land. But, the major figure in the development of Zionism was the Viennese journalist Theodor Hertzl. Hertzl supplied the movement with a theory with his pamphlet, "The Jewish State," published in 1896, in which he argued that the only solution to the Jewish Question was the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. He termed Palestine "our ever memorable historic home," drawing upon biblical imagery. "The very name Palestine," he said, "would attract our people with a force of marvelous potency."

Now it is important to recognize at this point that the Zionist movement to Palestine represented the same kind of colonial territorial invasion and exploitation of undeveloped regions that almost all the other European people groups of the period (from the 1890's up to WW II) were engaging in – English, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese – you name it. Reflecting typical 19th C. European colonialist attitudes, Herzl presented the proposed Jewish state as “a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization opposed to Barbarism.” Elsewhere he reflects colonialism's world-view of European racist superiority. He assured a German leader that Jews returning to their historic fatherland would do so as representatives of European civilization, “bringing cleanliness, order and well-established customs of the West to this plague-ridden, blighted corner of the Orient.” (Prior, *Zionism*, p. 5.)

Herzl not only gave Zionism a theory, he also gave the movement a firm and well-established organization by the convening of Zionist Congresses. These congresses met annually and established the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish National Fund whose object was to acquire land in Palestine for exclusive and inalienable Jewish settlement.

Nevertheless, despite the Zionist's best efforts, before 1914 they made little progress in winning either Jewish or international support for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, or in settling significant numbers of Jews there. Estimates of the numbers of Jews in Palestine at the outbreak of W.W. I vary from 38,000 to 85,000, which constituted no more than 10% of the population. This was only a slight increase over what it had been in 1880.

Now, you will remember that for over 400 years prior to WWI almost the whole Middle East had been under the rule of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. By 1914, when the Turks entered the war on the side of Germany, only Egypt was not under Turkish control. In the context of the allied war against the Ottoman Turks, there developed a strong convergence of interests between the Zionists and Britain. To the Zionists it had been clear from the beginning that their program of colonizing Palestine could not succeed without the support of Britain, since Britain had been the major European power in the Middle East since the end of the Napoleonic wars a century earlier. So in 1917 Chaim Weizmann, a leading English Zionist and later the first President of the state of Israel, sought for a declaration of support from the British government. For its part, Britain considered Palestine to be vital to its strategic interests as a means of protecting the Suez Canal as its major route to India. In addition, supporting a Zionist Jewish state in Palestine meant Jewish financial support in the British war effort. And it also meant that a European, Jewish Palestine would be a loyal political island for the British in what promised to be a sea of Arab states newly established after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

The result of this was the infamous Balfour Declaration. On Nov. 2nd, 1917, at the instructions of the British Cabinet, Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, made it known in a letter to Lord Rothschild, the wealthy head of British Jewry, that,

His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of

existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

The Balfour Declaration had no validity in international law, since Palestine at the time was under the sovereign rule of the Ottoman Turks. As one author has put it, in the Balfour Declaration “one nation solemnly promised to a second nation the territory of a third.” Further, British perfidy and double-dealing is revealed by the fact that in 1915, two years before the Balfour Declaration, they had already entered into a compact with Hussein, the Sharif or ruler of Mecca (the great-great-grandfather of King Hussein of Jordan). In this compact, in compensation for Hussein’s rebellion against the Turks and his aid in defeating them, Britain guaranteed to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs from the Turkish border in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south and from the Mediterranean to Iran. Given this background, the Arabs understandably saw the Balfour Declaration, which mentioned neither their name nor their political rights, as a betrayal. Manifestly, to support the intention to establish a Jewish state without the consent of the indigenous population, was an audacious undertaking, especially when the Jews in Palestine in 1917 constituted no more than 10% of the population and owned only 2% of the land. The attitudes of both the British and the Zionists to the Palestinian Arab population is expressed in a letter that Balfour wrote to another British official in August, 1919:

The Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in . . . present needs (and) in future hopes of far profounder import than the desires . . . of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land. . . . Whatever deference should be paid to the views of those living there, the Powers . . . do not propose . . . to consult them. In short, so far as Palestine is concerned, the Powers have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate.

