

A Short History of the Israeli - Palestinian Conflict: Past Is Prologue

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Its roots are from the late 19th century when Theodor Herzl founded modern Zionism at the First Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland in 1897.

In his book "Overcoming Zionism," Joel Kovel writes:

Zionism seeks "the restoration of tribalism in the guise of a modern, highly militarized and aggressive state. (It) cut Jews off from (their) history and led to a fateful identity of interests with antisemitism (becoming) the only thing that united them. (It) fell into the ways of imperialist expansion and militarism, and showed signs of the fascist malignancy."

If you accept "the idea of a Jewish state," you mix its twin notions of "particularism (and) exceptionalism (that are) the actual bane of Judaism (and give) racism an objective, enduring, institutionalized and obdurate character." It turns Israel "into a machine for the manufacture of human rights abuses," and consider three of its former prime ministers. Menachem Begin (1977 - 83), Yitzhak Shamir (1983 - 84 and 1986 - 92), and Ariel Sharon (2001 - 06) were former terrorists who dispelled the illusion of Israeli democracy, morality, and respect for human rights. Kovel's conclusion: "the world would be a far better place without (the corrosive effects of) Zionism."

Inventing a Jewish People - Creating Myths to Justify a Jewish State

Credit Tel Aviv University scholar, Shlomo Zand, for his 2008 book: "When and How Was the Jewish People Invented?" Forget the myths most Jewish children are taught. Biblical nonsense comprising core Zionist beliefs about Jews:

- expelled by the ancient Romans;
- the exodus from Egypt;
- wandering the earth rootless;
- enslaved, oppressed, and tormented for centuries; and
- the notion that God bestowed a "Greater Israel" for Jews alone - the idea of "A land without people for a people without land."

Zand's view (shared by others) is that the Romans didn't expel whole nations, just small numbers from their conquered territories. Most Jews remained, converted to Islam when Arabs took over, and became progenitors of today's Palestinians.

According to Israeli journalist Tom Segev:

“There never was a Jewish people, only a Jewish religion, and the exile never happened – hence there was no return.” So, if ancient Judaeans weren’t expelled en masse, how were Jews scattered globally – the so-called Jewish Diaspora?

Zand believes that some emigrated voluntarily. Many more converted to Judaism. “Contrary to popular belief, Judaism was an evangelical religion that actively sought new adherents during its formative period.”

Thus, if Judaism is a “religion,” not a “people,” how can a “Jewish state” be justified? It’s not an ancient idea, according to Zand, but a late 19th century Zionist invention, “an intellectual conspiracy of sorts. It’s all fiction and myth....an excuse (to justify) the State of Israel” and vilify Palestinian self-determination as a plot to destroy it.

Segev explained that “Zand did not invent (this) thesis; 30 years before (Israel’s) Declaration of Independence, it was espoused by David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi (Israel’s second president), and others.”

Zand wrote his book for a purpose – to debunk accepted myths, Zionists who advance them, and promote the idea that Israel should be a democratic state for all its people, not just for Jews alone. Why not if Jews and Palestinians share common roots!

Early Zionists had other ideas. Its Program was: “Establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Eretz Yisrael.” It began a process of:

- settling Jewish agriculturists, artisans, and tradesmen in Palestine;
- organizing effective action groups in various countries;
- building Jewish consciousness and a national identity; and
- beginning a process of gaining worldwide acceptance for a Jewish homeland.

Herzl later wrote: “At Basle, I founded the Jewish state....If not in five years, then certainly in fifty, everyone will realize it.” It took 51, but transforming Palestine wasn’t simple when Arabs comprised over 90% of the population.

The solution was to transfer or dispossess them, shift them to other Arab countries, deny Palestinians the right to their own land, and create a new Jewish identity, not in the Diaspora but in Palestine – to legitimize Jews as its rightful owner and justify removing indigenous Arabs.

