

# Zionism, Settler Colonialism, and Apartheid in the Holy Land

A brief, informal, and necessarily incomplete history of Israel and historic Palestine in the last 150 years

by Jus Sherwood



# Zionism, Settler Colonialism, and Apartheid in the Holy Land

*There is no view from nowhere, and nowhere is this truer than in Palestine and Israel.  
When it comes to understanding this tragic situation, what you see depends on where you are standing.*

To understand the current situation in Israel and Palestine, we must understand the history of the region, and for that we have to go back four thousand years. We must also refer to the Bible, the holy book of Judaism and Christianity. According to the Biblical narrative, about 4,000 years ago the patriarch Abraham (Abram) was living in historic Palestine.<sup>1</sup> He found favour with God, who made certain promises to him and his descendants. First, they would become a “chosen people” who were blessed in God’s eyes.

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;

“I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

”I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” – *Genesis 12: 1–3*

God would also give the region to his descendants.

The LORD said to Abram . . . “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring [seed] forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.” – *Genesis 15: 14–18*

The Bible identifies Abraham’s descendants, the Hebrew people, as the forebears of the Jews.<sup>2</sup> The Hebrews eventually established several powerful kingdoms, and Jerusalem emerged as a political and religious centre of the Jewish people. In about 1,000 BCE, King Solomon built a temple complex there in the middle of which was the Holy of Holies, where God’s spirit lived.

In the first century BCE, Palestine became a part of the Roman Empire. Not long after, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a village near Jerusalem. A Jew, he grew up and taught in the region, claiming that he was the Jewish Messiah. The Jewish religious leaders had him crucified, but his followers said that he rose from the dead, and a new faith — Christianity — was born.

About 70 CE, many Jews rebelled against the Romans. As a result, the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, expelled the Jews from the region, and built a Roman city on the site of Jerusalem. Jews settled throughout the Middle East as well as Europe, which was officially Christian. Over the next 1,800 years, most of the powers-that-be in Christian Europe persecuted the Jews. Not only did their religious beliefs and practices separate them from the Christian majority, but many Christians viewed them as “Christ killers” and enemies of Christianity. Jews were precluded from many areas of public life, forced to live in ghettos, expelled from countries such as Spain, killed in periodic pogroms — organized state-sanctioned massacres — and pressured to convert and assimilate.

Those who settled in the Middle East and North Africa fared better, as the new religion of Islam had common with Judaism.<sup>3</sup> Both faiths revered Abraham, and Islam regarded the Biblical prophet Moses as a prophet and messenger. Jews lived peacefully in Muslim

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<sup>1</sup> Historic Palestine refers roughly to the region comprised of present-day Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank, the Golan Heights, and Gaza.

<sup>2</sup> Many Jews believe that they are a “chosen people” with a divine, eternal claim to the “promised land.”

<sup>3</sup> Islam originated in the Arabian Peninsula in the early 600s. Within 100 years, a vast Islamic empire stretched from Spain to India.

societies, and with certain conditions they were free to practise their religion.

When the Roman Empire split in 395 CE, the Byzantines assumed control of Palestine. Christianity took root, and Jews were allowed back to Jerusalem in small numbers. In 637, Muslim forces defeated the Byzantines and conquered the region. The Al Aqsa Mosque was built in Jerusalem and became one of the three holiest sites of Islam. By the end of the century the Dome of the Rock had been completed nearby, the first great work of Islamic architecture. Palestine had become a “holy land” to the world’s three monotheistic religions.

In 1099, the Christian European Crusaders conquered Palestine. Saladin’s Muslim forces drove them out a century later, and various sultanates ruled the region until 1486 when the Ottomans took possession. Their rule lasted until 1917.<sup>4</sup>

During this entire time, Christian pilgrims from Europe visited Palestine on a regular basis, and small communities of Jews and Christians existed there, their freedom and prosperity depending on who was in power. The Jewish communities were largely composed of poor, elderly, religious Jews who wanted to live out their last years in the Holy Land. The Ottomans were tolerant — when Spain expelled the Jews in the late 1400s, the Ottomans allowed several families to settle in Hebron.

### **The Birth of Zionism and Settler Colonialism**

By the mid-1800s, the Ottoman Empire was waning, and Turkey was becoming the “sick old man” of Europe. Half a million people lived in Palestine, all Arabic speaking and mostly Muslim, except for 60,000 Christian Arabs, 20,000 Jews, 50,000 Ottoman soldiers, and 10,000 Europeans. About 80 percent of the population lived in villages and worked the land, much as they had for generations.

The end of the Crimean War in 1856 brought with it new treaties that opened the region, and over the next several decades European influence increased dramatically. Foreigners were allowed to buy land and property, and exports and imports grew rapidly. The Europeans brought with them the patronizing colonial

attitudes typical of the time — the primitive indigenous population would either be modernized or make way for the newcomers and their ideas. The missionaries, to their credit, established several excellent schools that were soon educating the children of the Palestinian elite.

In Europe, nationalism was taking root among many Jewish intellectuals in eastern Europe along with a revival of Jewish culture. In an effort to better their lot, many Jews were casting off centuries of religious dogma in favour of rational and scientific thought. Rather than viewing Judaism as a religion, they envisioned it as a muscular ideology of nationhood based on ancient Jewish history. In all of this they were motivated by a sense of urgency.

While western European countries had become increasingly democratic and were recognizing basic human rights for Jews and other minorities, eastern European countries, where most of the world’s Jews lived, were promoting a strain of nationalism that was anti-Semitic in nature. A Jew could never be a true Pole or a true Russian. Persecution was increasing, and many Jews were looking for a way out. Some tried to immigrate to western Europe, others cast off their Jewish identity and assimilated, and a third faction dreamed of a Jewish nation-state.

In 1881 an unprecedented wave of pogroms swept Russia and Poland, and the following year a group of Jewish nationalists, or Zionists as they were becoming known as, emigrated to “Zion,” or Palestine. This became known as the “First Aliya,” or ascent.

While these settlers were establishing themselves, Theodore Herzl, a Jewish Hungarian journalist, was having a change of heart. Originally an advocate of assimilation, Herzl experienced an about-face partly as a result of covering the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish French army officer who had been charged with treason. Although Dreyfus had assimilated into French society, many French people hated him because he was Jewish. Even though there was no evidence against him, Dreyfus was convicted.<sup>5</sup>

This public outpouring of anti-Semitism shocked Herzl, and he concluded that assimilation was

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<sup>4</sup> The Ottoman Empire came into being in present-day Turkey in the 1300s and eventually controlled much of southeast

Europe, the Middle East, and North and East Africa. Palestine was part of an Ottoman province.

<sup>5</sup> Years later the sentence was overturned.

impossible. In 1896 he wrote *The Jewish State*, in which he argued that the Jews possessed a nationality, and all they lacked was a national homeland of their own. After considering other options, Herzl decided that the ideal place would be historic Palestine, where the Jews had so much history. In *The Jewish State* he wrote:

The idea I have developed in this pamphlet is an ancient one: It is the restoration of the Jewish State. . . . We are a people — one people.