Britain never ever intended to honor her agreements with the Arabs. That is absolutely clear, because in 1916 she concluded with France the secret Sykes-Picot Treaty in which the two powers agreed on how to carve up the Middle East after the end of the war and the defeat of the Turks. In essence, France would control Lebanon and Syria; Britain would control Iraq and Jordan; while Palestine would be an “Allied Condominium,” presumably meaning it would be ruled jointly by Britain and France, leaving only Saudi-Arabia as an independent Arab state. So in 1922 in the aftermath of the war, the newly-formed League of Nations, dominated by Britain and France, put into effect the stipulations of the Sykes-Picot Treaty: France obtained the right to administer (the term for which was “have a mandate over”) Syria and Lebanon, while Britain had the mandate over Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine. As an independent state, they left to the Arabs only the inhospitable desert wastes of Saudia Arabia. The League of Nations also formally accepted the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine, which it entrusted to Britain, while at the same time affirming the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion.

One of the signals confirming the British governments commitment to Zionism was the appointment of Herbert Samuel as the first British High Commissioner (1920-

25) of mandated Palestine. Samuel was a British Jew and an ardent Zionist. (Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, p. 29.)

Time prohibits any detailed examination of the sad and sordid story of Britain's attempt to carry out its commitments to honor both the maintenance of the rights of the indigenous Palestinians and the provision of a Jewish state for the Zionists. It must suffice to say that, as the Jewish population increased (by 1939 it had risen to 30%), there was, not surprisingly, increasing Arab opposition to the Zionist enterprise. Although violence between the two communities was virtually a daily occurrence, it reached a climax in 1929 when serious riots began in Jerusalem and spread throughout the country. In 1936 Arab alarm at the increase in Jewish immigration led to the establishment of the Arab Higher Committee which called for a general strike to last until Zionist immigration stopped and the British took steps to establish independence for Palestine. The continued violence led to the 1937 Peel Commission, which acknowledged first that the British mandate was unworkable, since it involved two irreconcilables, a Jewish homeland and Palestinian Arab independence, and then recommended the partition of Palestine. Though Jews owned but 6% of the land, the partition plan proposed to give them 40 % of it. The Peel Commission partition plan led to a widespread Arab rebellion that lasted from 1937-39, to which the British responded brutally, with massive repressive measures, including the systematic disarming of the Arab population and the break-up of Arabic political organizations.

Finally, recognizing in 1939 that partition would not work and increasingly preoccupied with the threat from Nazi Germany, Britain radically changed its policy. In May she issued what is known as the White Paper. The White Paper proposed as its goal, "the establishment in ten years of an independent Palestinian state . . . in which Arabs and Jews share in government in such a way as to ensure that the essential interests of each community are safeguarded." In essence the proposal would have set up a bi-national state, the only solution that, in my opinion, was really just and fair. It was, of course, rejected by both sides. It was, and is, regarded by Zionist Jews as a betrayal, for their goal was and always has been a state for Jews alone. In addition, recognizing finally that the underlying cause of the ongoing unrest and violence in Palestine was Jewish immigration, the White Paper placed severe restrictions on Jewish immigration and land acquisition.

B. Zionist attitudes, intentions and policies from its beginning through 1939

Having looked at the general history of the Zionist immigration to Palestine up to 1939 and at the duplicitous and callous colonial policies of the European powers, especially Britain, let us now return to consider the Zionists claim that, during this period, they intended no ill to the Arabs of Palestine and that they did not intend to displace them.

Fully in keeping with typical colonialist prejudice against indigenous people that we noted above, neither Herzl nor the annual Zionist Congresses gave much attention at all to the impact of their plans on the people of Palestine. What public statements were made espoused the usual colonialist attitude that their presence would bring the benefits of civilization to the "plague ridden and blighted" native population. The closing words of Herzl's *The Jewish State* were, "And whatever we attempt there (i.e. in Palestine) to accomplish for our own welfare, will react beneficially for the good of humanity" (Prior, *Zionism*, p. 6).

But despite such public protestations of furthering the interests of the indigenous population, entries in Herzl's diary, which were edited out in published copies until the 1960's, reveal his real intentions. In his diary entry for 12 June 1895, he wrote that, after having occupied the land and expropriated the private property, "we shall endeavor to expel the poor population across the border unnoticed, procuring employment for it in the transit countries, but denying it any employment in our own country." He added, "the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly." (Prior, *Zionism*, p. 10f.) Another early Zionist leader, Israel Zangwill, put it this way:

If we wish to give a country to a people without a country, it is utter foolishness to allow it to be a country of two peoples. . . . a different place must be found either for the Jews or their neighbors. (Prior, *Zionism*, p. 191)

After the Balfour Declaration, Zangwill campaigned openly for transfer of the Arab population. He wrote in 1920:

