The United States and the Evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is arguably one of the most complex issues in the Middle East today, with no just or peaceful settlement in sight. The United States' unbalanced treatment of the conflict has contributed significantly to the inability of the Arabs and Israelis to reach such a settlement. Historically, a "pattern of surrender" to the Israelis that has plagued American presidents since Harry Truman has yet to be broken in any significant way.[1] This "pattern of surrender" has bolstered the Israelis' nationalist objectives while simultaneously undermining those of the Palestinians to the point where the United States has effectively acted more as "Israel's lawyer" than as a mediator between belligerents.[2]

How did a movement for a Jewish national identity evolve into what is in essence the colonisation and displacement of an entire population, whose own nationalist objectives were effectively suppressed in the process? And how did the United States, supposed leaders in democracy and diplomacy, come to take such an undemocratic and undiplomatic stance on the international stage in a conflict of this character? Much has been written about how the United States has served to undermine peace in the region, particularly during the mid-20th and into the 21st century. I would instead like to focus on the role the United States has played in shaping the nature of the conflict in its earliest years, and how this affected the Americans' treatment of the conflict after 1947, and

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[1] John B. Judis, *Genesis: Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), 7
[2] Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*, (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 2013), 37

especially after 1956 when their position as an ascendant power in the region was solidified.[3]

I will argue that an historical predisposition toward supporting Israel (exemplified by American Zionism and a deeply-rooted misunderstanding of the Palestinian people) served to embolden the Jewish nationalist cause and simultaneously undermine that of the Arabs. I will also argue that until 1947, the British, European Zionists and Arabs did far more to shape the nature of the conflict than the Americans could have, and the American Presidential administrations did not submit as willingly or as quickly to the Zionist cause as much of the American public did. However, I will then assert that a definitive turning point in the Americans' stance occurred in 1967 and was solidified in 1969 when the United States began to vigorously and unapologetically back the Israelis, making any prospects of a peaceful agreement exponentially more difficult. Thus, before 1947, the United States' role in shaping the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was mostly confined to exaggerating the polarised levels of success of the Jewish and Arab Palestinian nationalist motives. After 1947, however, the United States took on a much more direct role with the conflict that led to a turning point in 1967 when they began to act as "Israel's lawyer," a role the United States arguably still plays today.

Origins

Although the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began as a struggle over territory rather than competing nationalisms, the origins of the conflict are rooted in Jewish and Palestinian identity. This is not to say that the development of these two identities necessitated violent conflict. It simply demonstrates that the origins of the Israeli-

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[3] Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 116

Palestinian conflict are better understood in light of how the two national identities were formulated, and how their conflicting goals led to violence over time. The nature of Zionism as a movement for a Jewish national identity coincided with some American Christian beliefs that help explain the American public's predisposition toward supporting the Zionist cause. This support would prove to be instrumental in the future success of political Zionism and in pressuring the American leadership to support the Zionist cause.

Conversely, a widespread misunderstanding of the Palestinians' identity by both the American public and the Zionists would effectively undermine the Palestinians' ability to garner comparable support. A general misunderstanding of, and disconnection from, the Palestinians has been a fundamental component of the Americans' role in the conflict. As such, I think it is *as* important to discuss the Palestinians' history as it is to acknowledge its absence in the Americans' and Zionists' understanding of the region. I would argue that there is no better way to emphasise the effects of the topic's omission from the conversation than to give the topic its due attention.

Palestinian identity is also important simply because it is so often overlooked, markedly so in Western, and especially Israeli, historiography.[4] By extension, Palestinian intellectuals, for their part, tend to undermine the Israelis' national narrative. The result is two competing national narratives reflected in the Israelis' and Palestinians' historiographies. The consequences of this are expressed by Dirk Moses, who states "the political imperatives of nationalist movements and their leadership determine collective

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[4] Ilan Pappe, *The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis, 1700-1984*, Translated by Yael Lotan (Saqi Books:London, 2010), 314-321

memories of the past,"[5] which, in the context of Israel and Palestine, result in deeply divided understandings of each others' pasts, a condition that is pivotal in their inability to obtain peace in the region. "Post-Zionist" Israeli historian Ilan Pappe is at the forefront of an effort to bridge these competing narratives, exemplified by the Palestinian Israel Academic Dialogue (PALISAD) and related groups.[6]