Important also was getting Britain to go along which it did with the November 1917 Balfour Declaration “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people....” It also guaranteed one to Arabs as stipulated in the October 1915 McHahon – Hussein Agreement to return Ottoman Turk land to Arab nationals post-WW I in repayment for their help in the war. Britain instead betrayed them and so did America’s Woodrow Wilson.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis convinced him and Secretary of State Robert Lansing to support Zionism and British-French interests under the 1916 Sykes – Picot Agreement that carved up the region after the war.

At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the World Zionist Organization (WZO) presented its plan for a Jewish state. It included:

- all Palestine;
- South Lebanon up to Sidon and the Litani River;
- Syria's Golan Heights, Hauran Plain and Deraa; and
- control of the Hijaz Railway from Deraa to Amman to Maan, Jordan as well as the Gulf of Aqaba.

Other Zionists wanted more - land from the Nile in the West to the Euphrates in the East comprising Palestine, Lebanon, Western Syria and Southern Turkey.

In 1920, WW I allies met in San Remo, Italy, decided to control Ottoman lands, and agreed to a "mandatory" system. The British Mandate over Palestine began in 1920 under a Jewish High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel. He began its transformation by assuring:

- a liberal Jewish immigration policy;
- immediate provisional citizenship for Jews;
- easy Jewish land acquisition at the expense of indigenous Arabs;
- contiguous settlements to solidify a Jewish presence;
- employment for Jewish immigrants;
- favorable customs policies to develop Jewish commerce; and
- partiality toward Jews overall at the expense of indigenous Arabs.

The World Zionist Organization (WZO) was very much involved. It:

- founded the Jewish Colonial Trust in 1899 to buy land in Palestine;
- the Anglo-Palestine (commercial) Bank and investments institute followed in 1902 within the Jewish Colonial Trust;
- in 1901, the Jewish National Fund was established to buy and develop land;
- in 1909, the Israel Land Development Company for the same purpose;
- the 1907-established Eretz Yisrael Bureau assisted the project; in 1921, the Zionist Executive in Eretz Yisrael replaced it;
- in 1920, the United Israel Appeal was founded to raise funds to finance welfare, health, education, and continued settlement projects;
- in 1929, the Jewish Agency for Eretz Yisrael was established to represent the WZO in dealings with the British government in administering Palestine; Chaim Weizmann was its first president;

— in 1942, the WZO's official aim was for a "Jewish Community" in Palestine; the Biltmore Program stated that "Eretz Yisrael will be based as a Jewish (only) community, to be integrated into a new democratic world."

Zionist Divisions

Divisions characterized Zionists from the start. Herzl, Chaim Weizmann (Israel's first president) and Moshe Sharett (prime minister after Ben-Gurion) favored reconciliation with the Arab world. Revisionists, on the other hand, were hard line with Ze'ev Jabotinsky their leader. In 1923, he published an article called "On the Iron Wall" in which he argued that Arab nationalists opposed a Jewish state in Palestine and wouldn't accept one. Thus peaceful coexistence was unattainable, and Jews must build "an iron wall of (superior) Jewish military force."

The idea was to discourage Arab hopes of destroying Israel followed by a second stage - a negotiated settlement in which Israel had the upper hand and could dictate terms.

Ben-Gurion sided with Jabotinsky, chose a military option, and winning the War of Independence was his vindication. Ever since, Israel stayed hard line politically and militarily. It fights and negotiates from strength, not weakness. Confrontation, not diplomacy is its strategy. It believes Arabs only understand violence, so military threats and intimidation are its options. Generals become future leaders. The cycle is mostly repeated. Washington, the West, and most Arab states go along, and military aggression is called self-defense - hence the Israel Defense Forces much like America's Department of Defense.

In a recent article, Middle East expert Joseph Massad put it this way:

"The logic goes as follows: Israel has the right to occupy Palestinian land, lay siege to (its) populations in Bantustans surrounded by an apartheid wall, starve the population, cut them off from fuel and electricity (and all else), uproot their trees and crops, and launch periodic raids and targeted assassinations against them and their elected leadership, and if (resistance is encountered, Israel is entitled to slaughter) them en masse (because it's just 'defending' itself as it must and should."