We cannot allow the Arabs to block so valuable a piece of historic reconstruction. . . . And therefore we must gently persuade them to 'trek'. . . . There is no particular reason for the Arabs to cling to these few kilometers. 'To fold their tents' and 'steal away' is their proverbial habit: let them exemplify it now. (Prior, *Zionism*, p. 192)

To be fair, one must also note that, though many main stream political Zionists wished to displace the Palestinians, other voices were critical of such an enterprise. Yitzhak Epstein, who arrived in Palestine from Russia in 1886, drew attention in 1907 to the moral and political problems created by the practices of the Jewish settlers. He criticized those who purchased land from absentee Arab landlords and expelled the Palestinian tenants. One of the great Jewish moral philosophers of the period, Asher Ginsberg, who wrote under the pseudonym of Ahad Ha'am, protested for decades against the ethnocentric behavior of his fellow immigrants. In 1891 he wrote,

We have to treat the local population with love and respect, justly and rightly. And what do our brethren in the Land of Israel do? Exactly the opposite! . . . [T]hey behave towards the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, infringe upon their boundaries, hit them shamefully without reason, and even brag about it. (Prior, *Zionism*, p. 230)

Objections such as these however, came from intellectuals, philosophers and writers. For many of the Zionists who were in positions of political power and leadership, however, the policy of dispossessing and removing the Arab Palestinians remained their intention and purpose throughout their history, though rarely ever expressed publicly. Already by 1930 there were high-level discussions between the Zionists and the British government on the transfer of the Palestinian Arabs to Transjordan and eventually to other parts of the Near East.

By 1937 the British had realized both the difficulty of such an action and its political ramifications, and so in 1937 they abandoned the idea in favor of the Peel Commission's concept of partition of the land between the two peoples and in the 1939 White Paper espoused the concept of a bi-national state, as we have seen. But the Zionist leaders, Ben-Gurion, Weitz, Weissman and others, never gave up the idea of physically

removing the Palestinians, though they expressed their views only in closed Zionist circles. In 1937 in connection with the Peel Commission's proposal to partition Palestine, they convened the first of two "Population Transfer Committees," which discussed various means of "transferring," a polite term for expelling, the Arabs.

Since our time is short, let me illustrate their intentions first with Ben-Gurion, a revered figure in Zionist history and Israel's first president. At a meeting of the executive of the Jewish Agency in 1938, Ben Gurion was very explicit, "I support compulsory transfer," he said, "I do not see anything immoral in it." But, he said, it would be more tactful in public discourse to replace the phrase "compulsory transfer" with less unacceptable ones, such as "citizenship control," "state agricultural development policy," etc. (Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 112-117, apud Prior, p. 199). Moreover, Ben-Gurion deleted such statements in his published records. Benny Morris, a prominent Israeli revisionist historian, sums up the duplicity as follows:

Ben Gurion . . . preached behind the closed doors of the Zionist Congress in 1937 the virtues of transferring Palestine's Arabs. . . . But in the printed text of his speech solemnly expatiates on creating "one law for the foreigner and the citizen in a just regime based on brotherly love and true equality . . . that will be a shining example for the world in treating minorities." (Prior *Zionism*, p. 200.)

Secondly, a major figure in the Population Transfer Committees was Josef Weitz. A passage in his unedited diary, kept in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem and dated to December 1940, but which was omitted in the edition published in 1965, reads as follows,

Amongst ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country . . . the only solution is the Land of Israel, or at least the Western Land of Israel, without Arabs. . . .The only way is to transfer the Arabs from here to neighbouring countries, all of them, except perhaps Bethlehem, Nazareth and Old Jerusalem. Not a single village, or a single tribe must be left. And the transfer must be done through their absorption in Iraq and Syria and even in Transjordan. . . .Only then will . . . a solution be found to the Jewish question.

Time permits me to give no further evidence. It must suffice to say that it is now unmistakable that, from the beginning of its effort to the end, many of the Zionist leadership hoped to dispossess the native Palestinians if it was politically feasible. The only question in their minds was not whether it should be done, but whether it would be possible.