Thus, my attention to both the Zionists' and the Palestinians' formulation of a national identity is not only for the sake of shedding light on a part of the history of Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is often left in the shadows, but also for honouring the importance of bridging two competing narratives that have largely been shaped by supposedly opposing nationalisms. I use the term "supposedly" to highlight the extent to which these nationalisms are not, in and of themselves, opposed to one another. The underlying assumption that Israeli and Palestinian national identities are opposed to one another is, in my opinion, a result of the historiographical conflicts discussed above, and not something that arose by nature of the two nationalisms. What I hope to make clear is that *both* the Israelis and the Palestinians have valid historical and national claims to the Israel/Palestine region. Questions over who has a greater right to the land are fruitless. The difficulty is, and has been, how to divide and/or share the land between two worthy parties. This has not been done in either a just or peaceful manner. The United States has played a major role in this regard through sympathy for the Zionist cause and simultaneous ignorance of the Palestinians.'

Connecting the development of a Jewish national identity to Zionism is complicated by the nature of Zionism itself. The terms "Jewish" and "Zionist" are by no

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[5] Dirk Moses, "Hayden White, Traumatic Nationalism, and the Public Role of History," *History and Theory*, **44**:3 (2005): 313

[6] Moses, "Traumatic Nationalism," 329. Also see TIPP http://www.israelpalestineproject.org/path

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means synonymous. While Palestine itself has religious significance Judaism, Jewish immigration to Palestine had little religious significance for Jews before the 19th century – or at least, Palestine's religious significance did not emphasise Jewish immigration to Palestine in the same way.[7] Shalom Goldman describes Zionism as "a Jewish implementation of an idea that had been developing in Christian circles for more than 300 years."[8] For the purpose of this essay, there is Christian "Zionism" and there is Christian Zionism. Christian "Zionism" refers to early Christian notions of a Jewish commonwealth in the Land of Israel. Christian Zionism refers to groups of Christians who supported Zionism as a movement for a Jewish national identity and nation, only after Jews established such a movement on their own basis in the late 19th century.

So what exactly is Zionism? In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is tempting to generalise Zionism as a Jewish nationalist agenda in Israel/Palestine because the most successful forms of Zionism, namely political Zionism, can be characterised this way. But in order to differentiate between the Jewish nationalist agenda in Palestine and the Christian motives regarding the Land of Israel, "Zionism" must be looked at first and foremost in terms of how it emerged within Christianity.

Early roots of Christian "Zionism" date back to 17th century Protestant messianic groups, who interpreted the Jewish exile from their homeland after their defeat at the hands of the Romans as a punishment that could be absolved in part through the re-establishment of that homeland. This could be done by a mass returning of Jews to Palestine, or the Land of Israel. According to messianic Christians, forming a Jewish

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[7] Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland,* Translated by Geremy Forman, (Verso: London 2012), 107-118

[8] Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, & the Idea of the Promised Land,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 99

commonwealth in the Land of Israel would advance the messianic timetable and bring about the return of Jesus to earth for the final salvation.[9] A fundamental step in this final salvation would be a mass conversion of the Jews to Christianity.[10] Given that this proposed commonwealth was of no religious significance to Jews, Christian "Zionism" was simply interpreted by Jews as attempts at mass conversion.[11] Jews insisted that Judaism was a religion, not a nation.[12] These Christian motives took on some vaguely nationalist characteristics in the mid to late 19th century. For example, American businessman William Blackstone petitioned for Jewish claims to Palestine in 1891, but he received very little support from American Jews.[13] His motivations were primarily religious (and indeed, specifically Christian), and did not represent a Jewish nationalist cause. Thus some of the earliest discernible forms of "Zionism" surfaced as a Christian religious motive, not a Jewish nationalist one.

