

A legal, political, and social study of the root causes from 1916 to 1949 which led to the creation of the “Question of Palestine” and the misunderstanding of the current Anti-Zionist movements.

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We are faced with an amazing situation in the Middle East. Constantly we hear about Palestinian terrorist groups killing hundreds of Jews in Palestine and retaliations by the Israeli Defense Force which lead to twice as many Palestinian deaths. “They had it coming,” we say. “Why can’t they just accept peace?” It is a unique situation that I personally don’t believe can be solved without studying the root causes of why this problem exists; and then even then it may be impossible without an all out war.

To explore this situation, I have written this paper to look at the root causes of the “Question of Palestine” by summarizing and analyzing various primary sources from government documents and letters to the social and political movements of Palestine from 1916 to 1949. Using these sources, this paper will show how the socio-political dynamics of 1916 to 1949 resulted in the mistreatment of the native Palestinian Arab population and planted the seed for Palestinian terrorism today.

This problem began after the Triple-Entente defeated the Ottoman Empire in the First World War. France and Britain were left with an Empire which now lacked an administration. Rather than reassign the Empire a new government or leave the existing government intact with punishments, France and Britain went ahead and worked out a plan designed to break up the Empire into several independent nations or one large nation, to be ruled by Arab rulers. This plan, The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, is the first stop we must make in understanding the dynamics at work that contributed to the mess which led to our current situation in Palestine. It is important for our understanding to take note that the literal language used within the plan, “France and Great Britain are prepared to recognize and protect an independent Arab state or a

confederation of Arab states ... under the suzerainty of an Arab chief,”¹ makes no mention of any Zionist or Jewish nationalist movements; rather, by reading this plan for what was to be done with the land in the Middle East, one would never guess what would begin to occur within the very next year.

Zionism was an idea that existed within a group of Jews which stated out that the Jewish people should be able to return to the land from which they were dispersed by the Romans over two thousand years ago. The chance to make this idea a reality occurred during the First World War with the Ottoman Empire’s imminent demise and the foreshadowed transfer of the Jewish homeland to British control. Although the Zionist idea had been entertained to the British public for quite some time by Zionists such as Theodor Herzl, it was because of the rare opportunity that occurred with the breakup of the Ottomans that the idea was successfully pushed forward more aggressively through debates, pamphlets, and journals in Britain. According to H. Sacher, “Many public men in Great Britain were deeply interested in these efforts to restore the Jewish people to the Jewish land.”²

And so it was that only one year after the Sykes-Picot Agreement that the British presented their intention of creating a home for the Jews in their ‘legendary’ homeland of Palestine.³ This document, known as The Balfour Declaration, is the first acknowledgement of support for the Zionist movement by a leading power in the world, as it states “[Britain] view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”⁴ This document is the single most important document regarding the confusion

¹ Sir Edward Grey, The Sykes-Picot Agreement. 16 May 1916.

² H. Sacher, “A Jewish Palestine,” The Atlantic Monthly July (1919).

³ Sir Arthur James Balfour, The Balfour Declaration. 2 November 1917.

⁴ Ibid.

behind the creation of Israel as it is the key which opened “Pandora’s Box”. As we continue to study this dynamic of confusion it is important to understand that this document not only announced its support for a Jewish home in Palestine, but it made specific that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”⁵

With this declaration of support for the Jewish national home in Palestine, Jewish immigration, which had been occurring peacefully since before the 1880s⁶, increased dramatically. 1,806 Jews have been estimated to have immigrated to Palestine in 1919. 8,223 Jews, or approximately an increase of 455%, have been accounted for in the following year; 1920.⁷ It is in that following year, 1920, that the Arab population of Palestine began to revolt against this increase of immigration due to rumors that the Zionist plan was that “Palestine is to become ‘as Jewish as England is English’”⁸ and that “the demand of the Arabs for national independence and their antagonism to the National Home remained unmodified.”⁹ In response to these revolts, the Jewish population created its first “self-defense” organization, the Haganah.¹⁰ These opposing forces created a cause and effect dynamic which the British felt they had to address.

To address the Arab concern regarding the ‘alleged’ Jewish intent of creating a Jewish state, Britain released the British White Paper of June 1922,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “The Increase of Population Growth in Palestine,” n.d., <http://www.pnic.gov.ps/english/Population/Population_Increase.html> (24 November 2003).

⁷ “Jewish Immigrants to Palestine,” n.d., <<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Immigration/palims.html>> (24 November 2003).

⁸ Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, British White Paper of June 1922, June 1922.