C. Zionist attitudes, intentions and policies from 1939 through the 1947-49 war.

Time now, unfortunately, permits me only the briefest of summaries. First we need to note that the Second World War, 1939-45, had a profound impact on the situation in Palestine. First, of course, it totally precluded any attempt by Britain to implement the first part of the 1939 White Paper, the establishment of a bi-national Jewish-Palestinian state. But it did not preclude the implementing of the second part of the new policy, restricting Jewish immigration. And, unfortunately, this new policy coincided with the outbreak of the worst and most horrible persecution that European Jewry had ever faced, the almost unthinkable Nazi answer to the "Jewish Question" in

the concentration camps and gas ovens of what we now know as the Holocaust. The horror of that genocide with its post-WWII images of emaciated survivors and piles of corpses, together with the images of British soldiers refusing to permit ships laden with Holocaust survivors to land on Palestinian soil, radically transformed both European and especially American attitudes toward the Zionist ideal of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Harry Truman, who succeeded Roosevelt as president in April, 1945, and Clement Attlee, whose Labour Party came to power in Britain three months later, became more and more ardent supporters of Zionist intentions as time went by. Truman was clearly influenced by a concern for the Jewish refugees who were now totally excluded from Palestine by the British immigration policies. But, as the 1948 election approached and his popularity rating slipped to 35%, his support for the Zionists was also predicated upon the importance of accommodating the powerful Jewish vote. Speaking to Arab diplomats, he explained, "I am sorry, gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents." (Prior, *Zionism*, p. 21)

In the meantime, under extreme pressure from the U.S. to support the Zionist aims, Britain by 1946 was faced with a rapidly deteriorating situation in Palestine. In addition to blowing up the King David Hotel, with 90 killed, the Jewish underground (or should we use a modern term and call them terrorists) blew up bridges, mined roads, derailed trains, robbed pay vans, and in a single night blew up 20 warplanes. Despairing of making any progress toward an agreed settlement, in February 1947 Britain submitted the problem to the newly formed United Nations. And, as we well know, in November, 1947, the UN by a vote of 33 to 13, with 10 abstentions, recommended the partition of Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish states with Jerusalem to be under UN administration. In the partition plan, the Zionists were granted 57% of the land, including most of the best arable land, which contained a substantial Arab population, against 43% for a Palestinian Arab state. Yet in 1948 Jews still constituted only about 33% of the population, and owned only about 7% of the land.

Not at all unreasonably, the partition plan was unacceptable to the Palestinians, a people who had resided in Palestine for over a thousand years and who could hardly be expected to agree to a plan to transfer 57% of their land to recent arrivals who owned but 7% of it. They submitted to the UN a resolution that the UN members take in the distressed European Jews in proportion to their resources, but it did not win sufficient support. Europe, the US and the rest of the Americas were perfectly willing for mostly Muslim Palestine to be the repository of the remnants of European Christian anti-Semitism.

After the U.N vote, faced with increasing inter-community strife and anti-British activity, Britain announced that just seven months later, on May 15, 1948, she would terminate her mandate over Palestine. This immediately plunged the Jewish and Arab communities into a civil war, which raged throughout the remaining seven months of the British Mandate. On the last day of the British Mandate, May 14th, Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel; and on May 15th 1948, the British withdrew in great haste. Soon thereafter the surrounding Arab states sent their troops into Palestine to support the Palestinians. The Zionist forces won the resulting war, and when the final armistice was declared in July 1949, the new Zionist State of Israel had captured 78% of what was once Palestine; the West Bank had been taken by Jordan, as King Abdullah of

Jordan and Britain had already agreed in secret negotiations with the Ben Gurion government; and Egypt had taken over the rule of the Gaza Strip.

For the Palestinians, this was an unmitigated disaster. First, given the intentions of the Zionist leaders prior to the war that we have already examined, it should come as no surprise that the official Israeli version of what happened is contrary to the facts. Israel is portrayed as a tiny, poorly armed, peace-loving, new nation being attacked without provocation by the overwhelming force of the regular armies of the surrounding Arab countries. But the new historical evidence recently available shows that the Zionist forces were militarily and administratively superior to the Palestinian forces, in particular during the seven months of civil war from the UN vote in November 1947 and the British departure in May 1948, as well as to the forces of the Arab countries that came to their aid thereafter. The Jewish forces were far better armed, organized and led.

We examined briefly above evidence that the policy of dispossessing and removing the Arab Palestinians remained the intention and purpose of the Zionist leadership throughout their history. These intentions came to full fruition in the specific plans that the Zionist leadership made for the conduct of the 1947-49 war, and then fully carried out in the military campaigns that followed. That this is the case has now been fully and completely documented by Israeli history professor Ilan Pappé in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2006). In the interests of brevity, let me quote briefly from the preface to Pappé's detailed study:

