

## **Scenes from a Nightmare: The Imperialist Construction of Israel**

*By Richard Lichtman*

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look at it too much.  
(Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*)

Nothing in human history is “inevitable” in the sense in which the conclusion of a Euclidean proof follows of necessity the steps that precede it. But as a series of world events follow each other in time, the circle contracts and the range of possibilities narrows until the choices available are nothing more than various alternative routes to an overwhelming disaster. What follows is a simple outlining of some crucial tendencies and events that mark the first fifty years or so of this horror in Palestine.

1. Judaism was conceived as the result of the fusion of two portentous concepts: “the chosen people,” and “the promised land.” According to the first notion the Jewish people was uniquely selected by God to serve a majestic purpose: according to the second, one particular place on earth was uniquely designated by “destiny and mystery” to serve as the homeland of this chosen people. The consequences of these convictions for the Palestinians lie stretched before us in the present age as an ongoing disaster.

2. Though God had brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, he had brought the Philistines out of Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir. “From all the families of the earth I have chosen you alone; for that very reason I will punish you for all your iniquities.” (Amos) To be “chosen” was to endure the burden of suffering for “normal”

immorality, a conviction that followed the Jews calamitously throughout history.<sup>1</sup>

3. Palestine became predominantly Arab and Islamic by the seventh century. The fact that Palestine became a province of the Ottoman Empire in 1516 “made it no less Arab or Islamic.”<sup>2</sup>

4. As Walid Khalidi has noted, “The Palestinian tragedy...has, unlike most great upheavals in history, a specific starting point: the year 1897,” the year of the meeting of the World Zionist Organization in Basle, Switzerland. At the time 95 percent of the population was Palestinian and 99 percent of its land was owned by the Arabs.<sup>3</sup> Before the political intervention of Zionism most Jews who lived in Palestine belonged to the old Yishuv, or community, and there was little if any conflict between them and the Arab population. “Islam....had no objection whatsoever to Jewish settlement in Palestine. And Arabs, ‘unlike some other people, have no inherent dislike of the Jews, certainly they did not have it. Jews lived among them in perfect amity before and during the war.’”<sup>4</sup> The spirit of a substantial majority of participants in the Basle Conference was later articulated in the well known assertion of Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir: “There was no such thing as a Palestinian people....It was not as though there was a Palestinian people considering itself as Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.”<sup>5</sup>

How much these sentiments were intended quantitatively and how much qualitatively, as an estimate of Palestinian inferiority, is not clear. But what is clear is that the Zionist movement proceeded, through such organizations as the Jewish National Fund, to purchase the land of Palestinians that were very often the legal property holdings of absentee landlords.

5. The key political moment in the transformation of the dual Zionist myth of the right of return and the “non-presence” of the Palestinians was the Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the

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<sup>1</sup>See Hans Kohn in Walid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948* (Washington D.C.: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987). This is an indispensable work; more than 850 pages of relevant documents brilliantly introduced by Khalidi.

<sup>2</sup>Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Khalidi, *op. cit.*, p. xxii.

<sup>4</sup>L.M.C. Leonhard Van Der Hoeven in *ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup>Khalidi, *op. cit.*, p. xxii.

government “undertook to view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” This strategic policy pronouncement was an expression of British post-war imperialism and supported the expansionist tendencies of Zionism that aimed to “spirit the penniless (Arab) population across the border by procuring employment for it in transit countries, while denying it employment *in our own country*....Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly....”<sup>6</sup> ( Those Palestinian farmers who refused to move were evicted by Turkish authorities.

6. The Balfour Declaration was imposed by a European power on a non-European population without any consideration of or consultation with the people destined to be oppressed by the decision. Of course, there was nothing unusual in this mode of exploitation which simply followed the pattern of European imperialism of which Zionism was a particular manifestation. Balfour’s memorandum of 1919 dealing with the British deceptions and contradictions contained in the simultaneous promises utilized to manipulate the various parties in the middle east is particularly revealing:

Take Syria first. Do we mean in the case of Syria to consult principally the wishes of the inhabitants? We mean nothing of the kind....Are we going to “chiefly to consider the wishes of the inhabitants” in deciding which of these (mandatories) is to be selected? We are going to do nothing of the kind....So that whatever the inhabitants may wish, it is France they will certainly have. They may freely choose but it is Hobson’s choice after all....The contradiction between the of the Covenant and the policy of the Allies is even more flagrant in the case of the “independent nation of Palestine”....*For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country.*<sup>7</sup>

7. The years from 1920-1948 are constituted by a series of tendencies and events too complex for anything but simple outline:

a. Britain defeated the Ottoman Turks and became the Mandatory over Palestine. In its dominant power it proceeded to construct the

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<sup>6</sup>Herzl cited in Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* (London: Verso, 2002) (emphasis added). See also Van Der Hoven, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>7</sup>Balfour cited in Khalidi, *op. cit.*, p. xxxii.

fiction that Arab aspirations were reconcilable with the goal of a “Jewish national home” (a euphemism for “Jewish State”). Balfour had already pointed to the resolution of the difficulty when he explained in a previous memorandum that “we are dealing not with the wishes of an existing community but are seeking to reconstitute a new community and definitely building for a Jewish numerical majority in the future.” The key article of the Mandatory, Article 2, clearly stated its intention to “secure the establishment of the Jewish national home.”