We have sincerely tried everywhere to merge with the national communities in which we live, seeking only to preserve the faith of our fathers. It is not permitted us. In vain

are we loyal patriots, sometimes superloyal; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow citizens; in vain do we strive to enhance the fame of our native lands in the arts and sciences, or her

wealth by trade and commerce. In our native lands where we have lived for centuries we are still decried as aliens, often by men whose ancestors had not yet come at a time when Jewish sighs had long been heard in the country.

Palestine is our unforgettable historic homeland. . . . We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes peacefully die. The world will be liberated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness.

While the concept was not new — Napoleon and others had suggested a Jewish homeland, and by 1895, 18 Jewish colonies existed in Palestine — *The Jewish State* brought it into the mainstream. Zionism took shape as a secular political ideology — a form of nationalism that rejects the assimilation of Jews and supports a Jewish nation-state in Palestine.<sup>6</sup>

The main tenets of political Zionism are:

- The Jewish people exist as a distinct people

- Assimilation has not proven to be viable
- Jews have a historical right to the Promised Land (Palestine)
- A Jewish homeland must have an overwhelming Jewish majority (i.e., little or no indigenous population)

Herzl and the Zionists decided to focus on a long-term plan of establishing a homeland in Palestine. During this time about 20,000 Jews from eastern Europe and Russia immigrated to Palestine to escape ongoing pogroms. Many would have preferred to immigrate to

the United States, but America had quotas on Jews. Ironically, the new arrivals in Palestine didn't worry about being persecuted by the Muslim Arabs, as Jews and Muslims had coexisted peacefully throughout the Middle East. By 1914, about 59,000 Jews lived in Palestine along with 657,000

indigenous Arab Palestinians.

Two points are worth noting here. From the beginning, many Jews rejected political Zionism. Some favoured assimilation: others looked into the future and saw that such an enterprise could wreak havoc in Palestine; and many devout, orthodox Jews believed that Jews could only return to the promised land when the Messiah returns in glory and power. They opposed a Jewish state and viewed Zionism as an abomination. This remains true today. Some of the most vocal critics of Israel and its Zionist policies and practices are Jews. Zionism does not, and never has, equated with Judaism.

Second, Zionism was not, at its inception a settler-colonial enterprise — its goal was to improve the lot of Jews — but it became one when Zionist leaders decided to create their homeland in Palestine. For Palestine was not a “land without a people” as early Zionist propaganda portrayed it, but home to a vibrant, flourishing society of over half a million Arab and Bedouin indigenous people who had lived there for centuries and were deeply connected to their land. To create a Jewish homeland, “as Jewish as England is

chosen people of a promised land, and so they referred to their “historic homeland.”

Settler colonialism is a distinct type of colonialism that functions through the replacement of indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty.

<sup>6</sup> The early Zionists were overwhelmingly secular. They could not base their claim to Palestine on God's promises to a

English, or Canada is Canadian” as the *Jewish Chronicle* put it, the Zionists had no choice but to take the inhabitants’ land and eliminate or dispossess them.

Several early Zionists recognized this. Herzl writing in his diary on June 12, 1895, confided, “We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country. . . expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.” Israel Zangwill, a prominent Anglo-Zionist, stated in 1905 that Zionists must “be prepared either to drive out by the sword the tribes in possession as our forefathers did or grapple with the problem of a large alien population.”

Many historians claim that these views were the fatal flaw of Zionist ideology and contained the seeds of its “original sin.” Rather than rejecting them, Zionist leaders embraced them and put them into practise. From this point on, the success of the Zionist enterprise was predicated on the colonization and settlement of Palestinian lands and the oppression, disenfranchisement, and expulsion of the indigenous people.

The early Zionist goals included encouraging Jewish immigration from Europe to Palestine, buying as much land as possible in Palestine, and remaining separate from the Arab inhabitants. The newcomers refused to hire Arabs or buy their products, and whenever they purchased farmland from absentee landlords, they evicted the Arab tenant farmers who had lived on the land for generations. The Jewish National Fund was formed with a mandate to buy as much land as possible and ensure that it was never sold or leased to non-Jews.

Some early Zionists protested the unprincipled behaviour of the European Jewish settlers. In 1891, Ahad Aham, the conscience of the Zionist movement, spoke out against the direction that Zionism was taking. He claimed that far from being a means for Jews to recover their spiritual and cultural greatness and become a light unto the nations, the Zionist enterprise was becoming land-obsessed, predatory, and prone to the use of force. Zionists, he said, should be judged by how they treat their Arab neighbours.

Yet what do they do in Palestine? Servants they were in the land of exile. Suddenly they find themselves in a state of freedom without limits . . . and the sudden transformation has produced in them that inclination to despotism that always occurs when the servant becomes the master. They treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, unscrupulously deprive them of their rights, insult them without cause, and even boast of such deeds.

The implications of the Zionists’ beliefs, long-term plans, and behaviour were not lost on the Palestinians. By 1910, a nationalist independence movement was growing among the Arab intelligentsia in Palestine, and by 1914 anti-Zionism dominated Palestinian politics. A political tract of the era asked, “Do you wish to be slaves to the Zionists who have come to you to expel you from your country, saying that this country is theirs?”

### **World War 1 and The Balfour Declaration**

In 1914, World War 1 broke out — Britain, France, Russia, and other countries allied against Germany, Austria, and the Ottomans. The Western Front in France became a stalemate, and so the British looked for opportunities to attack the Ottoman Empire and raise money for the war effort. To this end they encouraged the Arabs living under Ottoman rule to revolt. However, the Saudi King Hussein wanted a guarantee that Britain would grant the Arabs independence after the war. In 1916, the British promised to do this in the Hussein — McMahon Letters. The Arabs revolted, and by 1918 they had defeated the Ottomans.<sup>7</sup> However, at the same time the British were making a secret deal with France and Russia to create European “spheres of influence” from the Ottoman provinces. This became known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. And then, in late 1917, just after Jerusalem surrendered to British forces, the British issued the famous Balfour Declaration, promising the Jews a homeland in Palestine. The promised land was indeed promised — three times over.

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<sup>7</sup> T.E. Lawrence, “Lawrence of Arabia,” wrote *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, an engaging account of the uprising.

The Balfour Declaration has arguably shaped the modern history of the Middle East more than any other document. The 107-word note had a gestation period of several years. Chaim Weizmann and other prominent British Zionists had long been lobbying their government to endorse the Zionist venture in Palestine. Britain finally relented, for several reasons. It was popularly believed at the time that a shadowy movement of wealthy “international Jewery” favoured a Jewish homeland. Their financial support of the war effort, Britain reasoned, could prove vital to breaking the military stalemate. It was also hoped that a pro-Zionist stance would curry favour with the many Jewish leaders of the recent Russian Revolution and more importantly, President Woodrow Wilson’s top advisors, many of whom were ardent Zionists.

America had recently entered the war.

Closer to home, a pre-war flood of Jewish refugees from eastern Europe had resulted in riots and demonstrations in Britain, and so it was hoped that a Jewish homeland would alleviate the pressure. Strategically, Britain also saw a Zionist homeland as a European bastion of sorts in the Middle East that would represent western imperial interests. And finally, many influential Britons were Christians who believed that the Bible ordained that the Jews, God’s chosen people, should one day return to the Holy Land. They were the forebears of today’s Christian Zionists.