[O]n a cold Wednesday afternoon, 10 March 1948, a group of eleven men, veteran Zionist leaders together with young military Jewish officers, put the final touches to a plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. That same evening, military orders were dispatched to the units on the ground to prepare for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians from vast areas of the country. The orders came with a detailed description of the methods to be employed to forcibly evict the people: large-scale intimidation; laying siege to and bombarding villages and population centers; setting fire to homes, property and goods; expulsion; demolition; and, finally, planting mines among the rubble to prevent any of the expelled inhabitants from returning. Each unit was issued with its own list of villages and neighbourhoods as the targets of this master plan. Codenamed Plan D (*Dalet* in Hebrew), this was the fourth and final; version of less substantial plans that outlined the Zionists had in store for Palestine and consequently for its native population. The three previous schemes had articulated only obscurely how the Zionist leadership contemplated dealing with the presence of so many Palestinians living in the land the Jewish national movement coveted as its own. . . .

As the first chapters of this book will attempt to show, this plan was both the inevitable product of the Zionist ideological impulse to have an exclusively Jewish presence in Palestine, and a response to developments on the ground once the British cabinet had decided to end the mandate. . . .

. . . The plan decided upon on 10 March 1948, and above all its systematic implementation in the following months, was a clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation, regarded under international law today as a crime against humanity. (*The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, pp. xii-xiii)

Finally, let me deal with one particular claim that the Zionists have made to explain the fact that vast areas of the land were completely denuded of their Palestinian

inhabitants. In 1953, the Israeli government published an official pamphlet claiming that the Palestinians were ordered to leave their homes and flee by express commands over the radio by both the Palestinian and Arab authorities, in order to allow the Arab forces the opportunity to defeat the Zionists without Palestinian losses. Once again, the evidence is quite the opposite. Both Israeli historian Benny Morris, drawing upon Israeli army sources, and Irish diplomat Erskine Childers, drawing upon British sources, have published articles documenting that no such appeals were ever issued. Childers puts it this way:

There was not a single order, or appeal, or suggestion about evacuation from Palestine from any Arab radio station, inside or outside Palestine in 1948. (see Hitchens, "Broadcasts," Said and Hitchens, *Blaming the Victims*, p. 77)

Childers then goes on to state that, quite the opposite to appeals to leave, there is documented evidence of "Arab appeals, even flat orders, to the civilians of Palestine to stay put" (*Ibid.*). In point of fact, rather than Arabic radio stations broadcasting appeals to leave, clandestine Jewish army radio stations broadcast in Arabic threats of dire punishment and advised on modes of escape (Prior, *Zionism*, pp. 25-26). Particularly effective were news reports, published by both Jewish and Arabic media, of the terrible massacre on April 9th 1948 of the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin on the western outskirts of Jerusalem. The massacre of some 250 people, among whom were more than 100 women and children, was perpetrated by members of two Jewish paramilitary brigades: Irgun (the brigade led by Menachem Begin from 1943-48) and the Stern Gang (of which Yitzhak Shamir was then co-commander).

In spite of these fully documented refutations, these claims of radio broadcasts, used to justify the Zionist claim that Israel has no responsibility for the refugees, have been repeated over and over again since 1953. For example, as recently as 1987, a Zionist organization called "The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting" (which, by the way, is anything but) published a full page ad in the magazine *The New Republic*, entitled "Mid-East Refugees: Who Are They, What is the Story?" The ad began by saying:

In 1948, on the day of the proclamation of the State of Israel, five Arab armies invaded the new country from all sides. In frightful radio broadcasts, they urged the Arabs living there to leave, so that the invading armies could operate without interference . . . (Hitchens, "Broadcasts," Said and Hitchens, *Blaming the Victims*, p. 83).

In light of the evidence we set forth earlier that, from the beginning of its effort to the end, the Zionist leadership fully intended to dispossess the native Palestinians, it is surely important to note that the Zionist military campaigns in the 1947-49 war accomplished exactly that. First, these campaigns successfully emptied approximately 500 Arabic villages of their inhabitants and drove somewhere between 700,000 to 800,000 Palestinians over the borders into the surrounding, Arab controlled territory. And secondly, in the weeks and months following the war, the houses and other buildings of most of the depopulated villages were fully or partially destroyed, either blown up or bulldozed into oblivion. While an observant traveler can still see some evidence of these villages, in the main all that remains is a "scattering of stones and rubble across a forgotten landscape."