But perhaps a Jewish state was in fact reconcilable with the continuing presence of the Palestinian population. It is worth considering, in this regard, the reflections of the American King-Crane Commission, dispatched to the middle east in 1919 at the behest of President Wilson:

The Commission began their study of Zionism with minds disposed in its favor....the fact came out repeatedly in the Commission’s conferences with Jewish representatives that the Zionists looked forward to a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine.<sup>8</sup>

b. It became increasingly clear that oil was to play a major role in the development of the industrial foundation of modern capitalism, the only problem requiring disposition being whether to form a central alliance with one of the Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, or to employ Israel as the “colon” to impose Western will upon the oil rich nations of the region.

c. The medium for the realization of Zionist aspirations was British policy toward Jewish immigration, a development which ran in anything but a single line, though in the long run it succeeded, on occasion as much in “passive” acceptance as active decision, in making the land available to the Zionist cause. The Arab percentage of the population fell steadily from 91.3 percent in 1919 to 69 percent in 1939, while Jewish land ownership rose from 2.04 percent in 1919 to 5.7 percent in 1939. It is crucial to realize that the Jewish settlements occurred in the most fertile parts of Palestine. There was no legal-constitutional resistance afforded the Arabs. Obviously, the British rejected the policy of democratic representation, and as the British-Zionist amalgam solidified, the flood of immigration expanded: 9,953 in 1932, 30,327 in 1933, 42,359 in 1934, 61,854 in 1935, a total of

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

144,093 in four years. Consider for comparison that in the same four years only 14,118 Jews were accepted into the United States.<sup>9</sup>

It is against this background that the Palestinian Arab Rebellion of 1936 must be understood. In 1937, Lord Peel was dispatched to conduct another inquiry, and in the process proposed the partition of Palestine:

The Arabs, of course, were horrified at the very principle of partition, which they saw as the vivisection of their country. But they were equally horrified at its interpretation which gave the Jews 40 percent of Palestine at a time when their land ownership did not exceed 5.6 percent....But the cruelest provision of all was that there should be, if necessary, a “forcible transfer of Arabs” from Arab lands allotted to the Jewish state. This was, indeed, a nightmare come true.<sup>10</sup>

And Ghandi was led to comment:

Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct. Surely it would be a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs so that Palestine can be restored to the Jews partly or wholly as their national home....according to the accepted canons of right and wrong, nothing can be said against the Arab resistance in the face of overwhelming odds.<sup>11</sup>

There are two other aspects of early 20th century immigration policy that warrant notice:

First, as the Jewish population of Israel expanded, Zionist policy became more selective, aiming not at the largest number of Jews to be included in the state of Israel, but at those regarded as superior. The Zionist policy was concerned not with the number who might be saved but with the quality of those “pioneers” who might save Israel. So, the Zionists actually slowed the process of emigration during the crucial years 1933-1938. The Zionist insistence that emigration should be

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xxxviii.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xli.

<sup>11</sup>Cited in *ibid.*, p. xlii.

deflected from the West was incorporated into American and British legislation.

Second, this aspect of the immigration issue echoed a pre-existing Western interest in deflecting Jewish immigration from Britain and the United States. In Britain, after a late 19th century surge of Jewish immigration there were riots in London and growing demands to enact a more restrictive policy. The same tendencies surfaced in the United States where Louis Brandeis, as President Wilson's representative, engaged in a significant conversation with Balfour, which concluded in their mutual commitment to Zionism. This Western concern would continue to exert itself in one form or another throughout the remaining years leading to the recognition of Israel.

8. From 1939-1947 Zionist strategy, following a protracted struggle between Ben-Gurion and Chiam Weizman, agreed to the position of the former and determined that the best solution to the waning of British interest in the Zionist cause was to establish its Western base in the United States. Its problem was how to awaken an apathetic Jewish population. The heart of its policy was to utilize the Zionist presence in Palestine to stimulate the Jewish presence in the United State to bring pressure on the American Administration. To this end Ben-Gurion convened the "Biltmore Program" in 1942: "The Conference urges that the gates of Palestine be opened; that the Jewish Agency be vested with control of immigration into Palestine...and that Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth."<sup>12</sup> The old euphemism of "a national home" had been abandoned in the presence of a growing Zionist arrogance. For in 1942 Jewish land ownership stood at only 5.9 percent of the country and the population at 31.2 percent of the total population.

Ben-Gurion had made substantial headway in enlisting American Jews in the Zionist cause, but the next step, persuading the American government to support the transitional partition and eventual domination of Jewish presence in Palestine depended on a unique conjunction of historical, geopolitical and accidental factors.