Zionism as a movement for a Jewish national identity started in Europe, largely in response to the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism. A Western European scholar coined the term "anti-Semitism" in the 1880s, distinguishing it as a racial, "modern" antipathy different from the religious persecution that traditionally characterised anti-Jewish antagonism in Europe.[14] Anti-Semitism was especially hostile in Eastern Europe.[15] In response to the Russian pogroms in 1881, Russian-Polish physician Leo Pinsker suggested in his 1882 pamphlet *Auto-Emancipation* that until Jews could develop a

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[9] Ariel, Yaakov, "An Unexpected Alliance: Christian Zionism and Its Historical Significance," *Modern Judaism* 26: 1. (2006): 74-5 http://muse.jhu.edu.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/journals/modern_judaism/v026/26.1ariel.html,
[10] Ariel Yaakov, "An Unexpected Alliance," 76
[11] Judis, *Genesis*, 132
[12] *Ibid.*, 134
[13] Judis, 131
[14] Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*, 8th Edition, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 23
[15] Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 27-28

coherent national consciousness, they would never escape the inequalities of anti-Semitism exemplified in the violent pogroms.[16] Pinsker believed Europeans to be inherently anti-Semitic and felt that assimilation was an unviable solution. He believed the Jews had to emancipate themselves, and needed to acquire territory in which to do so.[17] This assertion of the need for territory would serve as the future basis for nationalist strands of Zionism.

The movement attracted some attention, as organizations of "Lovers of Zion" emerged in Europe and the US, collecting donations and promoting the cause through publications.[18] While American support for Zionism was relatively insignificant at this stage, these were the first stirrings of an American Zionist movement.[19] However, what support there was generally came from the Christian rather than the Jewish community. The largest Jewish community in the US in the late 19th century were the Reform Jews, whose main difference from the Orthodox Jews was that they rejected rituals and scripture not based on reason, leading to a rejection of the religious premise of Zionism.[20] While they were happy to raise money for the Jews suffering in Russia, they maintained that Judaism was a spiritual identity, not a political one.[21] In Europe, however, the political and national aspects seemed highly beneficial in some Jewish circles. From their perspective, not only could a Jewish nation serve as refuge for suffering Jews, it could also help combat anti-Semitism by giving Jews a national voice. Other forms of Zionism

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[16] William Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 5th Edition, (Westview Press, 2013), 223
[17] Smith, 31
[18] Goldman, *Zeal for Zion,* 88
[19] Judis, 132
[20] *Ibid.,*134
[21] *Ibid.,*136-137

began to materialise, some drawing more on the nationalist objectives than others, and suggestions as to where this Jewish nation should be began to surface.[22]

Palestine was suggested partly due to the existence of small agricultural Jewish societies already present there. Though they were not necessarily Zionists, some had immigrated in the late 19th century as members of the Pinsker-inspired "Lovers of Zion," who felt Pinsker should commit his territorial ideas to Palestine specifically.[23] The Lovers of Zion believed that a Jewish nation could be re-established in their ancient home of Israel through Jewish labour and agriculture, a belief that A.D. Gordon (a member of the Lovers of Zion), used to inspire labour Zionism. Gordon also asserted the Jews had an "undoubtedly greater" historical right to the region than the Arabs, based on what Judis calls a "mythic version of Palestine," rooted in the Old Testament and dating back to first and second centuries C.E.[24]

Austro-Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl, who is considered the father of political Zionism, did not share this commitment to Palestine, but was particularly inspired by Pinsker's assertions about Europeans' inherent anti-Semitism and felt that a Jewish state was absolutely necessary. Initially, Herzl was open to any "empty territory" to serve this purpose, and focused his efforts of lobbying for the Zionist cause.[25] He convened the First Zionist Congress in 1897 and established the World Zionist Organization, giving the movement political leverage and spreading awareness of its objectives. However, by not committing to Palestine, Herzl was unable to gain the support of groups of Christians and Eastern European Jews who considered such a

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[22] Smith, 31-32
[23] *Ibid.*, 29
[24] Judis, 19
[25] Smith, 32

commitment pivotal. Thus, in an effort to bolster support, Herzl honed his efforts on obtaining recognition of a Jewish right to Palestine. [26]

Palestine, however, was by no means "empty territory." Palestine and its inhabitants were terribly misunderstood by Westerners and Zionists in the 19th and early 20th centuries, either to the extent that their very existence was unknown, or that their presence was acknowledged but their sense of identity and attachment to the region was ignored. In the mid 19th century, Palestine housed a population of over 340,000 people, approximately 88% of whom were Arab and only about 4% of which were Jewish.[27] The presence of hundreds of thousands of Arabs living on that land was a fact that would be neglected by many influential Zionists to come, whether out of ignorance, outlandish and contradictory justifications, or both.