The Zionists were ecstatic with the Balfour Declaration. An imperial power had endorsed a future Jewish state in their historic homeland and pledged to help make it a reality. This was the legitimacy that they needed. However, other Europeans spoke against it, noting that the document made no mention of protecting the political rights of the 90 percent Arab majority in

### **The Balfour Declaration**

*Foreign Office, November 2nd, 1917*

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty’s Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of the object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious’ rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) Arthur James Balfour

Palestine. They correctly understood that a Jewish homeland and self-determination for the indigenous people were incompatible. The Arab majority would never vote for a Jewish national home, and so eventually the Zionists would rule the natives against their will.

The Palestinian Arabs were also outraged. They had lived on their land for centuries, and now a distant imperial power had arbitrarily decided that a minority of European Zionists could colonize the region and establish a homeland against their wishes? What had happened to the promises of independence, self-determination, and democracy for the Arab people?

### **The King Crane Commission**

In 1919 the United States formed the King Crane Commission to ascertain the aspirations of the people living in non-Turkish areas

within the former Ottoman Empire. President Woodrow Wilson had spoken out in favour of self-determination for colonial subjects at the Versailles Peace Conference, and the commission was tasked to find out what Arabs wanted as their political future, how they viewed British and French plans to divide their region, and what they thought of Britain’s idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It was in a sense the first-ever survey of Arab public opinion. The Commission travelled extensively throughout Palestine and present-day Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. The findings were suppressed “in the public interest” until 1922, long after the fate of the area had been settled, and then they were largely ignored. However, the conclusions and recommendations concerning Palestine were astonishingly prophetic.

- 90 percent of the inhabitants were not Jewish and emphatically did not want a Jewish state. “If the wishes of Palestine’s population are to be

decisive as to what is to be done with Palestine, then it is to be remembered that the non-Jewish population of Palestine — nearly nine tenths of the whole — are emphatically against the entire Zionist program. There was no one thing upon which the population of Palestine were more agreed than upon this.”

- If Zionists established a homeland, they would expel the indigenous people. “The fact came out repeatedly in the Commission's conference with Jewish representatives that the Zionists looked forward to a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, by various forms of purchase.”

- A Zionist state would have to be established violently, by force of arms, as the Palestinians would resist. “The anti-Zionist feeling in Palestine and Syria is intense and not lightly to be flouted. No British officer consulted by the

Commissioners believed that the Zionist program could be carried out except by force of arms. The officers generally thought that a force of not less than 50,000 soldiers would be required even to initiate the program.”

- The Zionist claim that Palestine is the historical homeland of the Jews — that they had a “right” to the land based on ownership 2,000 years ago — was ridiculous. “For the initial claim, often submitted by Zionist representatives, that they have a ‘right’ to Palestine, based on an occupation of 2,000 years ago, can hardly be seriously considered.”

The Commission recommended, “with a deep sense of sympathy for the Jewish cause,” that only a greatly reduced Zionist program be gradually attempted. Jewish immigration should be limited, and the goal of making Palestine a Jewish commonwealth should be given up.

The British were unimpressed with these findings as they had no interest in Arab political self-determination in Palestine. In a letter to Lord Curzon dated August 11, 1919, Lord Balfour confessed,

In Palestine, we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country. . . . The four great powers are committed to Zionism and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.<sup>8</sup>

The King Crane report was a setback for the Zionist movement. One of their key strategies had been to secure the support of major world powers. However, the King Crane report publicly revealed Zionism to be a classical settler-colonial enterprise. Zionists wanted the land, but not the people who lived on it. The non-native newcomers — in this case the Jews — were to be accorded special political and social rights, while the natives were viewed as disposable, a surplus population to be removed to make way for Jewish settlers.

Future Zionist leader and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin understood this. Many years later he observed, “If this is Palestine and not the land of Israel, then we are conquerors and not farmers. We are invaders. If this is Palestine, then it belongs to a people who lived here before we came.” Zionists could not “return” to a place they had never lived in. They could only invade and steal it.

### **The League of Nations and the British Mandate**

After the Versailles peace treaty carved up much of Europe, the new League of Nations divided the Middle East into mandates, each governed by a European power. Britain controlled Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq, and France took over Lebanon and Syria. The stated goal was that France and Britain would prepare each mandate for independence. The Mandate Agreement required the British in Palestine to “place the country under such political, administrative, and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish National Home to facilitate Jewish immigration under suitable conditions and settlements by Jews.”

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<sup>8</sup> Talmon, J.L., *The Unique and the Universal*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1965, as quoted in *Original Sins*, p. 78

In the early 1920s, the Zionists had three broad goals. First, to become a majority in Palestine. This involved persuading Jews to move to Palestine and dispossessing the Arabs. By 1929, 159,000 Jews were living in Palestine. Second, to present Zionism as a romantic, heroic cause to the western public so that no one would oppose it. To this end they developed a misleading slogan. Palestine was, “A land without a people for a people without a land.” This succeeded so well that many Jewish immigrants were shocked to find the land populated with Arabs. And third, to develop the infrastructure for a future Jewish state and relentlessly pursue the Judaization of Palestine. They did this by establishing Jewish-only hospitals, schools, trade unions, and a militia. They also continued buying agricultural land from Arab landlords and evicting the tenants. By 1929, Zionists owned 14 percent of the cultivable area. They continued treating the Palestinian Arabs with disdain. One visitor wrote, “Zionists treat the Arabs with cruelty and hostility, deprive them of their rights, offend them without cause, and even boast of these deeds.”

When it came to deciding how to deal with the British, the Palestinians found themselves between a rock and a hard place. How could they cooperate with an occupying power that was working against their natural interest? On the other hand, what hope had they of defying a military superpower? They chose conciliation, and in 1921 the Fourth Arab Congress resolved to use political, nonviolent means to advance their demands.

At this point it must be said that before and during the British Mandate, the Palestinian people were ill-served by many of their leaders. Almost all were self-serving members of the traditional land-owning ruling elite who did little to champion the needs of the people they claimed to represent. Their corruption and hypocrisy — many were secretly selling land to the Zionists while publicly decrying their presence — convinced many Zionists and the British that “the Arab could be bought.” As a result, they were no match for the politically astute Zionists who were becoming masters at lobbying and manipulating the British authorities.

As the 1920s wore on, the conciliatory methods adapted by the Palestinians proved futile, and tension and animosity grew. In 1929, violence broke out in Jerusalem and Hebron. The Zionists emerged stronger and more confident than ever, but the British were beginning to realize how difficult it would be to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Palestinian Arab anger mounted and fostered a nationalistic passion. Not only were the British denying them democratic rights, but the possibility of a Zionist takeover was becoming more real. Many British officials sympathized, but they were bound to pro-Zionist policies. To this end they quashed Palestinian Arab demands for democratic self-determination, as democracy would mean the end of a Jewish homeland.

In 1933, Hitler took power in Germany, and Jewish immigration increased. The United States, Great Britain, Canada, and others sympathized with the Jewish refugees, but none accepted them in any numbers.<sup>9</sup> Some Zionists did little to challenge those policies as they wanted refugees to go to Palestine. Assimilation in America did not advance the cause of Zionism.