Clearly, the most crucial event effecting the disposition of the Jewish situation was the Holocaust and its impact on world consciousness and conscience. The enormity of the topic precludes any significant comment in an outline presentation such as this. Needless to say the horror of the German extermination of the Jews agitated ancient strata of guilt that had deposited in Western history for three thousand

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<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. lii (emphasis added).

years. The actual record is extremely complicated, there being no constant persecution of the Jews over time, and the incidence of persecution in ancient and medieval times seeming to depend on the strength of the prevailing state power, which, much more than is assumed, often protected the Jews against movements from below.

It must be pointed out that in all the worst anti-Jewish persecutions (of the classical period) that is, where Jews were killed, the ruling elite — the emperor, the pope, the kings, the higher aristocracy and the upper clergy, as well as the rich bourgeoisie in the autonomous cities — were always on the side of the Jews. The latter's enemies belonged to the more oppressed and exploited class and those close to them in daily life and interests, such as the friars of the mendicant orders."<sup>13</sup>

Matters change in modern times, particularly in the 19th century, with the growth of the nation state, the achievement of minimum standards of human rights, the changing function of the Jews in capitalism, and the reaction to these movement by those who were uprooted and bewildered by the process of radical change. The creation of the Jews as scapegoats did not occur through projection, but from what might be called inverted causal projection: the Jews were seen as the cause of the disintegration of the older society and universal conceptual construction was accomplished through the media of "race."

What is most pathetic and pathological in this configuration is the fact that Zionism itself arose in an embrace of this very notion of racial identity: "Historically, Zionism is both a reaction to antisemitism and a conservative alliance with it..."<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, in Europe, an Austrian Jewish journalist, Theodore Herzl, gave Zionism its definitive ideological foundations and organizational structure.

According to him, anti-Semitism, which was at the root of the Jewish problem, was inerradicable; the Jews constituted a people in the sense of a nation, and the Jewish problem was consequently a national problem, which could only be solved by the gathering into one state of all Jews who wished to retain their Jewish identity.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), p. 64.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup>Van Der Hoeven in Khalidi, *op. cit.*, p. 117-118.

As Hannah Arendt noted, “Herzl thought in terms of nationalism inspired from German sources.”<sup>16</sup> The view she is referring to held that all persons who were of German descent, or “blood,” or who spoke a common language, owed their primary loyalty to Germany. For Herzl, anti-Semitism was ineradicable because “Jewishness,” by some inherent, “natural” character, was itself ineradicable. According to Zionism it was not acquired, or chosen, or learned, or absorbed culturally, but was ingredient in one’s bio-cultural being, a view that could only appear within the structure of naturalistic reification that marked the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe. Nazism, itself, embraced this conception but inverted the value judgment made by the Zionists, so that what they regarded as exemplary, Nazism came to see as execrable.

The Nazi elaboration of the notion of Jewish identity contributed to the ideological grounds upon which the extermination of the Jews was constructed. The root of the notion was to become, after the end of World War II, the very foundation of the Zionist claim to a homeland in Palestine, a strategy justified in the aftermath of the Holocaust, by the obvious need for territorial safety. That the Palestinians already resided in this place was viewed as basically unimportant. But what must never be forgotten is the manner in which Western guilt, following the slaughter of six million Jews, served to invert the nature of history, to make the victim into the victimizer, the exploited the exploiter, the oppressed the oppressor. And, particularly since the major Western powers did little to aid the Jews when the possibility presented itself, closed down immigration and left the Jews to suffer the ravages of Nazi brutality, they chose in a futile attempt at expiation, to provide Israel what it demanded, choosing to throw the Palestinians to the viciousness of Jewish slaughter.

9. The creation of the State of Israel could not have taken place as it did without the accident of Roosevelt’s death and Truman’s ascension to the presidency. Obviously, he encountered a situation of extraordinary complexity. Truman was thrust into office at the very moment when the self-condemnation of Western Christianity was developing into an overwhelming demand for redemption. There is no reason to doubt Truman’s sincere compassion for the plight of the Jews and his wish to assist the “pitiful remnants” of survivors. He was supported in this sentiment by a strong component of his own party and the intense pressure of Zionist organizations in the United States. When Secretary of Navy James Forrestal reminded him of the

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 814-817.



importance of Saudi Arabian oil, Truman replied that he would not act for oil but for “what is right.”<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, Truman was quite capable of sharp criticism directed against supporters of the Jews. A major concern was relations with Britain. In 1939, fearing Arab-German collaboration, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s government issued a White Paper that curbed Jewish immigration and promised an independent Arab State within a decade. At this point, Britain was the predominant power in the Middle East.