In his book *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty*, Ilan Pappe explores two and half centuries of Palestine and the Palestinians through the lens of the Husayni family, who he describes as "the most significant informal political association prior to the appearance of national movements and political parties."[28] One of the most important shifts described in Pappe's book is how the Husaynis went from being the "notables of religion" (the *ulama*) during the Ottoman era to the "notables of nationalism" in the twentieth century.[29] This shift is important because it reflects the overall characteristics of Palestinian identity as it transformed over time.

The Ottoman era is the most important in terms of highlighting the extent to which the Palestinians had developed an identity before Zionist claims to Palestine began

[26] Smith, 31
[27] Judi, *Genesis,* 13
[28] Pappe, *The Rise and Fall of the Palestinian Dynasty,* 7
[29] *Ibid.,* 14

to challenge the existence of such an identity – keeping in mind that "Palestine" did not have distinct, definitive boarders at this time. It is also important in forming an understanding of the complex nature of the relationship between a broader Arab and a more specifically Palestinian identity. During the Ottoman era, Palestine ran under a political structure known as the "politics of the notables," a system that relied heavily on status, lineage, religious respectability, alliances, connections, and financial resources.[30] The prominent Palestinian notable families, the Husaynis and the Nashashibis, came from a line of Islamic scholars, the *ulama*, and military officers, respectively. Their prestige, power, and ability to exercise autonomy over their cities, stemmed from their elite position in society and their access to the rulers of the Empire.[31] The autonomy enjoyed by the notables and their access to Ottoman rulers meant that they represented, and thus played a fundamental role in shaping, Palestinian identity.

Between 1839 and 1876, the structural changes during the Tanzimat era redefined the roles of the notables and reshaped the locus of power in Jerusalem and other urban centers.[32] The Husaynis' religious prestige was undermined by the secularisation of the Empire's legal codes, but centralisation worked to their advantage by shifting power from the rural lords to the urban notables. Furthermore, since Palestine was mostly rural and its economy depended so strongly on agriculture, the Land Law of 1858 (which required land to be registered and categorised for increased taxation) meant that the notables gained in land ownership and agricultural income what they lost in religious prestige.[33] They were also able to retain much of their influence in urban settings, such as Jerusalem,

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[30] Pappe, 13-15
[31] Pappe, 15
[32] *Ibid.,* 18-19
[33] *Ibid.*

by adapting to the reforms and using them to their advantage. Through the adaptability

and resilience of the notables, the later years of the Ottoman era bore promising potential

for the future of Palestine as a nation.[34] Unfortunately, an ignorance toward the existence

of an embryonic Palestinian identity by Zionists, American or otherwise, would

undermine this potential.

Despite his ambition, Herzl's ideas were not met with great success initially. As

noted earlier, the United States' proto-Zionist roots did not initially translate into

extensive support for Herzl's cause. Blackstone may have felt that the US had a special

role to play in "God's plan for humanity," and that this role involved "restoring the Jews

to Zion," but this theory remains an important quality only of American Christian Zionist

ideas specifically,[35] and Herzl was struck by his initial inability to gain financial support

from Western Jewish communities.[36] But Herzl's assertion that Palestine could serve as a

"safe retreat" for the victims of the Russian pogroms was not widely shared, nor was his

belief that Zionism could combat anti-Semitism.