Naked aggression is called self-defense. Civilians are legitimate targets. Heroic freedom fighters are "terrorists," and if Arabs don't understand, the process is repeated until they do. Further, international humanitarian and other laws don't apply. Victims aren't entitled to the same rights as Jews because Arabs are inferior and don't warrant them. In addition:

"Israel has the right to oppress the Palestinians and does so to defend itself (its right to exist), but were the Palestinians to defend themselves against Israel's oppression, (to which it has no right, then) Israel will have the right to defend itself against their legitimate defense" without restraint or regard for the laws of war or humanitarian considerations.

Negotiating with Israel is futile because Tel Aviv demands and doesn't yield. It takes and doesn't give. Peace process hypocrisy offers nothing, and all Palestinians have to show for it is continued occupation, death, destruction, oppression, immiseration, and loss of their land and freedom.

Zionists did it in stages:

- early arrivals saw themselves as “returning natives” and began a process of displacement;
- from 1918 - 1947, it advanced as the Jewish population increased;
- from 1936 - 1939, Arab resistance grew against increasing Jewish encroachment; it was clear that unlimited Jewish immigration, combined with Zionist political and military development, meant the eventual transformation of Palestine to a Jewish state; in 1936, Arabs resisted, called a strike, and reacted violently;
- Zionists countered with a “compulsory transfer” policy; Jewish sovereignty over all Palestine became a priority; accommodating Arabs was rejected; the Biltmore Program affirmed it;
- Ben-Gurion had a plan, but WW II intervened;
- post-war, violence again erupted; Zionists wanted unrestricted immigration; Palestinians saw their country being lost; the war bankrupted Britain; it ended its Mandate over Palestine on May 14, 1948 when the State of Israel was established.

America became the first country to extend recognition when Harry Truman signed the following statement:

“This Government has been informed that a Jewish state has been proclaimed in Palestine, and recognition has been requested by the provisional government thereof.

The United States recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the new State of Israel.”

It established an enduring alliance, more firmly in place now than ever - in a strategic part of the world for the mutual benefit of both nations.

Understanding Zionism is fundamental:

- its reliance on oppression, violence, and dispossession;
- its belief in exclusivity, privilege, and Jewish exceptionalism;
- racism at the core of its politics;
- democracy only for Jews;
- an ethnically pure state in which half its inhabitants aren’t Jewish, are afforded few rights, and none on what matters most.

Zionism justifies a Jewish ethnocracy with built-in structural inequalities. Israeli Arabs may vote, sit in the Knesset, but government rulings aren’t “legitimate” without a “Jewish majority.” The Law of Return is for Jews alone. All laws are for Jews. On issues of land, housing, education and most everything, Jewish favoritism discriminates against Arabs.

The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law prohibits Israeli Arab spouses from the West Bank, Gaza or any Arab country from entering Israel and getting residency rights or citizenship. It’s to counter a “demographic problem” or the threat that a faster-growing Palestinian

population will soon outnumber Jews and change the character of a “Jewish state.”

Ideology becomes policy and Arabs suffer with convenient myths for justification:

- poor Israel; it’s a victim fighting to survive against hordes of hostile Arabs;
- they reject peace, prefer violence, plan Israel’s destruction, so conflict is inevitable;
- the core problem is Palestinian “terrorism;” Israel acts only in self-defense;
- Gaza and the West Bank are “disputed,” not “occupied” Territories;
- political solutions aren’t possible so Israel must maintain total control under “Fortress Israel;”
- Palestinians are to be relegated to isolated powerless cantons under Israel’s control before a “final solution” dispossesses or annihilates them; Israel is for Jews alone; after the 1967 war, the Allon Plan affirmed it – named after deputy prime minister Yigal Allon; his goal:
 - (1) “maximum land with minimum Arabs;”
 - (2) annex around 40% of the West Bank and Gaza, taking the choicest parts; and
 - (3) dispossess Palestinians from land Israel wants for Jews.