By 1935 the situation for the Palestinians had become intolerable. Twenty-two percent of the rural population had been forced off the land and into the cities where they lived in squalor. Many were forced to work for the Jewish immigrants who had displaced them. The following year a popular Palestinian revolt broke out, beginning with a six-month country-wide strike. National committees sprung up largely independent of the traditional Palestinian leaders.

In 1937, the British responded by forming the Royal (Peel) Commission to investigate the causes of the revolt. It interviewed Zionist and Arab leaders and concluded that the mandate for Palestine was failing and that the goals of the Zionists and the Arabs were incompatible — both sides wanted a nation-state on the same land. It proposed partition, stating that “sooner or later, there should be a transfer of land and, as far as possible, an exchange of population.”

The Zionists embraced the findings of the Peel Commission, especially population transfer and the

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<sup>9</sup> The Canadian Immigration Minister is reported to have been asked in 1939, “How many Jewish refugees will Canada accept?” He replied, “None is too many.”

concept of partition, which had not been mentioned publicly before. Zionists wanted the entire region, but Zionist leader and future prime minister of Israel Ben Gurion endorsed partition as a necessary first step.

The Jewish state now being proposed to us is not the Zionist aim. But this will be a decisive step in bringing about the great Zionist aim. In the shortest time possible, it will build the real Jewish strength that will carry us to our historic objectives.

Population transfer had been central to the Zionists' planning, and this public endorsement caused them to begin promoting it unreservedly. Ben Gurion acknowledged that it would be difficult to uproot "by foreign force some 100,000 Arabs from the villages in Galilee which they have inhabited for hundreds of years," but,

We must be prepared to carry out the transfer . . . we must expel Arabs and take their place, and if we have to use force . . . then we have force at our disposal. . . . Our strength will exceed theirs [the Arabs] and we will be better organized and equipped because behind us still stands . . . the whole younger generation of Jews from Europe and America.

In late 1937, the Zionists created the Population Transfer Committee and began planning the wholesale transfer of Palestinian Arabs. One executive member observed, "We will not achieve this by preaching sermons on the mount, but by machine-guns, which we will need."

The Palestinians were enraged by the Peel Commission's recommendations and started a sustained, organized campaign of violence against the British and the Zionists. After years of negotiations, they had been goaded, as one put it, "to speak with rifles instead of their lips."

The British moved quickly to crush them with assassinations, summary executions, home demolitions, land confiscations, detention without trial, collective punishment, and mass exiles — practices that the Israelis employ today. The British also allowed the Zionists to

create a militia defense force, the Haganah, and two armed groups, the Irgun and the Stern Gang, which also fought the Palestinian Arabs. The latter two believed:

- Every Jew had the right to enter Palestine
- Only violence would stop Arab opposition
- The Zionists would have to use violence to establish a homeland

The Stern Gang and the Irgun were destined to play a large part in the fight for statehood.

By the time the revolt ended in 1939, 5,000 Arabs had been killed and the Palestinian leadership had been decimated. Almost 10 percent of the Palestinian male population was dead, wounded, imprisoned, or in exile.

The Zionists, however, emerged with a new-found confidence in their military capabilities. Their militia of 14,500 soldiers and the extreme Stern Gang and Irgun had performed well and were well-armed and trained.

However, the Zionists' celebrations were short-lived. In 1938 a second royal commission concluded that precisely because partition would require large-scale population transfer, it was not feasible. With war in Europe approaching, Britain convened a conference in early 1939 of Arabs, Palestinians, and Zionists who failed to agree on anything. The government then issued a White Paper that stated the following:

The proposal of partition recommended by the Royal [Peel] Commission, namely the establishment of self-supporting independent Arab and Jewish states within Palestine, has been found to be impracticable.

His Majesty's Government now declares unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish state.

The object of His Majesty's Government is the establishment within 10 years of an independent Palestine State . . . in which Arabs and Jews share in government in such a way as to ensure that the essential interests of each community are safeguarded.

The British also imposed an annual immigration quota for Palestine of 15,000 Jews.

The Zionists were furious. Ben Gurion wrote, “What we want is not that the country be united and whole, but that the united and whole country be Jewish.” From this point on, the Zionists viewed the British as their enemy — they had served their purpose, but now they had to go. Lobbying efforts would be directed towards the American government. During World War 2, thousands of Zionists served with the Allied armed forces, largely to gain military training. In 1944, Zionist agents committed their first terrorist act against the British when they assassinated Lord Moyne, the British secretary of state in Cairo.

Meanwhile, the cause of the Palestinian Arabs suffered a major blow. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem had fled Palestine during the revolt. During the war he collaborated with the Germans and made several radio broadcasts encouraging Muslims to join the Nazi cause.

At the war’s end in 1945, the Zionists were ready to create their homeland. They had three immediate goals.

- Persuade European Jews to come to Palestine
- Persuade the British to leave Palestine
- Persuade Palestinian Arabs to leave Palestine

In spite of aggressive recruiting campaigns in European refugee camps by Zionist agencies, most Jewish refugees went to the United States or remained in Europe. Only 10 percent of three million Jewish refugees immigrated to Palestine. The British, however, still opposed massive immigration, and so the Zionists launched a terror campaign against the British that included assassinations, mining roads, derailing trains, robbing banks, and killing soldiers and policemen.

This wave of terror peaked in July 1946 when future Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and the Irgun blew up the British headquarters in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, killing 91 people. Begin and many other Zionists were charged with terrorism.

### **The U.N. Partition, the 1948 War, the Birth of Israel, and Al Naqba**

By this time Britain had grown weary of Palestine. Nearly 100,000 soldiers — more than were stationed in all of India — could barely keep order. In April 1947, Britain brought the question of Palestine to the new United Nations. This pleased the Zionists who redoubled their lobbying efforts for statehood. The Arab states and the Palestinians were disorganized and disunited on how

to proceed, and so the Zionists had the field to themselves.

The Zionist requests were well-received. The horrors of the Holocaust were fresh, and the world saw the need for a Jewish homeland. In November 1947, the U.N. voted to partition Palestine into two states, one for Palestinians and one for Jews. Jerusalem would be an international city.

The British subsequently agreed to end their mandate on May 15, 1948. The Zionists supported this plan — the partition did not give them as much as they had hoped for, but that didn’t matter as it was unworkable anyway. As soon as the British left, war would break out, and then they could grab more.

The Palestinians, however, were furious. How could the U.N. arbitrarily give away more than half of a region against the will of the inhabitants? Was this democracy? And the plan was grossly unfair. The 680,000 Jews, who had recently arrived and owned 7 percent of the land, would receive 55 percent of the territory, while 1,200,000 Palestinians, who had been there for generations, only got 45 percent. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the Israeli sector would become unwelcome in their own homes.

And so the Palestinians refused the deal. Some say they should have accepted it and bargained for time. But they were hampered by a lack of effective leaders — most had been killed in the Arab Revolt or driven into exile — and powerful backers. As U.S. President Harry Truman said in defending his support of the Zionists, “I am sorry, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism. I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.”

The 1948 War took place in two phases. In early 1948 while the British were still in Palestine, the Zionists implemented Plan Dalat — their plan for expelling or killing as many Palestinians as possible in their area of partition. This violent campaign of ethnic cleansing was executed with remarkable efficiency. The most notorious atrocity took place on April 9, 1948, when Irgun and Stern gang soldiers led by Menachem Begin massacred 254 men, women, and children in the Palestinian village of Dier Yassin. By the time Israel declared its independence on May 14, the Zionists had forcibly expelled or terrorized hundreds of thousands of

Palestinians into leaving their homes and fleeing to the West Bank, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Gaza.