In fact, many Reformist Jews felt that defining themselves as national group

would invite, rather than combat, anti-Semitism.[37] Eastern European Jews who had

immigrated to the United States also tended to side with the Reform groups. Between

1880 and 1920, over 2.5 million Jews had immigrated to the United States from central

Europe; America *was* their Zion.[38] The experience of the "American Zion" separated

American Jews from those in Europe in substantial ways. They already struggled with a

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[34] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of a Modern National Consciousness* (e-book), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 60-61 http://quod.lib.umich.edu.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/ cgi/t/text/ text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb00158

[35] Ariel, "An Unexpected Alliance," 78

[36] Judis, 134

[37] *Ibid.*, 151

[38] *Ibid.*,132-133

"dual loyalty" to their American citizenship on one hand and their Jewish identity on the other, and were not willing to compromise their significantly improved social status by aligning with a potentially inflammatory political movement. [39]

Even in Europe, many Zionist groups rejected the political and national premises of political and labour Zionism. Hebrew intellect Ahad Ha'am, known as the founder of cultural Zionism, saw the movement primarily as a revitalization of Judaism and a uniting force for the Jewish people. He did not see the creation of a Jewish state as necessary means to this end.[40] Herzl would not live to see the success of political Zionism, but his ideas would eventually form the foundational movement that led to the establishment of the State of Israel. Americans' disaffection with Zionism in the late 19th century mitigated over the next few decades. This was partly due to the First World War, which fostered a surge of sympathy for the plight of the European Jews,[41] but it was mostly due to more successful campaigning for the Zionist cause on the domestic level. The most important figure in this sense was American lawyer Louis Brandeis, who "almost single handily revived the Zionist movement in 1914."[42]

Arguably, Brandeis' most important strategy was making Zionism compatible with "Americanism," and thus more appealing to those Jews still hesitant to align themselves with the movement. [43] Brandeis was not a religious man. He saw Zionism as a moral obligation to the European Jews and considered himself a progressive liberal. By emphasising this standpoint, Brandeis succeeded in turning Zionism into something Jews could be proud to align themselves with without having to compromise either their

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[39] Judis, 134
[40] *Ibid.,* 22
[41] *Ibid.,* 143
[42] *Ibid.,* 144
[43] *Ibid.*

American or Jewish identities.[44] Alternatively, Zionism did not pose a threat to Americans' Christian identity in the same way it did to the Jewish community. So as Americans became more receptive to Zionism in general, the movement's popularity expanded within the Christian community as well. Indeed, Yaakov Ariel notes, "motivated by a biblical messianic faith and the belief that a Jewish commonwealth in the Land of Israel was a necessary stage in the preparation of the way for the return of Jesus of Nazareth to earth, Christian Zionists have, at times, been more enthusiastic than Jews over the prospect of a Jewish state."[45]

Unfortunately for the Palestinians, Brandeis' successful campaigning was largely the result of a misunderstanding of Palestine. Throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, Americans in general sorely misunderstood Palestine as a place. Knowledge of Palestine came in the form of travel books that portrayed it as desolate and under-populated, fostering ideas that Palestine was hardly more than a barren wasteland.[46] Any mention of the Palestinian Arabs, if they were mentioned at all, described their society as backward or simple, implying they were somehow inferior and had no particular identification with the land.[47] More disappointing was how the most influential Zionist groups dealt with the "discovery" of hundreds of thousands of people already living in and identifying with the region. For all his success, Brandeis' identification with progressive liberalism is misleading in light of his views of the Palestinians. He "saw Palestine through the lens of Western colonialism and Jewish nationalism,"[48] and

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[44] Judis, 144-145
[45] Ariel, "An Unexpected Alliance," 74
[46] Judis, 141
[47] *Ibid.*, 141-142
[48] Judis, 147

effectively ignored the problem this supposedly moral, liberal Zionist agenda posed to the Palestinians.

Running with the logic of Edward Said's *Orentalism*, the tendency to view the "Easterners," or in this case specifically Arab Palestinians, as inherently subordinate was deeply entrenched in the West.[49] Luke Peterson highlights how popular media served to exacerbate this view, up to the present day, as a strategy for embellishing pro-Israel views.[50] The impact of this phenomenon is difficult to overstate, especially in a society whose "strength [as a] nation is not provided by the central government or the States as such, but by its... web of interests and institutions produced in the private sector, in what [Said]... [calls] civil society."[51] And this civil society, Said furthers, is considerably intertwined with political society. [52]A refusal to admit the problematic nature of political Zionism paired with an outright denial of the existence of any kind of Palestinian identity came to characterise many American Zionist leaders throughout the 20th century, which in turn would drastically shape public perception of the conflict in later years.