Most British leaders, including Bevin, presumed that for political, economic, and strategic reasons their nation need to preserve their long-standing position in the Middle East despite the great costs and problems of doing so....As the foreign secretary would tell the cabinet in 1949 after four extremely difficult years, ‘(I)n peace and war, the Middle East is of cardinal importance to the U.K., second only to the U.K. itself. Strategically, the Middle East is a focal point of communication, a source of oil, a shield to Africa and the Indian Ocean, and an irreplaceable offensive base. Economically, it is, owing to oil and cotton, essential to the United Kingdom recovery.’<sup>18</sup>

However, Britain was a declining economic power and with the termination of Lend-Lease after the war, was less and less in any position to mount a vigorous challenge to the policy interests of the United States.

Truman resisted a “religious” state all the while that he supported some form of partition. Yet, he feared that an independent Jewish entity might incite a Third World War. There was also concern that the Arabs, if sufficiently provoked, could intensify their relations with the U.S.S.R. He continued to favor increased Jewish immigration to Palestine, however much he remained uncertain of the particular form of the new political arrangement between the Jews and the Arabs. In another of the fateful conjunctions of history, 1948 was a critical election year and the Democratic party was acutely aware of the importance of New York and the considerable likelihood that Dewey would adopt a pro-Zionist policy in the pursuit of votes. There can be

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<sup>17</sup>Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory* (Stanford: Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). Chapter 11.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 278.

little doubt about the determination of Truman's position, and, as he explained matters to a meeting of American diplomats from Arab countries: "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 thousand of Arabs among my constituents."<sup>19</sup> Not only did American geo-political interests contribute significantly to the fate of Palestine; domestic concerns were also a vital if corrupting element in the mix.

The greater America's support for Palestinian partition and an independent Jewish state, the more powerful is the Zionist influence among Jews in the US. And sympathy for the Jewish remnant of the Holocaust was being utilized with considerable effect by the very efficient Zionist propaganda machine. For example, as Lieut. General Sir Frederick Morgan, 1944-1945 Chief of U.N.R.A. said:

The camp at Zeilsheim, near Frankfurt, was skillfully used to reinforce points of Zionist propaganda of which the general object seemed to be to indicate to the world that those Jews who had survived the nazi terror were being treated little, if any, better by the western conquerors who were now doing their utmost best for all, including Jews.

Not only did one admire the skill of the Zionist Propaganda campaign, but even more so the whole organization of the ceaseless movement of great numbers of these poor people across war-torn Germany, wherein legitimate movement was a highly problematic business, down into Austria into Italy and Yugoslavia for shipment, often in circumstances of terrifying danger, to Palestine.

The whole business was represented as being the spontaneous surge of a tortured and persecuted people toward their long-lost homeland. I fancy that, in reality, there were few among the travelers who, of their own free will, would have gone elsewhere than to the U.S.A.<sup>20</sup>

It is worth considering whether the Zionist leadership itself suffered anything approaching guilt for its disastrous insistence that Jews

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<sup>19</sup>Khalidi, *op. cit.*, p. lvii.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 529-530.

establish themselves wholly in Palestine, thereby turning a blind eye to the anti-immigration policies adopted by the Western powers. As Khalidi puts the matter "...the chief Zionist miscalculation lay...in emphasizing the political formula for the solution of the Jewish problem at the expense of the humanitarian one."<sup>21</sup> The revelation of Nazi barbarism that came to light with the conclusion of the war served to redouble the efforts of the Zionist leadership for single solution of a national homeland.

The Biltmore Program propagated by the Zionist leadership in 1942 called for Zionist control of all of Palestine, "...that the Jewish Agency be vested with control of immigration into Palestine and with necessary authority for upbuilding the country...and that Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth..." This from an administration that Ben-Gurion defined as "completely identified with the needs and aims of the Jewish settlers." And this in a country that was largely Palestinian at the time. These pronouncements would have been irrelevant had not Jewish military force, through the defeat of the Arab uprising of 1936-1939 and the growth of the Zionist military during the second world war, come to favor the power of the latter. In the wake of these considerations, Arab alarm increased as did Jewish maneuvering until Truman, in October of 1946, endorsed the proposed Zionist map for the partition of Palestine.

A brief summary by Khalidi will suggest the injustice and blatant immorality of the agreement: the Zionist map of Palestine that Truman endorsed agreed to give 75 percent of the total area of Palestine to the Jews at a time when they owned 7 percent of the land area, at the expense of the Palestinians.

The number of Arab town and villages to come under Jewish rule would be about 450, with a total of about 700,000 inhabitants, or 58 percent of the total Arab population of the country. The Arabs would lose *all* their richest lands including *all* their citrus groves, which latter produced their more lucrative export crop. They would lose *all* the control of the vital headwaters of the River Jordan, and *all* contact with the sea except for a tiny corridor leading to the largest Arab city of Jaffa, which from a bustling prosperous city would become a waif dependent on Jewish mercy.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. lix.

<sup>22</sup>See *ibid.* for a more detailed account, p. lxv.