In his 2001 book, “The Iron Wall,” Avi Shlaim wrote:

After Israel’s victory in 1967, Allon (on July 26) “submitted to the cabinet a plan that was to bear his name (The Allon Plan). It called for incorporating in Israel the following areas: a strip of land ten to fifteen kilometers wide along the Jordan River; most of the Judean desert along the Dead Sea; and a substantial area around Greater Jerusalem, including the Latrun salient. Designed to include as few Arabs as possible in the area claimed for Israel, the plan envisaged building permanent settlements and army bases in these areas. Finally, it called for opening negotiations with local leaders on turning the remaining parts of the West Bank into an autonomous region that would be economically linked to Israel. The cabinet discussed Allon’s plan but neither adopted nor rejected it.”

He also called for defensible borders, creating a Jordanian – Palestinian state, letting Israel maintain a West Bank military presence up to the Jordan River, and be fully in control of a united Jerusalem, perhaps with a Jordanian status in the Old City’s Muslim quarter.

The Allon Plan was in Labor Party platforms in 1974, 1977, 1981, 1984, and 1987, and to large degree shaped Israel’s settlement policies from 1967 – 1977. Prime minister Begin then offered Palestinian self-administration (the right to be Israel’s enforcer) to Egypt’s Sadat in 1977. It became part of the 1978 Camp David agreement and 1993 Oslo Accords.

From 1948 to the present:

- peace, reconciliation, liberation, and a fair and equitable solution to the region’s longest and most intractable problem is unconsidered and unwanted; conflict is the chosen option; seizing all of historic Palestine the goal; and eliminating the Palestinian problem and establishing Israeli regional dominance the final aim.

Post-WW II, Palestinians were nearly 70% of the population, Jews around 30% and owned 6% of the land. Yet the November 1947 General Assembly Partition Plan (Resolution 181) gave Jews 56%. Palestinians got 42% with 2% kept under internationalized trusteeship, including Jerusalem. Jews got the best parts, including choice agricultural areas. Palestinians had no air access or harbor and port facilities, except for isolated Jaffa. Nonetheless, David Ben-Gurion wanted 80%. Israel's 1948 War of Independence got 78%. The problem was keeping it for Jews alone.

Israel agreed to UN Resolution 194 (in December 1948) providing for free access to Jerusalem and other holy places as well as granting Palestinian refugees the right of return. In May 1949, UN Resolution 273 gave Israel UN membership conditional on it accepting Resolutions 181 and 194 and "unreservedly (agreeing to honor) the obligations of the United Nations Charter." However, earlier in June 1948, the Israeli cabinet (with no formal vote) barred Palestinian refugees from returning and directed the IDF to stop those trying with live fire. The same policy remains today to assure a Jewish majority and much more.

"Israelification" and "De-Arabization" are policies to preserve a "Jewish character." Pre-1948, Palestinians owned 93% of Palestine. It dropped to 25% after the war, 7.3% by 1962, and is now around 4%. Palestinians are gradually being dispossessed of their land, country, freedom, and futures. This is the Zionist goal, internal oppression and conflict the methodology.

Treat them like "dogs," said Moshe Dayan, so they'll leave. Use "terror, assassination, intimidation, land confiscation," and more was David Ben-Gurion's formula. Today it's unilateral separation, "de-Arabization," isolation, confinement, and destroying the will to resist with intermittent conflict and mass slaughter for reinforcement.

Israel's aim:

- total control of Palestine;
- Palestinians are "encouraged" to leave;
- confining those who don't to isolated, powerless cantons;
- advancing land seizures;
- co-opting a quisling Palestinian leadership;
- using it as enforcers;
- terrorizing the population relentlessly;
- denying Palestinians any rights; and
- purifying Israel as a Jewish state (like the Nazis tried in Germany) by removing its Arab population. This is Israel today, the reason many Jews aren't staying, and why growing numbers won't move there. Nominally it's a democracy, but only for Jews. Arabs are disenfranchised, without rights, and unwanted.