⁹ U.K. Secretary of State, Report of the Palestine Royal Commission, July 1937 (Geneva, Switzerland: 1937).

¹⁰ “The Establishment of the Irgun,” n.d., <<http://www.etzel.org.il/english/ac02.htm>> (24 November, 2003).

which stated that “His Majesty’s Government regard any such expectation as impracticable and have no such aim in view.”¹¹ This document goes further in reaffirming that the Jewish population and the Zionists “has not desired to possess, and does not possess, any share in the general administration of the country.”¹² This document, along with a restriction on Jewish immigration to Palestine¹³, temporarily alleviated the problem and brought about a relief of non-violence.

By 1929 the Arabs rioted again against the Jewish population in response to which the British launched an investigation. The Shaw Commission, responsible for the investigation, found that “The violence occurred due to ‘racial animosity on the part of the Arabs, consequent upon the disappointment of their political and national aspirations and fear for their economic future ... The Arabs feared economic domination by a group who appeared to the Arabs to have unlimited funding from abroad.”¹⁴ By the suggestion of the Shaw Commission, Britain restricted Jewish immigration even further until the “Palestine Problem” could be solved.

The new restrictions on immigration by the British had little effect on the actual immigration however. Beginning in 1932 and 1933, the years of the Great Depression and the rise of Hitler to power in Germany, illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine skyrocketed, against British regulations and the wishes of the Arab population. According to History Central, “The Fifth Aliyah

¹¹ British White Paper of June 1922.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “The Illegal Immigration of the Irgun,” n.d.,
<<http://www.etzel.org.il/english/ac04.htm>> (24 November 2003).

¹⁴ “Shaw Commission of 1929-1930,” n.d.,
<http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_mandate_shaw_1929.php> (24 November 2003).

brought more than 65,000 Jews to Palestine each year.”¹⁵ Although these numbers seem highly unlikely, a more accurate source does show a trend in the increase of immigration from 4,075 Jews in 1931 to 66,472 Jews in 1935, or an increase of about 1,631%.¹⁶

In direct response to the increase of Jewish immigration and several other factors which were the “same as those of all previous outbreaks,”¹⁷ the Arabs began their third and most devastating riot so far by killing, according to several different conflicting sources, between 300 and 517¹⁸ Jews. Nevertheless, these riots effectively slowed the Jewish immigration into Palestine from a total of 66,472 Jews in 1935 to a total of 4,592 in 1941, or a decrease of about 1447%.¹⁹ Although the destruction of human lives can never be condoned, in order to understand why the Arabs had gone from living peacefully alongside an increasing population of Jews prior to the Balfour Declaration to killing the Jews now, we would have to understand their fear of losing their land to the ever expanding Jewish population. As History Central states, “Within a two year period, 52 settlements were established. Each of these settlements was created in one day.”²⁰

These riots were yet another major milestone in this history in that they were the direct cause in escalating the problems which lead to the never ending conflict we see today in Palestine. In direct response to these riots, the British

¹⁵ “1932-1938 Fifth Aliyah,” n.d.,
<<http://www.multied.com/Israel/1932FifthAliyah.html>> (24 November 2003).

¹⁶ “Jewish Immigrants to Palestine.”

¹⁷ Report of the Palestine Royal Commission, July 1937.

¹⁸ “History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” n.d., <<http://www.aipac.org/timeline2.PDF>> (24 November 2003).

¹⁹ “Jewish Immigrants to Palestine.”

²⁰ “1939 ... Homa U’Migdal (Wall & Watchtower),” n.d.,
<<http://www.multied.com/Israel/1938HomaUMigdal.html>> (24 November 2003).

accepted the fact that it was impossible to create a home for the Jews within Palestine as they had now come to want their own national home in direct conflict with their previous intent of “not desired to possess, and does not possess, any share in the general administration of the country;”²¹ this was also in direct conflict with the Arabs who did not wish to lose their land to be ruled by foreign immigrants, as they saw the Jews. Therefore, the British released the results of the Peel Commission of 1937 which stated that “The answer to the question which of them in the end will govern Palestine must be Neither ... But while neither race can fairly rule all Palestine, each race might justly rule part of it.”²² However it is import to point out that this plan for partition was simply a proposal and not intended to be implemented as is and would need “further protracted inquiry which would be needed for working out a scheme of Partition in full detail.”²³

Secondly, towards the end of these riots, Britain finally released a proclamation as to the future of Palestine and how it should be governed. One main point for the argument of this paper which must be explicitly stated is that the British government had repeatedly announced that it had no intention of creating a Jewish nation carved out of Palestine; this was and continued not to be understood by the Zionists. Therefore, the British White Paper of 1939 explicitly states “His Majesty's Government therefore now declare unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State ... a [Jewish National Home] should be founded IN PALESTINE.”²⁴ The second main point for this paper is that this document specifically laid out a plan

²¹ British White Paper of June 1922.