As James Reston commented at the time: “The president went against his advisors on foreign policy and chose to follow the promptings of those who were primarily interested in retaining Democratic majorities in Congress.”<sup>23</sup>

10. Once Truman committed himself, on Yom Kippur, 1946(!), to the Zionist plan for the partition of Palestine, the fate of its people was sealed. It is true that UNSCOP, The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, (composed of eleven states; one Moslem, the rest, with the exception of India, Christian) met in session from April of 1947. The influence of the United States was, however to prove dominant. Like the Yom Kippur proposal, the UNSCOP plan called for the incorporation of the Negev into the Jewish State. By October 1946 there were only four Jewish settlements in the Negev, and a total population of 475. Despite the carefully calculated verdict that the Jews alone had the capacity to make the desert bloom, the area under cultivation by the Beduins was *three* times the *total* area cultivated by the *entire* Jewish community in Palestine after more than sixty years of loudly trumpeted “pioneering.”<sup>24</sup>

UNSCOP recommended to the General Assembly the partition of Palestine in general accord with Jewish wishes. The event can only be seen as one of the most abhorrent and “pathological” decisions of modern time. If the boundaries were being imposed by a foreign power, as the British proposal for partition in 1937, one could more readily grasp how it might simply conform to political interest. However, the final disposition of the situation was being implemented in this case by an “impartial” world body. And however and in what manner one can readily understand the desire to shelter the Jews after the horror of the holocaust, it must have been equally obvious that the Palestinian people had a firm and incontestable claim to this very land. The arrangement cannot be considered a compromise as it was totally abhorrent to the Palestinians who were to lose everything and gain nothing, while the Zionists gained everything and lost nothing. The event is intelligible on the basis of power and guilt, but these being the grounds, it would be well to eliminate all pretext of justice. How portentous and horrendous the sanctimonious hypocrisy of Peel’s declaration of 1937:

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<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 526.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. lxviii-lxix.

Considering what the possibility of finding a refuge in Palestine means to many thousand suffering Jews, is the loss occasioned by partition, great as it would be, more than Arab generosity can bear?....If the Arabs at some sacrifice could help to solve that problem they would earn the gratitude not of the Jews alone, but of the Western world.<sup>25</sup>

After considerable pressure, manipulation and intimidation by the United States, the UN General Assembly chose to endorse the UNSCOP proposal by the required two thirds majority. The Arab delegates at the General Assembly requested that the legitimacy of any United Nations resolution on the matter be put before the International Court of Justice, since the proposal would be enforced “without the consent of the inhabitants of Palestine.” The voting of the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly on this resolution was 21 to 20; “Only 21 of the 57 members of the General Assembly considered that the UN had the necessary competence.” (Khalidi, lxxi)

UNSCOP’s proposals strongly recommended the General Assembly “undertake immediately the initiation and execution of an international arrangement whereby the problem of the distressed European Jews will be dealt with as a matter of extreme urgency for the alleviation of their plight and of the Palestinian problem.” The Arab delegates proposed that those Jews who could not be repatriated should be absorbed “into the territories of the members of the United Nations in proportion to economic resources, per capita income, population and other relevant factors.” It was not carried.

At the end of 1947, the British announced their intention to withdraw from Palestine in the following year, which was tantamount to Zionist military victory. (On December 10, 1947, the remainder of the American loan that had been frozen since August of 1946 was released.) Since the Zionists had overwhelming military advantage, the British facade of neutrality guaranteed Zionist victory. The key to British strategy during this interim period was to obstruct Arab entry and facilitate Zionist military concentration. The Zionists utilized their overwhelming advantage to decimate the Arab population and expand their own territorial possession beyond even what the UN had provided. (At the time of the partition the Zionist portion of Palestine was no more than 7 percent; the partition gave the Zionist 55 percent of the country outright.)

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<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. lxx.

11. Obviously, the initial responses of Arabs and Jews to the UN partition plan were diametrically opposed: the Arabs rejected it as a violation of the rights of an indigenous people; the Zionists apparently accepted it. Like everything the Zionist leadership had agreed to over the course of the century, their acceptance was provisional and duplicitous, their ultimate aim being the establishment of a Jewish state for the whole of Palestine:

In short, acceptance of the UN Partition Resolution was an example of Zionist pragmatism par excellence. It was a tactical acceptance, a vital step in the right direction — a springboard for expansion when circumstances proved judicious.

The Zionist leadership was sufficiently pragmatic to understand the impracticality of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine, with a population of 1,300,000 Arabs and 650,000 Jews. Nonetheless, its territorial ambitions and its opposition to a Palestinian state made Jewish acceptance of the UN partition proposal more formal than real.<sup>26</sup>

Ben-Gurion had articulated his position quite clearly as long ago as 1937:

The acceptance of partition does not commit us to renounce Transjordan. *One does not demand from anybody to give up his vision.* We shall accept a state in the boundaries fixed today — but the boundaries of Zionist aspirations are the concern of the Jewish people and *no external factor will be able to limit them.*<sup>27</sup>

So, in 1947, the Zionists implemented, through a series of expropriations and violations, their long cherished desire to expel the Arab population and dominate Palestine. From the beginning this intention was masked by the blatant and carefully constructed lie that the indigenous population had left voluntarily. This prevarication was spread so forcefully and completely that it became an iconic conviction of Israeli consciousness. Ben-Gurion, addressing the People's Council in 1948, claimed that the Jews had not abandoned a single settlement while the Arabs had abandoned settlements and cities "...with great ease,

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<sup>26</sup>Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), pp. 33-44.