Gaza and the West Bank remain occupied. Pre-Oslo, Middle East expert Sara Roy called Gaza a "Case of Economic De-Development," a condition as true of the West Bank and, in

today's environment much harsher than she discovered. Her definition was a "process which undermines or weakens the ability of an economy to grow and expand by preventing it from accessing and utilizing critical inputs needed to promote internal growth beyond a specific structural level." Gaza was to be transformed "into an auxiliary of the state of Israel." So was the West Bank.

It's way beyond that now under Israel's policy of oppression, impoverishment, depopulation, destruction, displacement, and genocide to crush the Palestinian spirit, slaughter its people, and end any hope for a viable Palestinian state.

Gaza is under siege and was ravaged by war. The West Bank is checkmated by isolation, land seizures, walls, checkpoints, home demolitions, a nightmarish bureaucracy, closures, agricultural and free movement restrictions, crop destruction, curfews, permits, economic strangulation, random killings, arrests, imprisonment, torture, and overall security force terror against a civilian population.

Israel has total control, aided by the complicit Fatah under Abbas, but this pattern has persisted for decades. For over a half century, Tel Aviv ignored or abused hundreds of UN resolutions condemning or censuring it for its actions against Palestinians and other Arabs, deploring it for committing them, or demanding, calling on, or urging Israel to end them. UN Resolution 242 alone (November 1967) calls for: "Withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict."

Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits:

"Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory...." Neither shall "The Occupying Power...deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies."

Israeli settlements have "no legal validity" under Security Council Resolutions 446 (March 1979), 452 (July 1979), 465 (March 1980), 471 (June 1980), and 476 (June 1980). In addition, Resolutions 267 (July 1969) and 497 (December 1981) say the annexations of East Jerusalem (267) and Syria's Golan Heights (497) are illegal and call for them to be rescinded. Yet Israel continues settlement expansions and maintains a Kafkaesque "matrix of control" over Palestine in gross violation of international law.

In 1967, Theodor Meron, Israeli foreign ministry's legal council, told prime minister Levi Eshkol that: "My conclusion is that civilian settlement in the administered territories contravenes the explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention."

In April 1978, US State Department Legal Advisor, Herbert Hansell, told Congress that:

"while Israel may undertake, in the occupied territories, actions necessary to meet its military needs and to provide for orderly government during the occupation, (the) establishment of the civilian settlements in those territories is inconsistent with international law."

Palestinians are isolated and on their own. Few nations anywhere support them. None in the West or the Middle East, except Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Courage alone sustains them, now powerfully buoyed by a groundswell of world outrage; the global BDS Movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions; calls for criminal prosecutions for Israeli war criminals and expulsion of Israel from the UN System until it fully complies with

international law.

In November 2004, law professor Michael Mandel wrote: "Israel's West Bank and Gaza settlements are war crimes in Canada. Under the Canadian Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act 2000, c. 24, Israel's settlements in territories taken in the June 1967 war constitute war crimes punishable in Canada."

Mandel cites Section 8, paragraph 2 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) adopted by 120 states in July 1998. Item viii prohibits: "The transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or parts of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory."

After initially voting against the Rome Statute, the Clinton administration signed it in December 2000. Then in May 2001, the Bush administration revoked the signature and began a worldwide campaign against the Court.

Israel as well isn't a party to the Rome Statute, but that's irrelevant under Canadian law. Grave breaches of Geneva constitute war crimes. Israel (like America) is criminally liable. Mandel states that although "Israel denies it, there is no question that Israel is an Occupying Power for the purposes of the Geneva Convention, the Rome Statute, and the Canadian Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act." Holding it accountable is essential. It's high time world jurists demanded it.

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