²² Report of the Palestine Royal Commission, July 1937.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, British White Paper of 1939. 1939.

which stated that “The objective of His Majesty's Government is the establishment within 10 years of an independent Palestine State.”²⁵ Finally it is important to note that this document also effectively limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 Jews over the five years following the year of issue of the article; Jewish immigration dropped from 31,195 in 1939 to 4,592 in 1941.²⁶

Unfortunately for the British, the heavy restrictions on Jewish immigration into Palestine coincided with Adolf Hitler's *Final Solution*; the extermination of at least six million European Jews.²⁷ Ironically this time around, perhaps they too were getting fed up with the “Palestine Problem,” the British strictly enforced their immigration policies that were outlined in the White Paper of 1939, indirectly contributing, in the minds of the Jews, to Hitler's Holocaust by not allowing desperate emigrations from Europe into Palestine. In later years, towards the end of the second world war when the United States took an active role in the problem of Palestine, President Truman, after having failed to persuade the British to open immigration to 100,000 displaced European Jews, stated “I cannot believe that a program of immediate action along the lines suggested above could not be worked out with the cooperation of all people concerned.”²⁸

In response to the British betrayal, the Jewish political movement, Irgun, which had by now split from the defensive Haganah on the basis that the Jewish people must be on the offense rather than the defense,²⁹ began to carry

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Jewish Immigrants to Palestine.”

²⁷ “1939-1945 .. Holocaust,” n.d.,

<<http://www.multied.com/Israel/1939Holocaust.html>> (24 November 2003).

²⁸ Harry S. Truman, Immigration into Palestine - Statement by President Truman, October 1946.

²⁹ “The Establishment of the Irgun.”

out terrorist³⁰ attacks against British government and the Palestinian Mandate's infrastructure. Shortly after the release of the White Paper of 1939, telephone systems were destroyed in Jerusalem, cutting off thousands of telephones. Following that, more telephone networks were destroyed in Tel Aviv and a railway line was attacked nearby. "In all, they attacked 23 sites and dozens of fighters took part in the operation."³¹ By 1946, seven years later, this terrorist group was still in action as they bombed the King David Hotel, the site of the British Criminal Investigation Division, in response to a British troop invasion of the Jewish Agency.³² One final example of this group's activities is a 1947 prison break in which 27 convicted terrorists escaped.³³

With the creation of the United Nations in 1945, the "Question of Palestine" as it came to be called, would now be handled by this newly created body³⁴ of which the United States was a major part. Within that year, the Arabs became worried about this new power player and immediately worked towards assurance that the United States would in no way jeopardize the Palestine Problem by supporting Zionist ambitions wholeheartedly. In a letter from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the King of Saudi Arabia, he writes "I assured you that I would take no action, in my capacity as Chief of the Executive Branch of this Government, which might prove hostile to the Arab

³⁰ U.S. Department of State, Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, 1946 (Lausanne, Switzerland: 1946).

³¹ "The Split Within the Irgun," n.d., <<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/History/split.html>> (24 November 2003).

³² "The Bombing of the King David Hotel," n.d., <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/History/King_David.html> (24 November 2003).

³³ "The Acre Prison Break," n.d., <<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/History/Acre.html>> (24 November 2003).

³⁴ U.N. General Assembly, UN Special Committee on Palestine (New York, N.Y.: 1947).

people.”³⁵ Nevertheless, with the failure of Britain to allow the 100,000 displaced European Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, the creation of the United Nations, and the arrival of President Truman, the United States took on an active role in deciding Palestinian affairs when the U.S. Deputy Representative to the United Nations stated that “The United States, having contributed its blood and resources to the winning of [World War I], felt that it could not divest itself of a certain responsibility ..”³⁶

Within one month of the U.N. Special Committee on Palestine release, the U.N. General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State against all the previous documents’ suggestions. From as far back as the Balfour Declaration to as recent as the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, such a rash action was deplored. The problem was further aggravated once everyone began to wonder what caused such a change in the direction of the policy. One extreme claim, according to Jews for Justice in the Middle East, is that “the United States had emerged as the most aggressive proponent of partition ... The United States got the General Assembly to delay a vote ‘to gain time to bring certain Latin American republics into line with its own views.’”³⁷ Assuming that this claim were true, it would have a great impact considering that fourteen Latin American countries voted in favor, five abstained, and only Latin American nation voted against this proposal.³⁸ Regardless whether this is a conspiracy theory or the truth, it does prove that there was confusion and distrust for this resolution and shows that all future

³⁵ Letters, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Attitude of American Government Toward Palestine, April 1945.