After May 14, the Palestinians and their Arab neighbours attacked the new Zionist state. Far from being the underdog, Israeli forces were better equipped and trained — they had been preparing for a long time — and they outnumbered their enemies three to one. As well, the Arab countries had no stomach for the war — most just wanted to make a statement. The U.S. and the U.N. called for a three-month truce, but Israel rejected it.

In late May, Count Folke Bernadotte, a Swedish diplomat who had saved thousands of Jews during World War 2, was appointed as U.N. mediator between the Palestinians and Israel. He began insisting that Israel offer the Palestinian refugees two choices: return or compensation. Either they could return to their homes in Israel, or the Israeli government should compensate them. This was articulated in U.N. Resolution 194.

Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property.

On September 17 the Stern Gang, led by future Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir, assassinated Bernadotte in Jerusalem.

The war ended a few months later. Israel controlled 75 percent of Palestine, much more than had been awarded them by the U.N. The following year Israel was admitted to the U.N., Egypt took control of the Gaza strip, and Jordan annexed the West Bank. The “Green Line” marked the border of the West Bank and ran through Jerusalem dividing Jewish west Jerusalem from Palestinian east Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup>

Israel had driven more than 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and refused to allow them to return. The new Jewish state was determined to erase evidence

of the Palestinian presence and create a new Jewish national narrative. Some Palestinian homes were given to Jewish immigrants and others were bulldozed — entire villages — and new Israeli communities were built on top of them. In all, Israel wiped 416 Palestinian villages and 11 urban areas off the map. 73,000 rooms in abandoned Palestinian homes were expropriated along with 7,800 shops, workshops, and warehouses. Israel also seized five million Palestinian pounds in bank accounts and 300,000 hectares of land. Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel, called this ethnic cleansing “a miraculous clearing of the land: the miraculous simplification of Israel’s task.” Palestinians refer to it as “Al Naqba” — the catastrophe.<sup>11</sup>

The Zionists learned a key lesson from the 1948 war that still plays an important part in Israeli policymaking. While they understood the importance of international diplomacy and lobbying, they also grasped that if they concentrated less on obtaining international approval and more on creating “facts on the ground” — taking what they wanted — the international community would be forced to go along with them.

In 1956, Moshe Dayan, the chief of staff for the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), made some startling admissions in a eulogy for an Israeli who had been killed by Arabs on the Gaza border. Dayan had grown up in Palestine and knew the realities of the Zionist enterprise.

Let us not heap accusations on the murderers. How can we complain about their deep hatred for us? For eight years they have been sitting in the Gaza refugee camps, and before their very eyes we are possessing the lands and villages where they, and their ancestors, have lived. . . . We are the generation of colonizers, and without the steel helmet and the gun barrel we cannot plant a tree and build a home. . . . Let us not recoil from seeing the hate which fills the life of hundreds of thousands of Arabs surrounding us. Let us not turn away our eyes, lest our hand weakens. This is our

still in refugee camps. The issue of their right of return, recognition, and compensation is still alive. Many feel that a successful peace initiative must address this issue. However, Israel continues to erase the evidence and memory of the former inhabitants of the land. Some call it memoricide.

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<sup>10</sup> The border became known as the Green Line as a green pen had been used to mark it on a map when the war ended. The international community considers all land inside the Green Line to be occupied territory and not part of Israel.

<sup>11</sup> The Palestinian refugees of the *Nakba* and their descendants are scattered throughout the Middle East, many

generation's fate. Our choice — to be ready and armed, strong, and tough, or if the sword loosens from our fist, our lives will be felled.<sup>12</sup>

In 1969 while speaking to some students he observed,

We came to this country which was already populated by Arabs, and we are establishing a Hebrew, that is a Jewish, state here. . . . Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I don't blame you, because these geography books no longer exist; not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either. Nahalal [Dayan's own village] arose in the place of Mahlul, Gevat in the place of Jibta, Sarid in the place of Haneifs, and Kfar Yehoshua in the place of Tel Shamam. There is not a single community in the country that did not have a former Arab population.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Palestinian Liberation Organization and the 1967 Six-Day War**

Following the 1948 war, nationalistic Palestinians in refugee camps throughout the Middle East and the West Bank and Gaza looked to Arab countries to continue the struggle to regain their homeland. However, they eventually realized that very few were willing to do anything, and that they were going to have to liberate their homeland themselves. In 1964 they formed the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which the U.N. eventually recognized as the representative of the Palestinian people. The organization believed that:

- The Palestinian people had a right to self-determination
- Armed struggle was acceptable
- A secular, democratic society where Jews and Arabs could live together was possible

Between 1948 and 1967 the IDF became the strongest army in the Mideast. In June 1967, Israel attacked its neighbours. Egypt had been conducting military manoeuvres, and Israel used that as an excuse to

make a surprise attack and gain more land in the Sinai and Gaza and weaken Egypt. An early morning air attack destroyed most of the Egyptian air force.

The Six Day War was a complete success for Israel. It captured the Sinai Peninsula, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, parts of Syria, and the Gaza Strip. Only 265 Israeli soldiers were killed, but more than 500,000 Palestinians became refugees. Israeli now controlled all of Jerusalem and the Western Wall, the most holy site for Jews.

The U.N. Security Council unanimously condemned the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank and Gaza. Resolution 242 emphasized:

The inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security

. . . All Member States in their acceptance of the Charter of the United Nations have undertaken a commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter.

Article 2 states, "All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered." The Security Council then called for, "withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict and achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem."

Israel ignored the U.N. — again — and annexed East Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> However, it did not annex the West Bank. If it had, it would have had to grant Israeli citizenship to the millions of Palestinians who lived there, and that would jeopardize the Jewish majority. As well, Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war who lived in the West Bank would then try to reclaim or seek compensation for their lands in Israel. And so Israel placed the West Bank under "temporary" military occupation that continues to this day.

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<sup>12</sup> Tevet S., *Ben Gurion and the Holocaust*, 1971, p. 433. Quoted in *Original Sins*, p. 113

<sup>13</sup> *Original Sins*, p. 114

<sup>14</sup> Israel has ignored or violated over 100 U.N. Security Council Resolutions, more than any other member state.

## **Terrorism, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Camp David Peace Treaty, and Israeli Settlements**

After the Six Day War, the PLO and other Palestinian organizations took their armed struggle outside the region to gain the world's attention. For several years they were responsible for acts of terrorism such as hijacking and blowing up airplanes. In 1972, Palestinian commandos took nine Israeli athletes hostage at the Olympic Games in Munich. Both the Palestinians and the hostages were killed in a shootout.

In October 1973, the Egyptians and Syrians launched a surprise attack on Israel to regain the land they had lost in the Six Day War. They attacked on Yom Kippur, a Jewish holy day. Israel eventually counter-attacked and almost invaded Egypt, and the U.S. organized a cease-fire. However, the near defeat scared Israelis — maybe next time the Arabs would win.