For example, Helen Schary Motro, who writes a column for The Jerusalem Post, is an American Jewish attorney living in Kfar Shmariahu, Israel. Ms. Motro published an article in the March 12th 1999 edition of the Christian Science Monitor entitled “Unrecognized Villages,” in which she related what she had learned about the expulsion of Bedouin tribes in the Negev near Beer Sheba. In addition, she wrote as follows:

. . . [T]hroughout the Holy Land the past is a Pandora's box. . . . Around the corner from where I live, on the streets where my children bike, I came across the following commemorative plaque applied to the pastel wall of a neighbor's home: "Here stood the last house of the village facing west toward the Bedouin tents between Sidnei Ali and Kfar Shmariahu.... A lookout beam illuminated the path to Sidnei Ali and the dirt road upon which Arabs journeyed from Wadi Falik to Jaffa." The lush poinsettias of my neighborhood are more reminiscent of Palm Beach than of Bedouin tents, and that old dirt road has become the highway connecting Haifa to Tel Aviv.

And such realities were not limited to the 1947-49 War. Ms. Motro went on to say:

A favorite spot to take my young children on a weekend outing was Park Canada on the way to Jerusalem. In February they played among blossoming white almond trees. Only recently, overhearing an offhand comment, did I learn that Park Canada is situated upon the ruins of three Arab villages bulldozed and evacuated in the aftermath of the Six-Day War. Unaware of where they are sitting, people picnic today beside fallen walls of towns whose names have disappeared from the maps. The almond trees I admired once stood in someone's garden.

All of this lends credence to the frequent Zionist claim that Palestine was virtually an empty country before the Jews came.

In this connection, let us examine the claim that the Zionist army followed what it calls its principle of “purity of arms.” Therefore, the Zionists claim, the Israeli forces perpetrated only a few dreadful and offensive actions in the 1947-49 War, and they were only the results of the stresses of war. The evidence once again does not support this claim. It is true that it does not substantiate that the actions of the Jewish brigades were worse than what generally happens in the heat and brutality of war. Nevertheless, the Zionist campaigns of 1948 were demonstrably not pristine examples of the principle of “purity of arms.” On the contrary, their campaigns were accompanied by all the normal horrors of warfare. In discussing the Zionist claim of “purity of arms,” the Jewish-American historian Norman Finkelstein documents the following:

According to the former director of the Israeli army archives, “in almost every Arab village occupied by us in the War of Independence, acts were committed which are defined as war crimes, such as murders, massacres and rapes.” The number of massacres exceeding 50 people is put by the (Israeli army) archivist at a minimum of 20 and massacres of an individual or a handful at about 100. Uri Milstein, the authoritative military historian of the 1948 war, goes a step further, maintaining that “every skirmish ended in a massacre of Arabs.” (*Image and Reality of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, p. 110.)

This estimate of Israel's intentions and actions is confirmed by its ongoing refusal up to the present day even to consider the return of the Palestinian refugees.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion to the issue of Palestinian refugees, let me say the following. One must certainly understand and have great empathy for motives and purposes of the Zionist Jew's invasion of Palestine, given the inhuman and longstanding persecution to which they were subjected for centuries in Christian Europe, and especially given the horrors of the Holocaust. But does that make it right? As Edward Said has said, "The classic victims of years of anti-Semitic persecution and Holocaust have in their new nation become the victimizers of another people, who have become therefore the victims of the victims." Is it just for a people who needed to escape the terrible persecution of the Christian nations of Europe to find their own space by dispossessing another people of their homes, villages and land, without their consent and mostly by brutal force, destroying their culture and driving over 700,000 of them into refugee camps? All subsequent crimes - on both sides of the conflict - flow from this original and fundamental injustice.

Most of these refugees and their descendants, now numbering some 4.5 million, still are scattered in some 59 refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, often living under the most deplorable economic and physical conditions. Yet the Israeli government adamantly refuses to consider in any way the question of refugee rights, either the right of return or the right of restitution and reparation for the loss of property and livelihood. Indeed, shortly after Ehud Barak was elected Israeli Prime Minister in the late 1990's, he told American interviewers that the solution to the problem of the refugees must be found within the boundaries of the countries where they currently reside.

And yet, at the same time, the world Jewish community is very successfully pursuing - and rightly so - restitution and reparations from the Christian nations of Europe for Jews who lost homes, property and livelihood in the Holocaust. Shraga Elam has estimated their success as follows:

Up until 1997 Germany paid \$58 billion in US funds to Israel, and to Jewish organizations and individuals. By 2030 it is expected that an additional \$20 billion will be paid. . . . [Swiss] banks agreed this past summer to a global solution for the Jewish properties in the range of \$1.25 billion.¹

And in 1994 Israel Singer, the Secretary-General of the World Jewish Congress, said,

The return of that which was his, and which belonged to his and her community, is a human right, which every man deserves.²

Surely, it is time that this statement is applied to the Palestinian refugees as well as to the Jewish victims of the Nazis. Justice, however it is conceived, demands that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian refugees for repatriation and/or restitution and

¹See the December, 1998, issue of the periodical "Article 74" of Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Refugee Rights, available at www.badil.org.