This is not say that Jewish communities in Palestine were necessarily at odds with their Arab neighbours, even as political Zionism grew in popularity. The Jewish population in Palestine began to grow during the later years of the Ottoman era, constituting about half the population of Jerusalem by 1914.[53] Their presence was noteworthy, but in both the rural and urban settings, they were not considered a threat by

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[49] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Random House, 1978)
[50] Luke Peterson, *Palestine-Israel in the Print News Media: Contending Discourses*, (London: Routledge 2015), 51.
[51] Edward Said, *The Palestine Question and the American Context*, (Verdun: Institute for Palestine Studies 1979), 8
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 59

any significant means.[54] Any qualms the Palestinians had over the growing Jewish presence by the late Ottoman era had to do with the overall threat of increased foreign influence, and was not directed at the Jewish community in particular.[55] The tensions over foreign influence say more about the Palestinians' sense of identity, as it included the Jewish population at the time, than it does about their future resentment of the Jewish presence.

Formative Years

This Arab-Jewish relationship is important in the broader context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because it demonstrates how problematic it is to characterise the conflict as an ancient one. Such claims are false and misleading. While some components of the conflict, specifically those related to religion, certainly have roots in ancient history, I would date the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as having started with the signing of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. There is an argument to be had for its beginning late in the 19th century with Herzl's specification of Palestine as the rightful refuge for European Jews and the beginning of periodical Jewish immigration that coincided with this. Specifying Palestine as the embodiment of political Zionism's objectives was undoubtedly a prelude to the ensuing conflict, but the Balfour Declaration turned this controversial objective into a tangible conflict. Thus the importance of the Balfour Declaration is twofold: it marked the beginning of the conflict in question, and it did so as the watershed moment for the future success of political Zionism. The final text of the Balfour Declaration read:

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

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[54] Pappe, 116-119.
[55] *Ibid.*

achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.[56]

The language of the Balfour Declaration was problematic for a number of reasons. For one thing, it reflects the kind of deeply imbedded cultural ignorance of Western nations to the Middle East. Rashid Khalidi describes the use of terms like "non-Jewish people" as opposed to "Arab Palestinians" as a "systematic omission of the indigenous Arab people from consideration of their own future," and implies that this type of "terminological slight of hand" would have profound future impacts on the understanding and treatment of the conflict.[57]

The term "national home" had its own problematic ambiguity, to the dismay of the Jews. The term is never explicitly clarified in the Declaration, leaving it open to interpretation. Fervent Zionists like Chaim Weizmann interpreted it to mean a Jewish state, gradually made to be "as Jewish as England was English" through a process of evolutionary Zionism.[58] While some Zionists still had strong misgivings with the idea of claiming Palestine as a Jewish nation, most American Zionists were optimistic about the Balfour Declaration.[59] But as Cleveland notes, the Palestinian elite who represented the Arab population commanded very little respect and influence on the international stage compared to the likes of Weizmann and other Zionist representatives.[60] They were, as Cleveland describes them, "provincial notables into whose hands was placed one of the

[56] Document 2.2: "Drafts and Final Text of the Balfour Declaration – Final Text, 31 October 1917," in Smith, Charles D, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*, 8th Edition, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins 2013), 94
[57] Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, 6
[58] Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 229
[59] Pappe, 179
[60] Cleveland and Bunton, 229

most intractable problems of the twentieth century," confronted with "British imperialism, Zionist determination,... [and] the demands of their own constituents ..."[61]

The Balfour Declaration also contradicted at least three other agreements regarding the division of the Ottoman territories after the war. The British corresponded with the Arabs, the French, and the Ottoman Turks between 1914 and 1916, suggesting, albeit ambiguously, to each of them separately that they would be given portions of Palestine.[62] Yet Palestine itself was an ambiguous area with uncertain borders when each of these agreements was made. Thus from the moment it was drawn up, the Balfour Declaration was a contradictory promise over an ambiguous territory that was inhabited by a people with a long established identification with the territory, and whose existence contradicted the implications put forth by these agreements that Palestine was somehow a territory without a significant community.