<sup>27</sup>Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 52-55 (emphasis added).

after the first defeat, even though no danger of destruction or massacre...confronted them. Indeed, it was revealed with overwhelming clarity which people is bound with strong bonds to this land.”<sup>28</sup> So, as we shall see, devotion to the land will come to be defined in terms of the ruthless capacity for barbaric destruction.

The claim of voluntary departure had been exposed as Zionist propaganda as far back as the 1960s through the work of Erskine B. Childers, an Irish diplomat and son of the President of the Irish Republic and Walid Khalidi, the founder and honorary general secretary of the Institute for Palestine Studies.<sup>29</sup> These revelations had very little effect on Zionist mythology however, and the claim to Jewish innocence has continued to flourish, even in the face of later Israeli revisionist criticisms. A British report on the conference of Arab prime ministers in December, 1947 summarized the Arab view of Zionist aspirations as follows:

The ultimate aim of all the Zionists was “the acquisition of all of Palestine, all Transjordan and possibly some tracts in Southern Lebanon and Southern Syria.” The Zionist “politicians,” after taking control of the country, would at first treat the Arabs “nicely.” But then, once feeling “strong enough,” they would begin “squeezing the Arab population off their land...(and) if necessary out of the State.” Later they would expand the Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinian Arab state. However, the more militant Haganah commanders wished to move more quickly....Exploiting the weakness and disorganization of the Arabs, they would first render them — especially in Jaffa and Jaifa — “completely powerless” and then frighten or force them into leaving, “their places being taken by Jewish immigrants.” The Arab leaders...thought that there existed a still more extreme Jewish plan, of the Revisionists, calling for more immediate expansion.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Cited in Norman G. Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 54.

<sup>29</sup>See the essay by Hitchens, “Broadcasts” in Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens, eds., *Blaming the Victims* (London: Verso, 1988).

<sup>30</sup>Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 24.

Unfortunately, this was the truth of imminent anguish and catastrophe.

Furthermore, it is equally true that the great majority of Palestinians came to realize that the partition was inevitable and that prolonged warfare on their part was futile. Ezra Danin reported that “the majority of the Palestinian masses accept the partition as a *fait accompli* and do not believe it possible to overcome or reject it.”<sup>31</sup> Ben-Gurion, in his war diaries, notes the same fact: “It is now clear...that the decisive majority of them, do not want to fight us...”

The Palestinians, then, neither wanted nor believed in war, and...attempted to protect themselves against warfare by the only means at their disposal: local agreements with their Jewish neighbors against mutual attacks, provocations, and hostile acts.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, the Arab retreat from Palestine began November 29, 1947 with the announcement of the UN Partition Resolution. The Arabs explained their flight as a result of a deliberate Zionist effort at intimidation, terror and forced expulsion. The Zionists denied all responsibility and claimed instead that the population fled as a result of calls for evacuation from the Arab Higher Committee, in order to facilitate the movements of Arab armies. However, as Flapan has noted:

The recent publication of thousands of documents in the state and Zionist archives, as well as Ben-Gurion’s war diaries, shows that there is not evidence to support Israeli claims. In fact, the declassified material contradicts the “order” theory, for among these new sources are documents testifying to the considerable efforts of the AHC and the Arab states to constrain the flight.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the desperate appeals of the AHC:

Fawzi al-Qawukji, commander of the Arab Liberation Army, was given instructions to stop the flight by force and to requisition transport for this purpose ....On May 10, Radio Jerusalem broadcast orders on its Arab program from Arab commanders and the AHC to stop the mass flight from Jerusalem and the vicinity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>See Flapan, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.



But the appeals, public calls and official demands of the AHC proved useless for the simple reason that they could not counteract the violence of the Zionist incursion. This despite the fact that it had long been the ceremonial position of the Zionist leadership that the Jewish people, who had themselves suffered such grievous persecution, would respect the rights of minorities. As late as 1947 Weizman could write that the “Jews are not going to encroach upon the rights and territory of the Arabs.”<sup>35</sup> And in October of the same year Sharrett informed the General Assembly that “with partition, between 400,00 and 500,000 Arabs would be included in the Jewish state....” And the leftist leader Aharon Cohen insisted that “the Arab exodus was not part of a preconceived plan....” but acknowledged “a part of the flight was due to official policy....Once it started, the flight received encouragement from the most important Jewish sources, for both military and political reasons.”<sup>36</sup>

Of course, there were those Palestinians who left freely. Particularly those of position and wealth, who were able to move themselves and their families to safety, often did so. But literally hundreds of thousand of others fled under the threat of violent upheaval or death. They fled in panic. IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) intelligence estimated that 84 percent of the Arabs left as a result of Israeli actions, 5 percent as a result of Arab insistence, leaving 11 percent who may be expected to have left voluntarily. Ben-Gurion was inhibited by the political situation from issuing orders concerning Palestinian expulsion, but in private there is considerable evidence that he strongly affirmed a wholly different view.