²Statement to the US Congress, Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs, 8 February, 1994, quoted in Restitution of Jewish Property in Central and Eastern Europe, Policy Dispatch No. 8, Jerusalem: Institute of the World Jewish Congress.

reparation be a part of the “final settlement” between Israel and the Palestinians, however difficult that may prove to be.

IV The 1967 War.

[See the map.] Let me conclude this investigation of the background to the present Palestinian/Israeli conflict by examining the circumstances of the 1967 war between Israel and her Arab neighbors, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. As I noted above, when the final armistice was declared at the end of the 1947-49 Arab-Israeli war, the new Zionist state of Israel had captured 78% of what was once Palestine, the West Bank had been taken over by Jordan, and Egypt had taken over the rule of the Gaza Strip. This situation between Israel and the Palestinians remained pretty much the status quo for the 18 years between 1949 and 1967.

But in June 1967 Israel attacked her three Arab neighbors (noted above), with a preemptive air strike in which it destroyed 400 Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian aircraft, most while still on the ground, giving it mastery of the air from the Suez Canal to Damascus. In the war that followed, Israel captured the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank from Jordan with almost ridiculous ease, occupying all three areas in only six days.

A. Israel’s Justification for the Attack.

Israeli apologists still claim that Israel had no choice but to attack on the grounds that her very life and existence was in danger from the belligerent intentions and actions of her Arab neighbors, especially Egypt under Gamal Abdul-Nasser. This is the view of the war proposed by Michael Oren, the author of the most pro-Israeli account of the war, “Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East”), which basically reiterates the official Israeli version of the June war (see the review of the book by historian Norman Finkelstein, “Abba Eban with Footnotes, “ *Journal of Palestine Studies* 127 [Spring 2003], pp. 74-87, reprinted in <http://www.usliberty.org/orenbook.htm>) Oren sets forth the same view in an op-ed in the Opinion section of the Los Angeles Times on Sunday, June 3rd, entitled “Remaking the World in Six Days,” in which Oren can claim that . . .”Jews confronted the possibility of witnessing a second Holocaust within a single generation.” As Abba Eban, then the Israeli Foreign Minister, put it in an address to the UN:

On the fateful morning of 5 June, . . . our country’s choice was plain. The choice was to live or perish, to defend the national existence or to forfeit it for all time. (Finkelstein, *Image and Reality*, p. 123.)

But both historical research and the statements made later by Israel’s generals and political leaders demonstrate that Oren’s work amounts to Israeli propoganda, for Israel’s Arab neighbors presented no serious threat to Israel whatsoever in June 1967.

In his book *Image and Reality of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, (Second Edition, London: Verso, 2003) the Jewish historian, Norman Finkelstein, notes the following facts:

Reporting from Cairo for the *New York Times* on the eve of Israel’s assault, James Reston observed that ‘Egypt does not want war and is certainly not ready for war.’

Reston's assessment was so widely held that it was echoed by (Israel's) Mossad chief Meir Amit in almost identical terms: 'Egypt was not ready for a war; and Nasser did not want a war.'

(Yitzhak) Rabin (then Israel's Chief of Staff) remarked after Israel's victory that he 'did not believe that Nasser wanted war'. 'The two divisions he sent into Sinai on May 14', the chief of staff surmised, 'would not have been enough to launch an offensive. He knew it and we knew it.', would not have been enough to unleash an offensive. He knew it and we knew it. . . . Menachem Begin, who was a member of the National Unity government in June 1967 (and later became Israel's Prime Minister under the right-wing Likud government), concede many years later that 'we had a choice'. 'The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches', he cautioned, 'do not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him. (Pp. 134-135, contents in parentheses added)

And Ezer Weizman, Chief of Army Operations, who did much of the operational planning for the war, and who was the President of Israel a few years ago, concurred that,

There was no threat of destruction against Israel in 1967 . . . had the Egyptians attacked first, they would also then have suffered a complete defeat,' with 'maybe 13 hours being needed instead of only 3' to 'command control of the air'. (P. 136.)