With this in mind, Israel and Egypt began peace negotiations. In 1977 Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made a surprise visit to Israel and spoke to the Israeli parliament. Two years later, U.S. President Jimmy Carter organized the Camp David Peace Agreement. For the first time in history an Arab country made peace with Israel. Many Arabs were shocked, and two years later Arab extremists assassinated Sadat. However, the peace has endured. None of this affected the Palestinians scattered throughout the region. The IDF in the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) continued to deny them fundamental civil liberties or human rights.

In 1977, a right-wing government led by Menachem Begin came to power in Israel. Many of his fanatical religious Zionist supporters believed that the West Bank belonged to Israel as it was part of the land that God had promised to Abraham. They insisted that Israel annex the West Bank and drive the Palestinians out before a peace treaty created a Palestinian state.

Begin and his allies were sympathetic to these demands and decided on a long-term plan to “settle” the West Bank by creating small “settlements.” For example, 50 Israeli settlers would take over some land, and Israel would then build a settler-only road to the settlement, install electricity and plumbing, and send soldiers to protect the Israeli citizens. The process would be repeated, and eventually the West Bank would be so full of strategically-placed ever-expanding settlements

— facts on the ground — that a contiguous Palestinian state would be impossible.

This worked, but in the process it created an apartheid society — Israelis and Palestinians live as neighbours, but the Israelis enjoy full rights as citizens while the Palestinians are subject to military law with little or no rights. One land with two sets of laws and regulations depending on ethnicity. Today nearly 600,000 Israelis live in 200 settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

## **The 1982 Lebanon War, the First Intifada, the Madrid Peace Talks, and the Oslo Accords**

In June 1982, Israel invaded southern Lebanon to drive out PLO fighters. For three months it bombed much of the country, which was too weak to defend itself, killing thousands of civilians. In September the PLO departed, and the IDF helped right-wing Lebanese soldiers massacre 2,000 Palestinian women and children in the Shatilla and Sabra refugee camps.

In 1987, Palestinians in the OPT revolted against the twenty-year Israeli military occupation in the first *intifada* — “the act of shaking off.” The causes were numerous. The IDF's “Iron Fist” policy humiliated the Palestinians through repression and fear, treachery, beatings, torture chambers, and daily intimidation, humiliation, and manipulation. More than 68,000 Israelis now lived in West Bank settlements, and Palestinians feared that Israel would annex the West Bank and expel them. Finally, PLO leaders, many of whom lived in exile in Tunisia, had become corrupt and unable to broker a peace deal with Israel.

Palestinian grass roots organizations decided that if Palestine was going to be a country, the people would have to fight for it, and so they started protests throughout the OPT. Palestinians went on strike, protested in the streets, threw rocks at Israelis, and refused to pay taxes to Israel and buy Israeli products. Everyone — men, women, and children — took part. The IDF suppressed the uprising by beating, teargassing, and shooting the demonstrators. They killed 1,000 Palestinians and wounded 24,000 children. Most of the world and the U.N. condemned Israel's actions.

The intifada succeeded in that it forced Israel to negotiate with the Palestinians. The United States and other countries convened a peace conference in Madrid

in 1993 — the first time that Israelis, Palestinians, and Arab countries had gathered together. The conference lasted three days. When Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir accused the Syrian leader of being a dictator, the Syrian produced a “Wanted” poster of Yitzhak Shamir from the British Mandate days and accused Shamir of assassinating Count Bernadotte.

At the same time, Palestinians and Israelis met secretly in Oslo, Norway, and negotiated an “interim peace accord” that would last five years while a permanent settlement was reached. None of the major issues such as borders, water use, and right of return were discussed. Instead, it was agreed that a Palestinian government — the Palestinian Authority (PA) — would govern parts of the West Bank. The IDF would withdraw from much of the West Bank, and the Palestinians would recognize Israel’s right to exist and renounce the use of violence. The West Bank was divided into three sections. These divisions remain in effect today.

**Area A** Palestinian urban areas. The PA has complete civic and military control, and no Israeli soldiers are normally allowed.

**Area B** The PA retains limited autonomy, but Israel controls security.

**Area C** About 60 percent of the West Bank, rural and desert areas. Israel retains complete control.

The Palestinian people waged an effective intifada, but their leadership proved ineffective in negotiating the Oslo Accords. Nothing of substance was decided, nor was any mention made of a Palestinian nation.

### **The Camp David Summit, the Second Intifada, and the Security Wall**

Five years passed with no sign of a peace agreement or a Palestinian state. Israeli settlements in the OPT continued to grow at an alarming rate, vivisectioning the West Bank with “settler-only” connecting roads. Most Palestinians became disenchanted with the Oslo Accords, seeing the Israelis as having slyly subcontracted the administration of the occupation to the PA. Now the PA was expected to maintain order in Areas A and B and prevent another intifada. Now it was

Palestinian police, not Israeli soldiers, arresting and imprisoning Palestinian activists.

In July 2000, U.S. President Bill Clinton convened a Camp David Summit between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PA President Yasser Arafat in an attempt to forge a peace deal. Little of the proceedings were made public, and at one point, Barak is supposed to have made a “take it or leave it” final offer. Essentially, he offered Palestine “full independence” except for restricted internal movement and control of air space, borders, water supply, and access to the capital (East Jerusalem). The Palestinian state would also be demilitarized and forfeit 9 percent of the West Bank to Israel. Arafat understandably rejected the offer.

A month later a second, more violent intifada erupted. Radical Islam was now popular in much of the Arab world, including the OPT, where Hamas had taken root in 1988. Followers of Hamas wanted a society based on the Koran, and some believed in holy war, or *jihad*, against the enemies of Islam. Hamas was popular in the OPT as it provided more social services than the corrupt PA.<sup>15</sup> During the second intifada, Hamas convinced many despairing young Palestinians to become suicide bombers. About 1,100 Israelis were killed. The IDF invaded the West Bank and killed 5,000 Palestinians.

In 2003, Israeli began building a huge wall around the West Bank on the pretext of keeping terrorists out of Israel. However, 80 percent of the wall stands on the Palestinian side of the Green Line, which marks the recognized border between the West Bank and Israel. This in effect annexes 8 percent of the West Bank to Israel. The wall stretches deep into the West Bank to encircle settlements and is double the length of the Green Line — some 700 kilometres. It also cuts off the West Bank from its traditional religious, cultural, and political capital of East Jerusalem; divides Palestinian communities; and severely restricts movement.

In 2005, Israel evacuated its settlers from Gaza, but sealed it off. Since then, Israel has fought three major wars with Hamas in Gaza. Approximately 4,000 Palestinians and 100 Israelis were killed. In the 2014 war, Israel killed nearly 2,000 Palestinians, 75 percent of them civilians. Seven Israeli civilians were killed.

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<sup>15</sup> Hamas defeated the PLO in the 2006 elections.

In 2005, dozens of Palestinian organizations called for an international boycott of Israel and companies profiting from the occupation. This Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement, or BDS, has grown. Several governments, including Canada, condemn it as being anti-Semitic.

In 2010, many Christian churches in Palestine issued *Kairos Palestine*, an appeal to Christians everywhere for support. Some excerpts:

We Palestinian Christians declare that the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings.

The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God.

Non-violent resistance is a right and duty for all Palestinians including Christians. We call on all peoples, political leaders, and decision makers to put pressure on Israel and take legal measures in order to oblige its government to put an end to its oppression and disregard for the international law.