Ben-Gurion utilized three basic tactics to dislodge the Palestinians from the land: destruction of economic resources; psychological warfare designed to instigate panic; and the destruction of villages and, in significant instances, the murder of their inhabitants.

So, in regard to the first strategy Ben-Gurion, in a letter to Sharrett noted: “Haifa and Jaffa are at our mercy. We can ‘starve them out.’” Ezra Danin referred to “a crushing blow” to be dealt by destroying “transportation...and economic facilities — Jafa port (boats to be sunk); ...the closing down of Arab factories...” Yigal Allon asserted: “Now only extreme punitive measures are possible. The call for peace will appear as a sign of weakness. Only after inflicting a major blow can calls to peace work. We must strike their economy.” And in his war

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<sup>35</sup>*UN Weekly Bulletin*, July 22, 1947, p. 220.

<sup>36</sup>Report to MAPAM, October, 1948.

diaries Ben-Gurion stated flatly: “The strategic objective (of the Jewish forces) was to destroy the urban communities.”<sup>37</sup>

The military campaign was directed by Plan Dalet which included the destruction of the enemy and enemy villages and the expulsion of the population. In its own terms the plan was highly successful. The Haganah and other Zionist groups attacked Palestinian towns and settlements with the anticipated result that the Arabs fled in terror. Each major Palestinian exodus occurred after each major military assault. As Finkelstein has noted:

The widely publicized slaughter at Deir Yassin, the massacres in Khirbet Nasr ad Dind near Tiberias and Ein az Zeitun near Safadm the indiscriminate mortarings in Haifa and Acre, the use of loudspeakers broadcasting “black propaganda” (i.e., terrifying messages in Arabic), crop burnings, and so on, spurred into exile those Palestinians not sufficiently impressed by the lightning assaults of the Zionist forces....The Carmeli Brigade was ordered to *kill every (adult) male encountered* and to attack with firebombs “all objectives that can be set alight.”<sup>38</sup>

The most infamous of these atrocities occurred in Deir Yassin. The inhabitants had signed a non-aggression pact with their neighbors and consequently saw no need for protection from the Arab Higher Committee. Nevertheless, of the 400 or so inhabitants, approximately 250, including women and children, were systematically and ruthlessly slaughtered. Jacques de Reynier, head of the delegation in Palestine of the International Red Cross, entered Deir Yassin immediately after the mass murder and wrote of the horror that awaited him:

The affair of Deir Yassin had immense repercussions. The press and radio spread the news everywhere among the Arabs as well as the Jews. Driven by fear the Arabs left their homes to find shelter among their kindred...Finally, about 700,000 Arabs became refugees, leaving everything behind in their haste, their one hope being to avoid the fate of the people of Deir Yassin.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Flapan, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>38</sup>Finkelstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 66 (emphasis added).

<sup>39</sup>Khalidi, *op. cit.*, pp. 761-766.

12. And what was the Zionist response to the their successful murder and expulsion of the Palestinian populations throughout Palestine? As Morris notes:

While Begin and the IZL leadership were careful not to openly espouse a policy of expulsion, it is clear that the IZL's military operations were designed with the aim of clearing out the Arab inhabitants of the areas they conquered. Following the massacre at Deir Yassin, the IZL fighters trucked out the remaining villagers to East Jerusalem. In May in the Hills of Ephraim the IZL assault ended in the flight of the majority of the villagers; and those who remained in place were, within days, swiftly sent packing....In their post operational reports, ...the IZL commanders emphasized their satisfaction with the fact that the assaults had precipitated mass civilian-Arab flight.<sup>40</sup>

In February of 1948 Ben-Gurion addressed a Mapai meeting and spoke with satisfaction of the expulsion of the Arabs from West Jerusalem, anticipating its extension. He noted that not “since the days of the Roman destruction” was Jerusalem “so completely Jewish as today ....There are no strangers. One hundred percent Jews.” When he was asked about the absence of Jewish land in crucial areas of Palestine he responded: “The war will give us the land. The concepts of ‘ours’ and ‘not ours’ are only concepts for peacetime, and during war they lose all their meaning.”<sup>41</sup>

The Zionist atrocity in Palestine did not go unnoticed and unmarked by its own indigenous critics. Because Zionism is a complex and variegated movement, deriving some part of its conscience and commitment from the prophetic tradition, and some part from the European enlightenment humanism that was the context of its formal birth, it has generated those who condemned its policy. In May of 1948 Aharon Cohen, director of MAPAM's Arab Department wrote that “a deliberate eviction (of the Arabs) is taking place....Others may rejoice — I as a socialist, am ashamed and afraid.”<sup>42</sup>