As Michael Prior puts it:

Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, Chief of Staff Rabin, Cabinet Minister Menachem Begin and others conceded later that Egypt did not intend to launch an attack against Israel, and that if it did, it would have been rebuffed easily. The CIA and British Intelligence estimated in late May that Israel would win a war against all the Arab states in between a week and ten days, and a speedy Israeli victory was assumed by a host of military and political experts, including USA President Johnson, and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara . . . , as well as by Israel's Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, who predicted that the Sinai Campaign would last from three to five days. (*Zionism and the State of Israel*, New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 208)

B The True Reasons for Israel's Attack

It is absolutely clear, then, that Israel faced no significant threat, let alone mortal danger, in June 1967. It was certainly not the case, as is the general view in the United States, that in 1967 an Israeli David confronted a brutal Arab Goliath who threatened her very existence. Why, then, did she commit this act of naked aggression? In general, historians cite two reasons for Israel's decision to go to war.

1. The Elimination of Nasser

The first objective was the elimination of Gamal Abdul Nasser, the President of Egypt. Norman Finkelstein observes that,

On the eve of the June 1967 war, the CIA appraised Israel's objectives as, first and foremost, 'destruction of the center of power of the radical Arab Socialist movement, i.e. the Nasser regime', second, 'destruction of the arms of the radical Arabs', and,

last, ‘destruction of both Syria and Jordan as modern states’. In a word, Israel’s overarching aim was to extirpate any and all manifestations of Arab ‘radicalism’, i.e. independence and modernization. (*Ibid.*, pp. 142-43)

In this effort, Israel was aided and abetted by the United States, who did not want a united and powerful Arab state that would threaten the flow of cheap oil from the Gulf oil-producing states needed to fuel the economy of the West.

2. Territorial Gain

The second objective is described by Finkelstein as follows:

War with the Arab world also offered Israel an opportunity to fulfill its territorial destiny. The Zionist leadership did not regard the borders that Israel achieved in the 48 War, let alone those designated by the UN partition resolution, as permanent.

In support of this, he notes that

Indeed, in an article composed on the eve of the June attack, influential Cabinet minister Yigal Allon stressed that, ‘in case of a new war’, Israel must set as one of its central aims ‘the territorial fulfillment of the Land of Israel.’

Benny Morris, another of the prominent new Israeli historians, notes in his book, *Israel’s Border Wars, 1949-1956*, that

A strong expansionist current ran through both Zionist ideology and Israeli society. There was a general feeling, shared by such prominent figures as Dayan and Ben-Gurion, that the territorial gains of the 1948 war had fallen short of the envisioned promised land. . . . [A] cause for lamentation for future generations was how Ben-Gurion described the failure to conquer the Arab side of Jerusalem. And leading groups in Israeli society regarded the Jordanian controlled West Bank with the same feeling.

And in an article in the March 29, 1972 edition of the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz, Ezer Weizmann, the Israeli army Chief of Operations at the time, stated that the attack on Egypt, Jordan and Syria was justified so that Israel could “exist according to the scale, spirit and quality she now (i.e. in 1972) embodies.” (Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle*, p. 100.)

Indeed, that Israel’s intentions in the war involved the accumulation of territory is clearly signaled by her adamant refusal to return the territory that was taken by armed conquest. On the 22nd of November 1967, after months of debate, the Fifth Emergency Special Session of the UN Security Council passed UN Resolution 242 with virtual unanimity. The resolution, which has remained ever since the basis of all international efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, stressed in its preamble “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace.” And one of the stipulations of the resolution called for “withdrawal of Israel’s armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.”

Nevertheless, in spite of numerous further UN resolutions requiring Israel’s withdrawal, she has adamantly refused to do so. In 1971 an opportunity for a peaceful

solution was lost, when both Egypt and Jordan independently assured the UN special envoy that they would make a peace agreement with Israel, provided Israel conformed with the withdrawal required by resolution 242. However, neither US pressure nor the international consensus reflected in votes in the UN General Assembly in 1971 and 1972 could budge Israel to withdraw. At the UN Security Council special session in July 1973, 13 votes were cast in favor, with no abstentions, strongly deploring Israel's continuing occupation of the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and expressing serious concern at its lack of co-operation with the UN special envoy. However, the US delegate to the Security Council vetoed the resolution, making it inoperative, and since then Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has remained the territorial status quo.

This is the background against which we must understand the Palestinian struggle, both violent and non-violent, for self-determination. They surely have been as justified in their struggle for self-determination as the Zionist immigrants from Europe were, who have succeeded in establishing the State of Israel, and are not satisfied with the 78% of Palestine that they conquered in 1947-49.



http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/israel_pol01.jpg

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