

# Zionist Project Has Always Been Colonisation and Exclusion of Indigenous Palestinians

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*The escalating violence in Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank has been inevitable for a long time. The century-old Zionist project in Palestine has always been colonisation and exclusion or subjugation of indigenous Palestinians. The problem is, of course, that the Zionists and Israel launched their project as European colonisation of Asian, African and American territories was winding down and indigenous independence movements were rising up against colonial masters.*

Palestinians can no longer tolerate constant Israeli abuse by settlers who threaten and attack Palestinian children walking to school, farmers harvesting their olive crop, householders in their homes and drivers travelling from one West Bank urban enclave to another. Palestinians are prepared to respond with stones, gun-fire and Molotov cocktails to Israeli military raids on refugee camps, cities, towns and villages. Consequently, at least 65 Palestinians and a dozen Israelis have died violently this year. Last year was the most deadly for both sides since 2005.

Palestinians did not figure in the 120-year-old Zionist campaign to colonise Palestine. The slogan, "A land without a people for a people without a land", was first adopted by Christian Zionists in 1843 and subsequently by Jewish Zionists although his was a false premise for colonisation. The man who proposed the founding of a "Jewish State", Theodor Herzl did not use this slogan as he visited Palestine and knew it to be false.

Overtly, he adopted a paternalistic line toward native Palestinians and said they would benefit from contact with European Jewish colonists. However, covertly, he wrote in his diaries that Palestinians could be pushed across the borders of their country "surreptitiously". This was, in fact, what happened and is happening but not "surreptitiously" — as an existential aspect of Israeli policy. The very reference of the land as "Palestine" and "Palestinians" as its inhabitants challenges Israel's legitimacy.

But modern-day Israelis cannot deny that Palestine and Palestinians have a long history. There is mention of “Philistines” in the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament. They were a sea-faring people thought to be from Crete who settled in southern Palestine in the 12th century BC about the same time as the Jewish tribes. They battled each other and the Canaanites who were the masters of the land. “Palae Palestine” rather than the names of the Jewish kingdoms was mentioned by the 5th century BC historian Herodotus to identify the district of Syria located between Egypt and Phoenicia.

Current attitudes toward Palestine and the Palestinian people were formed by British colonial rule of the country. This was rooted in the 1917 Balfour declaration which stated that the British government “viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best efforts to facilitate 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...” At that time, 92 per cent of the estimated 700,000 people in Palestine were Palestinian, 8 per cent were Jewish. Since then there has been a concerted effort to continue to deny Palestinians their identity as the indigenous people of the land.

At the time of Israel’s 1948 war of establishment, two-thirds of the population of Palestine was Palestinian. Consequently, if there was to be a Jewish state, the Zionists/Israelis had to clear the land they conquered of Palestinians. Of 1.37 million, 750,000 were driven from the 78 per cent of Palestine held by Israel and 150,000 remained in Israel. The former became “Arab refugees” and latter “Arab Israelis”. In the mouths of many if not most Israelis Palestinians became “Aravim”, aliens, inveterate enemies and, when they did not behave, “terrorists”. Their Palestinian origin was dismissed in the West.

The greatest contribution of Fateh’s leader Yasser Arafat was to put Palestine back on the map of the world, thereby propelling the Palestinian people to the forefront of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arafat proclaimed victory on this issue in this protracted struggle in November 1974 in his address to the UN General Assembly when he proffered the gun or the olive branch as the means of resolving this conflict.

The Israelis chose the gun and colonisation of the 22 per cent of Palestine they conquered and occupied in 1967. Despite two Palestinian uprisings and promises of Palestinian independence in a truncated statelet, Israel has not wavered from this objective and has not been obstructed or sanctioned by the US, its primary sponsor, or complicit Europe and the United Nations.

This has allowed Israeli “settlers”, i.e., colonists to build up their numbers in East Jerusalem and the West Bank and, under Likud chief Binyamin Netanyahu, assume powerful positions in the government. Mainstream Israelis are largely responsible for the rise of the “settlers”, their legitimisation (while breaking international law by colonising occupied territory), and their entry into the mainstream. Before the settlers and the hard right took power, the mainstream majority ignored their ascendancy and did not visit the West Bank, occupied East Jerusalem or Gaza.

Many Israelis opted for “internal exile”, until a serious peace movement emerged during and after Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon with the aim of eliminating Arafat and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. While peaceniks favoured a “two-state solution” involving the emergence of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, their governments, whether Likud or Labour, stepped up colonisation in the land needed for this state. Colonisation continued

even after the 1993 Oslo Accords were signed on the White House lawn and there were expectations that a Palestinian state would emerge by 1999. It was hardly surprising that this did not happen. Instead, colonisation has accelerated and under the current settler-friendly Netanyahu government will continue apace.

For him and his ministers, “Aravim” and “terrorists” constitute an obstacle to colonisation and the realisation of the 19th century Zionist project.

The colonists’ storming and burning of the Palestinian West Bank town of Hawara last Sunday was a direct result of Israeli duplicity: Of espousing the “two-state solution” while continuing colonisation. The colonists justify the attack on Hawara and neighbouring towns by calling it “revenge” for the killing of two Israeli brothers earlier in the day. There are likely to be many more Hawaras in the massively one-sided struggle for Palestine. No longer considered by most of the world, including the pro-Israeli Western powers, as a non-people, Palestinians have no choice but to fight for their existence.

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