Earlier in the century Achad Ha-am (in Hebrew, “one of the people,” the pen name of Asher Ginzburg) who has generally been

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<sup>40</sup>Morris, cited in Finkelstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 74.

taken to be a founder of “cultural Zionism, intending to create a Hebrew renaissance in Palestine, wrote:

This Jewish settlement, which will grow gradually, will become in the course of time the center of a nation....And when our national culture in Palestine has attained that level...we may be sure that it will produce men...who...will be able to establish a state which will be a *Jewish* state, and not merely a state of the Jews...(In addition it will be necessary for the creation of this spiritual center for Hebrew speakers to become)...a majority of the population, own most of the land, and control the institutions shaping the culture of the country.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, Ha-am also came to insist that Palestine was not an empty place, as the majority of Zionists chose to believe, but a land with very little untilled soil. And in regard to the Zionists who had begun to migrate to Palestine at the very end of the 19th century, Ha-am admonished them to approach the Arab population in a spirit of friendship and respect;

Yet what do our brethren do in Palestine? Just the very opposite. Serfs they were in the land of the Diaspora and suddenly they find themselves in freedom, and this change has awakened in them an inclination to despotism. They treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, deprive them of their rights, offend them without cause, and even boast of these deeds; and nobody among us opposes this despicable and dangerous inclination.<sup>44</sup>

A hideous portent.

13. By the end of 1948 Zionist domination and Palestinian tragedy were firmly in place. In one sense, there is nothing extraordinary about this Zionist brutality. It is not, in its geo-political structure, very different from other imperialisms with which it shared during the 19th and 20th centuries. Of course Israel came to play a unique role in the world: its colon status on behalf of England and the United States marked a considerable aspect of its future course. But in its sense of entitlement to the land, resources and lives of another people, it merely

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<sup>43</sup>Quoted in Bernard Avishai, *The Tragedy of Zionism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985), pp. 50, 57-58.

<sup>44</sup>Cited in Kohn in Khalidi, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

replicated the horror of European and even American assumptions of superiority and secularized “divine right.”

The fact that Israel could legitimate itself by appeal to ancient theocratic edicts and modern movements of national liberation made it profoundly dangerous. For

even the most left-wing Zionists, while envisaging a Jewish-Arab socialist state in all of Palestine, continued to believe that day-to-day affairs should be based on non-integration, on separatism. For most of the Jews in Palestine, the Palestinians Arabs *were always marginal*, living outside the pale of Jewish life, even if they were a majority. Their presence was significantly felt only when they took up arms to fight against what they considered to be Zionist encroachment on their rights and property. And what they considered defense emerged in the Zionist consciousness as the intrusion of violence on the peaceful endeavors of the Jewish settlers.<sup>45</sup>

“What they considered defense emerged in the Zionist consciousness as the intrusion of violence on the peaceful endeavors of the Jewish settlers.” This was the crucial inversion by which the violators came to see themselves as violated. After the holocaust it is not difficult to understand that the Jewish people would see itself, in view of the extreme and hideous suffering it had been subject to, as entitled to the simple right to a homeland. The Arabs who lived in Palestine? They were not viewed as a people with an equal claim to home and nation. Somewhere in the Zionist mind there existed an equation of suffering with right. Once again the “chosen people” was distinguished by its grievous sorrow, as though chosen by God for near extinction, it was chosen again for secular redemption.

Flapan offers the very compelling speculation that

The righteousness that allowed the Jews to defy accepted ethical norms was further intensified by the fact that *they projected onto the Arabs the wrath and vengefulness that they felt toward the Nazis.*<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Flapan, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

I would only add that the Nazis represented to the Zionists the extreme, distilled quintessence of the history of domination, cruelty and destruction which Jews had been made to suffer in the past. If rage was “projected onto the Arabs,” must we not also conclude that the Zionists experienced themselves as marked for slaughter by the Palestinians? How else can we begin to explain such statements as the following by Ben-Gurion:

The aim of Arab attacks on Zionism is not robbery, terror, or stopping the growth of the Zionist enterprise, but the total destruction of the Yishuv. It is not political adversaries who will stand before us, but the pupils and even teachers of Hitler, who claim there is only one way to solve the Jewish question, one way only — total annihilation.”<sup>47</sup>

The Nazis had aimed at total destruction of the Jews, and now the Arabs, or so Ben-Gurion understood the matter, were committed to carrying out the same enterprise. The Arabs are cast in the role of students and teachers of Nazism; that is, they became the origin and the conclusion of historical hatred against the Jews. The crucial mediating link is, of course, omitted — the desire of the Zionist for the “total annihilation of the Arabs.” Succeeding history will not, fortunately, realize this horrendous possibility, but neither will it escape the horror of its persistent presence.

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<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*