³⁶ UN Special Committee on Palestine.

³⁷ Jews for Justice in the Middle East, The Origin of the Palestine-Israel Conflict (2000)

³⁸ U.N. General Assembly, Resolution 181 (New York, N.Y.: 1947).

policies regarding Palestine would in essence be disregarded by one group or another. Add to that the fact that Great Britain abstained as it suggested it might when it stated “I cannot imagine His Majesty's Government carrying out a policy of which it does not approve.’ This did not mean that the Government would not accept any recommendation of the Assembly, but only that it would not carry out a decision it felt to be wrong.”³⁹

By 1948, the next year, the British government had disbanded in Palestine, and the U.N. Partition Plan had gone into effect. The Jewish half of Palestine immediately declared its independence and named their nation Israel. The Declaration of Israel’s Independence bases its right to exist or its legitimacy on several important documents.⁴⁰ First, the Balfour Declaration, which contrary to the claims of the Declaration of Independence has repeatedly been confirmed by the British in the White Papers of 1922 and White Papers of 1939 to not allow an independent Jewish nation within Palestine. Second, the Mandate of the League of Nations simply re-affirms the Balfour Declaration and thus, the White Papers apply to it also. Finally, “Resolution 181” of the U.N. General Assembly does recognize Israel as a legitimate nation, but considering the claims to U.S. voting interference, ten nations against and thirteen nations abstaining, and Britain’s disapproval of this resolution,⁴¹ this document does little to legitimize Israel as an independent nation in the eyes of the Arabs or the Palestinians, as they would now be called. Unlike the Jews of Palestine who did declare their independence, the Arabs of Palestine did not on the basis that this plan was not acceptable and that if they declared their independence in the

³⁹ UN Special Committee on Palestine

⁴⁰ Israel, Declaration of Israel’s Independence (Tel Aviv, Israel: 1948).

⁴¹ Resolution 181.

other half of Palestine then in essence, they would acknowledge Israel's existence. Based on the abstinence of UN Security Council Resolution 69⁴² and previously mentioned statements, not even Great Britain, a western nation, felt that admitting Israel to the United Nations so suddenly would be the right thing to do.

The first sight of mistreatment of the Palestinian Arabs occurred after Britain released the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which promised the Arab population in the Middle East self-rule.⁴³ Within a year, Britain had promised the Jewish Zionists a home within Palestine under the Balfour Declaration.⁴⁴ This was a case of Palestinian Arab mistreatment because it shows that the Sykes-Picot Agreement wasn't being honored when the promise was made to the Zionists without Palestinian Arab consent; consent that should have been required because the Palestinian Arabs were to be allowed to rule themselves.⁴⁵

The mistreatment of the Palestinian Arabs only escalated when the Zionists misunderstood the language of the Balfour Declaration to mean that Britain was intending to carve out land from Palestine for them as a national home with a sovereign Jewish Zionist government. This event clearly marks an escalation of the mistreatment of the Palestinian Arabs because with comments like "Palestine is to become 'as Jewish as England is English,'"⁴⁶ it clearly shows that the immigrating Zionists did not even consider the fact that there was already a native population living in Palestine which didn't wish to give up their land.

⁴² U.N. Security Council, Resolution 69 (New York, N.Y.: 1949).

⁴³ The Sykes-Picot Agreement.

⁴⁴ The Balfour Declaration.

⁴⁵ The Sykes-Picot Agreement.

⁴⁶ British White Papers of June 1922.

And we can see the unhappiness of the native population, because with the increasing Zionist immigration that occurred, the Palestinian Arab population rioted in revolt in order to stop this unwanted immigration.⁴⁷ The Palestinian Arab population was worried that the immigrating Zionists would take their land away from them, because the Zionists clearly misunderstood the intention of the Balfour Declaration. In fact, by 1922, the British had to release the White Papers to limit immigration and reassure the Palestinian Arabs that Palestine would not become a Zionist state.⁴⁸

However, this did not stop the Zionists, who continued to immigrate against the wishes of the Palestinian Arabs and by now against the wishes of the British. And by immigrating against the native population's wishes, the Zionists clearly mistreated them and provoked the fear of losing Palestine within the Arab Population; this led to the 1929 riots against the Zionists and the British Peel Commission's response in 1937 which tried to limit immigration again and went back on the promise of giving the Palestinian Arabs a nation of their own by replacing it with the idea of joint leadership between the Zionists and the Palestinians, adding to the mistreatment and distrust.