In light of these contradictions, the importance of having a representative at the Paris Peace Conferences was highlighted. Much like the other post-Ottoman Arab nations, the Palestinians had hoped to solidify a national identity after the war. However, the British neglected to include Palestine in the list of Arab countries deemed worthy of a right to self-determination, barring them from sending a representative to Paris.[63] To a large extent, this is where the Balfour Declaration became a real problem for the Palestinians. The Palestinians had some level of representation through Faysal, who sought to establish an Arab Kingdom of Greater Syria that would include Palestine as

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[61] Cleveland and Bunton, 229

[62] Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing 2010), 27,57,59-64, 239-241

[63] Pappe, 164-166, 172

"Southern Syria."[64] But better prepared and supported Zionists overshadowed Faysal's presence. Drawing on the suffering experienced by the Jews at the hands of anti-Semitism and an historical claim to Palestine dating back to the second century C.E., Nahum Sokolov and Chaim Wiezmann were highly influential at the Conferences. Weizmann was even able to persuade Faysal to express support for the political Zionists. His support was short-lived, but the timing nonetheless weakened the Palestinians' position.[65]

The problematic implications of the political Zionists' aims were not lost on the American leadership. At the end of the war President Woodrow Wilson remained wary of the aims of the political Zionists in light of their implications for the future of Palestine. Wilson hoped to hear the demands of all Arab nations in the post-Ottoman region, but the US Congress was overwhelmingly eager to return to prewar isolationism. This prevented any serious delegation between the US and its colonial allies, Britain and France, who were content to divide up the Ottoman Empire between them without any intention of giving the region's representatives a chance to participate in the peace talks.[66]

In an attempt to make up for the fact that the British and French refused to allow more representatives, a committee was appointed to visit Palestine "to acquaint themselves as fully as possible with the shade of opinion [in Palestine] ... with the social, racial, and economic conditions ... and to form as definite an opinion as the circumstances and the time at your disposal will permit, of the divisions of territory and

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[64] Pappe, 171
[65] *Ibid.*, 180
[66] Pappe, 177-178

assignment of mandates."[67] The committee comprised only two Americans, H.C. King, the president of Oberlin College, and C.R. Crane, a Chicago businessman. King and Crane recommended the United States or Britain be assigned a Mandate in Syria that would include Lebanon and Palestine as well as "a serious modification of the extreme Zionist program for Palestine of unlimited immigration of Jews, looking finally to making Palestine distinctly a Jewish State."[68] They also found that the non-Jewish population, which constituted 90% of Palestine's inhabitants, were "emphatically against the entire Zionist program" and suggested their feelings be honoured. The Commission criticised the Zionists' historical claim to Palestine, saying: "based on an occupation of two thousand years ago, [it] can hardly be seriously considered."[69] It also considered the problematic nature of a Jewish state in Palestine with regard to the holy sites in Jerusalem, questioning "whether the Jews could possibly seem to either Christians or Moslems proper guardians of the holy places, or custodians of the Holy Land as a whole."[70] The Commission states that such 'guardianship' would "intensify, with a certainty like fate, the anti-Jewish feeling both in Palestine and in all other portions of the world which look to Palestine as 'the Holy Land.'"[71] King and Crane concluded that Jewish immigration to Palestine should be limited, and that any plans to establish a distinctly Jewish state be abolished.[72]

This report, which might have had important implications for the Palestinians, was presented at the Paris Peace Conferences but essentially ignored. Britain and France

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[67] King-Crane Commission, 1919, "Palestine, Inquiry Commissions," Jewish Virtual Library: A Division of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_001 5_0_1543.html
[68] *Ibid.*
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] *Ibid.*

simply avoided taking it seriously, and the US Congress denounced it as irrelevant to the

role they hoped the Americans would play (or rather, avoid playing) in the postwar

territory divisions.[73] In hindsight, the failure of the King-Crane Commission to garner

any significant attention was a setback for the Palestinians, made worse by their absence

from the Paris Peace Conferences. As Pappe notes, this absence cost the Palestinians

important exposure to and experience in international affairs, and this lack of experience

would damage their effectiveness on the international stage in the future.[74] Additionally,

the Balfour Declaration had the effect of emboldening those Zionists that sought

complete control over Palestine, the establishment of an eventual majority, and

essentially the displacement of the Arab population that had lived and made up the

majority of the population there for over 1,400 years.[75] John Judis' summary of the

profound impact of the Balfour Declaration deserves to be quoted at length.