On 23 December 2016, The U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 2334, which declared that Israel's settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories constituted a "flagrant violation" of international law and has "no legal validity."

In early December 2017, the U.S. announced it would move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thus recognizing Israel's claim to the city.<sup>16</sup> The U.N. Security Council condemned this decision in a 14-1 vote. Only the U.S. voted against it and vetoed the resolution. On December 21 the U.N. General Assembly held an Emergency General Session and voted 128-9 to condemn the American decision. The nine nations voting against the resolution were the U.S., Israel, Guatemala, Nauru, Honduras, Micronesia, Palau, Togo, and the Marshall Islands. Thirty-five nations abstained.

In mid-May 2018, the United States officially moved its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, upending decades of U.S. foreign policy and inflaming Palestinian public opinion. (Palestinians insist that East Jerusalem must be the capital of any future Palestinian state.) Israel annexed East Jerusalem following its capture in the 1967 war, but the international community, including the U.S., never recognized that move, viewing East Jerusalem as occupied territory. The relocation of the embassy destroys any possibility that the U.S. can be a neutral party in future peace negotiations. One observer claimed that far from being a firefighter, the U.S. had become an arsonist.

On July 19, 2018, the Israeli parliament passed the "Basic Law on Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People." In the absence of a constitution, Israel's Basic Laws are constitutional in nature. The legislation codifies the discrimination that Palestinians and other non-Jews living in Israel experience on a daily basis. Mordechai Kremnitzer, professor emeritus of the Faculty of Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem observed that "it treats Arabs [Israeli Palestinians] as if they were trespassers in Israel." The bill stipulates that only Jews have the right to national self-determination. It makes no mention of democracy or equality and virtually guarantees that Israel will never be a democracy with equality for all its citizens, but rather an "ethnocracy." As Avi Dichter, the Likud Knesset member who first proposed the bill said, "We are enshrining this important bill into a law today to prevent even the slightest thought, let alone attempt, to transform Israel to a country of all its citizens."

B'Tselem, a leading Israeli human rights organization, had this to say.

The Nation State basic law . . . establishes that distinguishing Jews in Israel (and throughout the world) from non-Jews is fundamental and legitimate. Based on this distinction, the law permits institutionalized discrimination in favor of Jews in settlement, housing, land development, citizenship, language, and culture. . . . Jewish

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<sup>16</sup> Since 1948, the international community has maintained that the final status of Jerusalem must be determined as part of a permanent peace settlement. Members do not recognize

Israel's claim to the entire city and for this reason located their embassies in Tel Aviv.

supremacy has now been enshrined in basic law, making it a binding constitutional principle — unlike ordinary laws or practices by authorities, which can be challenged. This signals to all state institutions that they not only can, but must, promote Jewish supremacy in the entire area under Israeli control.

### **Where do things stand in 2022?**

The peace process is stalled. Thirty years after the “interim” Oslo Accord, the West Bank is still divided into Areas A, B, and C. Palestinians have full control of only 3 percent of the West Bank.

Over 500,000 Israeli settlers live in 200+ illegal settlements in the West Bank. Another 200,000 live in East Jerusalem. Illegal settlements are constantly expanding. Israel controls the borders, air space, water, electricity, and economy of the West Bank.

The Israeli military occupation is in its 55th year. It is the longest military occupation in modern history. Israeli soldiers and settlers humiliate and terrorize Palestinians in countless different ways. Palestinians have few civil or human rights. Almost 400 Palestinians are held in Israeli prisons without charge. Palestinian civil society in the West Bank has renounced violence and developed non-violent strategies for resistance.

The Palestinian economy is kept alive by foreign aid, which comprises about 30 percent of the GDP and pays the salaries of 140,000 PA civil servants. This relieves Israel of the cost of administering the occupation and also encourages corruption and inefficiency in the PA.

The U.S. remains Israel’s strongest and most unquestioning ally, providing \$3.7 billion yearly in foreign aid — 20 percent of the total U.S. aid budget and about \$500 per Israeli citizen. The U.S. vetoes almost every U.N. Security Council resolution critical of Israel.

Israel has the most powerful armed forces in the Middle East and is the only nuclear power. In January 2016, the head of its intelligence agency said that Israel no longer faces any existential threats.

Israel has become more right-wing and influenced by a strain of extreme religious messianic nationalism.

Prime Minister Trudeau describes criticism of Israel as “the new anti-Semitism” and has vowed to fight anti-Zionism.

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza live in a giant open-air prison. Israel controls the exits, the PA and Hamas controls internal security, and the international community pays for the upkeep. Most advocates for human rights, including those in Israel, have harsh words for the continued occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza.

According to international law:

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank is illegal.

The Israeli annexation of East Jerusalem is illegal.

The Israeli West Bank settlements are illegal.

The Separation Wall is illegal.

### **Israel an Apartheid State**

In the last two years, four respected human rights organizations have issued lengthy reports acknowledging what has been common knowledge for decades — Israel is an apartheid state. In July 2020, Israeli human rights organization Yesh Din issued a 58-page legal opinion entitled *The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid*. Its conclusion stated:

The conclusion of this legal opinion is that the crime against humanity of apartheid is being committed in the West Bank. The perpetrators are Israelis, and the victims are Palestinians. . . . The Israeli regime in its entirety is an apartheid regime. Israel is an Apartheid state.

In January 2021, B’Tselem, an Israeli human rights group that documents abuses in the OPT, released *A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid*. A few excerpts:

In the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, the Israeli regime implements laws, practices, and state violence designed to cement the supremacy of one group — Jews — over another — Palestinians.

All Palestinians living under Israeli rule are treated as inferior in rights and status to Jews who live in the very same area.

Land is a resource meant exclusively to benefit the Jewish public. Land used to develop and expand existing Jewish communities and build new ones while Palestinians are dispossessed and corralled into small, crowded enclaves.

The roughly five million Palestinians who live in the OPT cannot participate in the political system that governs their lives and determines their futures. . . Israel also denies Palestinians [in the OPT] political rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of association.

These accumulated measures all form the basis for our conclusion that the bar for labeling the Israeli regime as apartheid has been met.

An Israeli spokesperson dismissed the report as a propaganda tool. “Israel rejects the false claims in the so-called report as it is not based on reality but on a distorted ideological view.”

A few months later Human Rights Watch, an independent international organization, released *A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution*. This extensively documented 218-page report analyses Israeli policies and practices. A few excerpts.

Israeli authorities methodically privilege Jewish Israelis and discriminate against Palestinians. . . . The objective of maintaining Jewish Israeli control over demographics, political power, and land has long guided government policy. In pursuit of this goal authorities have dispossessed, confined, forcibly separated, and subjected Palestinians by virtue of their identity.

In the OPT, Israeli authorities treat Palestinians separately and unequally as compared to Jewish Israeli settlers. . . This level of discrimination amounts to systemic oppression.

On the basis of its research, *Human Rights Watch* concludes that the Israeli government has

The term “apartheid” has developed over the past half century into a universal legal term that describes a crime against humanity. The Apartheid Convention defines apartheid as “inhumane acts . . . committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime.”

demonstrated an intent to maintain the domination of Jewish Israelis over Palestinians. In the OPT, this intent has been coupled with systemic oppression of Palestinians and inhumane acts committed against them. When these three elements occur together, they amount to the crime of apartheid.