Just as before, this did not stop the Zionist immigration. Between 1931 and 1935, immigration skyrocketed by 1,631%⁴⁹ and a major land grab was made by the Zionists which expanded their territory into the existing population that had by now become desperate with fear of being replaced with a more powerful foe. In response, the Palestinian Arabs did the only thing they knew how to do by rioting. The British, who had enough of the Zionist stubbornness

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "Jewish Immigrants to Palestine."

at this point, clearly released the message in the White Paper of 1939 that “Palestine should become a Jewish State” and effectively limited immigration.⁵⁰

But the Zionist perseverance did not stop there because the next thing they did is become militant against the British with terrorist attacks against hotels, infrastructure, and so forth.⁵¹ Now the Zionists were not only going openly and directly against the original plan of the British, which was the plan to give the Palestinian Arabs a self-ruled nation, but they were in essence trying to drive out the only force protecting the native Palestinian Arabs from the Zionists; a clear attempt that can easily foreshadow future mistreatment of the Palestinian Arab population.

Of course the Zionist plan was proved to be effective when Britain turned the situation over to the United Nations, swearing to pull out its forces and give up the territory within 10 years. The United Nations decided to partition Palestine in half against the original promises made to the Palestinian Arabs, against the wishes of the British,⁵² and against the refusal to have this partition acknowledged by the Palestinian Arabs. Nevertheless the partition was made, showing once again how the Palestinian Arabs were mistreated against their will.

We see before us today a situation that we label as “Anti-Semitic Terrorism in the Middle East.” On one side we have Palestinian extremist “terrorist” groups such as HAMAS, PLF, PIJ⁵³, and all the other flavors of anti-Zionist movements, and on the other side we have the “counterterrorist” Israeli

⁵⁰ British White Paper of 1939.

⁵¹ “The Split Within the Irgun.”

⁵² Resolution 181.

⁵³ “The Terrorism Research Center,” n.d.,
<<http://www.terrorism.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=TGroups&file=index>> (24 November 2003).

Defense Force. We mistakenly label one group as “terrorists” and the other as protectors of their homeland because we can’t even remember that the Israeli Defense Force too had its roots in terrorism and was created in 1948 from the now obsolete “terrorist” groups, Haganah, Irgun, and even Lehi, the group responsible for the assassination of U.N. mediator to the Arab-Jewish conflict, Count Folke Bernadotte;⁵⁴ these are former “terrorist” groups that should be listed alongside HAMAS on the Terrorism Research Center’s website, but instead are mentioned in the list of Counter Terrorist organizations. This paper has taken a look at primary documents from British Papers and letters between leaders, to propositions, declarations, and resolutions; it has given a background of the social and political dynamics in Palestine based mainly on heavily biased pro-Zionist secondary sources along with one anti-Zionist source. Nevertheless against such odds, this paper has still managed to show that the climate of 1916 to 1949 in Palestine resulted in an unfair treatment of the native population of the Arabs by the Zionists and the poor handling of Palestine by outside powers from France and England to the United States and the United Nations. The justification for the mistreatment of the Arabs is clearly stated in the third paragraph of the declaration of Israel’s Independence where it states that “[Zionists] brought the blessing of progress to all inhabitants of the country.”⁵⁵ The irony behind all this is that is the same argument that was used to justify the destruction of the American Indians by the United States of America.

⁵⁴ “Count Folke Bernadotte,” n.d., <<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/Bernadotte.html>> (24 November 2003).

⁵⁵ Declaration of Israel’s Independence.

End Notes

When writing papers revolving around “The Question of Palestine” it is very easy to be scoffed at and thrown away as anti-Semitic or anti-Terrorist propaganda. This subject has become so tainted with such opposing views that people don’t seriously listen to each other’s arguments anymore. The sad part is that I find this understandable because most of the work that I’ve written has used extreme anti or pro Zionist sources as their material. For example, the “Jews for Justice in the Middle East” piece has used quotes from books like “The Zionist Holocaust.” Although it is possible that this book may be highly objective in its study, the sheer title of such a book will label it as a super-biased source which will weaken your argument in the opposing camp’s eyes.

Because this paper tries to show the mistreatment of the Palestinian Arabs, it is a pro-Palestinian paper. So, to avoid the aforementioned problem, I have avoided pro-Palestinian sources and stuck mainly pro-Zionist sources and primary sources. By doing this, I feel confident that the same flaw that applies to other works based on heavily biased material will not apply to this paper.

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