Israeli authorities are also committing the crime against humanity of persecution based on the discriminatory intent behind Israel’s treatment of Palestinians and the grave abuses it has carried out in the OPT.

Again, Israel dismissed the report as a “propaganda pamphlet, which lacks all credibility.” A Foreign Ministry spokesperson claimed it had “No connection to facts or reality on the ground. The fictional claims that HRW concocted are both preposterous and false.”

On February 1, 2022, Amnesty International published an exhaustively researched 236-page report entitled *Israel’s Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity*. An excerpt:

Amnesty’s research confirms that the government of Israel has created and maintains laws, policies, and practices that deliberately oppress Palestinians. This includes racist seizures of property, and policies that make it impossible for many Palestinians to build homes. Additional violations include unlawful killing and serious injury, torture, forcible transfer, persecution, and the denial of many other basic rights and freedoms.

Given Amnesty’s high-profile reputation as an advocate for human rights, the Israeli reaction was predictably much stronger and swifter. A day before the report was released, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson condemned it as “false, biased, and anti-Semitic,” and said that Israel “absolutely rejects all the false allegations that appear in the report.

[It] consolidates and recycles lies, inconsistencies, and unfounded assertions that originate from well-known anti-Israeli hate organizations, all with the aim of reselling damaged goods in new packaging. Repeating the same lies of hate organizations over and over does not make the lies reality, but rather makes Amnesty illegitimate.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid added, “Amnesty quotes lies spread by terrorist organizations.”

The Canadian government has not commented publicly on any of these four reports.

## Conclusion

The root cause of decades of unrest and war in historic Palestine has not been a clash of religions or civilizations or bloodthirsty terrorists, but rather Zionism, a political ideology that privileges one ethnic group over another. While the Zionists’ original aspirations were noble — to establish a safe haven for an historically persecuted people — their choice to launch their project in historic Palestine required that they forcibly dispossess the indigenous Palestinian people. Zionism thus became a settler-colonial enterprise and the resulting state of Israel an apartheid nation. The oppressed have become the oppressors.

The Palestinians, however, are not cooperating, and display *samud*, or resilience. They exercise what is called the “veto power of the oppressed.” Their mere existence is resistance and keeps awareness of their

cause alive. As one said, “We are not going anywhere. We will either be on the land or under it.”

Almost every Palestinian I met wants to live in peace, but it must be a just peace that is negotiated between equals, not between the oppressor and the oppressed. I grasped this in 2012 when I visited the West Bank city of Hebron, where the brutality of the occupation is in plain view. Our small tour group had lunch in the cottage of Hashem al Azzeh, a Palestinian human rights activist. At one point we were talking about peace negotiations, and Hashem said, “Give me my rights, and then I will negotiate!”

Hashem died in 2015 after succumbing to excessive inhalation of tear gas. But I feel that most Palestinians agree with him. In April 2016, a six-metre-high statue of Nelson Mandela was erected in the West Bank provisional capital of Ramallah. Mandela is famous for his insistence that, “Only free men can negotiate: prisoners cannot enter into contracts.”

So how will it all end? When will it all end? A just, enduring peace will only come when Israeli Zionists of all stripes renounce the concept of ethnic supremacy and dismantle the discriminatory and oppressive institutions, policies, and practices that support it. Zionists must embrace the notion that everyone living under Israeli control is equal and entitled to the same basic human rights and political self-determination. In a world that values human rights and political self-determination and rejects racism, there is no place for the political ideology of Zionism.

## Resources to Help You Find Out More

### Reports

*The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the Crime of Apartheid: Legal Opinion* Yesh Din <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/files.yesh-din.org/Apartheid+2020/Apartheid+ENG.pdf>

*A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid.* B’Tselem <https://www.btselem.org/apartheid>

*A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution.* Human Rights Watch <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/27/threshold-crossed/israeli-authorities-and-crimes-apartheid-and-persecution>

*Israel’s Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity.* Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.ca/news/israels-apartheid-against-palestinians-a-cruel-system-of-domination-and-a-crime-against-humanity/>

## **Websites**    *Most of these organizations have a social media presence*

United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine and Israel <https://www.unjppi.org/>  
Independent Jewish Voices Canada <http://ijvcanada.org/>  
Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) <https://www.cjpme.org/>  
Canada Talks Israel / Palestine <https://canadatalksisraelpalestine.ca/>  
Canadian Friends of Sabeel <https://friendsofsabeel.ca/>  
Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHN) <http://www.icahd.org/>  
Community Peacemakers Team Palestine <http://www.cpt.org/work/palestine>  
International Solidarity Movement (ISM) <http://palsolidarity.org/>  
Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre <http://www.sabeel.org/>  
Breaking the Silence <http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/>  
Rabbis for Human Rights <http://rhr.org.il/eng/>  
Military Court Watch <http://www.militarycourtwatch.org/index.php>  
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Palestine <http://www.ochaopt.org/>  
Kairos Palestine <http://www.kairospalestine.ps>  
Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) Movement. <http://www.bdsmovement.net/>  
972 Magazine <https://972mag.com/>  
Jewish Voice for Peace <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>

## **Books**

*Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, 1917-2017* Ian Black, Penguin  
*The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917 – 2017* Rashid Khalidi Metropolitan Books NY, 2020  
*Except for Palestine: the Limits of Progressive Politics* Marc Lamont Hill and Mitchell Plitnick, The New Press NY, 2021  
*Canada and Israel: Building Apartheid* Yves Engler Fern Publishing Canada 2010  
*Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* Noura Erakat, Stanford University Press, 2019  
*Canadian Christian Zionism* Ron Dart Synaxis Press, Dewdney BC, 2015  
*A History of Modern Palestine, 2nd Edition* Ilan Pappé, Cambridge University Press 2006  
*The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* Ilan Pappé Oneworld Oxford 2006  
*The General's Son* Miko Peled Just World Books Virginia 2012  
*Palestine* (Guide book) Sarah Irving Bradt Travel Guide 2011  
*The Lemon Tree* Sandy Tolan Bloomsbury, U.S. 2007  
*Original Sins* Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi Olive Branch Press NY 1993  
*The Balfour Declaration* Jonathan Schneer Anchor Canada 2010  
*One Palestine Complete* Tom Segev Holt 2000  
*Orientalism* Edward Said Penguin Classics UK 1978  
*BDS: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* Omar Barghouti Haymarket Books Chicago 2011  
*Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel 1917 – 1947* Bruce Hoffman Vintage NY 2015

## Documentaries / Movies

*Five Broken Cameras*  
*Omar*  
*Budrus*  
*The Gatekeepers*  
*Salt of the Sea*  
*Inch Allah*  
*Occupation 101*  
*The Iron Wall*

Many of these are available on Netflix, at the public library, or on Youtube

*The Lab*  
*Donor Opium*  
*Roadmap to Apartheid*  
*The Promise (English television miniseries)*  
*Waltzing with Bashir*  
*Bethlehem*  
*Paradise Now*

*Stone Cold Justice*  
*On the Side of the Road*  
*The Stones Cry Out*  
*With God on Our Side*  
*The Occupation of the American Mind*  
*The Visit*

## Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present