> "Some British officials thought of the Balfour Declaration as merely another wartime expediency... that could be disregarded or... modified once the war was over. But [for the Jews],... it turned what might have been a noble failure into a rousing success. [For the] Palestinian Arabs, it turned what might have been a historical nuisance... into a challenge to their very identity and self-determination."[76]

This weakened position of the Palestinians in terms of their nationalist objectives

was made worse under the British Mandate of Palestine that came into effect in 1920.

The United States was generally uninvolved during this period, but would have to deal

with the consequences of these formative years of the conflict that deeply divided the

Arabs and the Jews.

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[73] Pappe, 185-186
[74] *Ibid.*, 181
[75] Judis, 5, 63
[76] *Ibid.*, 61

In 1923 the terms of the Balfour Declaration were incorporated into the Mandate, as well as the recognition of Hebrew as the official language. These factors served to undermine the Palestinians' nationalist objectives while at the same time bolster those of the Zionists. The Jews in Palestine (or *Yishuv*) were granted an electoral system with representation, their own economy and army, and increased land ownership. While limited in scope (amounting to about 7% of Palestine by 1947), land transfers from Arab to Jewish ownership had a "demoralising effect on the Palestinian Arab national movement."[77] The Arabs enjoyed little of the same economic and political prospects as the *Yishuv*. They were forced to compete with the *Yishuv* for work and land, or as was more often the case, were pushed out entirely and replaced by Jewish residents. Thousands of Arabs, whose land was their livelihood, were forced from their homes without compensation.[78] In 1924, the US passed an anti-immigration act, which resulted in a gradual influx of Jews immigrating to Palestine, exaggerating the already polarised situation. Over-eager Zionists, exemplified by the right-wing movement Beitar, only provoked these matters.[79]

Arab grievances exploded into violence four times over the course of the British Mandate. The 1929 revolt resulted in a British commission recommendation, the Passfield White Paper, to change the land and immigration policies in order to address Arab grievances. The Zionists vigorously opposed this recommendation and managed to thwart it.[80] In the following years, the situation for the Arabs only worsened. Things came to a head again in 1936, resulting in the Peel Commission, which suggested that

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[77] Martin Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, Sept 2013), 28, DOI: 10.1093/actrade/9780199603930.001.0001
[78] Smith, 123
[79] Pappe, 239
[80] Smith, 130

hostilities between the Jews and Arabs had become unresolvable, and recommended Palestine be partitioned into two separate independent Jewish and Arab states.[81] The Zionists were divided on their reception of the partition, but the Arabs rejected it, fearing any partition of territory would result in their being pushed out by Jewish settlements, and tensions continued to mount.

The most violent Arab revolt started in September 1937 and lasted until January 1939. This time, the British proposed in the White Paper of 1939, the creation of "a Jewish national home in an independent Palestinian state."[82] Jewish immigration would be restricted for five years, then discontinued unless authorised by the Palestinian Arab majority, and unlimited land transfer to Jews would be restricted to certain coastal areas.[83] Both the Arabs and the Jews rejected the White Paper. It was too little, too late from the Arabs' perspective and the Zionists were opposed to the restrictions on immigration.[84]

An ironic, result of the implementation of the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist agenda was that the Arabs began to adopt the very European anti-Semitism that early Zionists sought to challenge with the establishment of a Jewish state. The British did their part to convince the Arabs that the Zionists were a non-threat by referring to the language of the Balfour Declaration. But the protection of "non-Jewish *civil and religious*" (as opposed to, say, national) rights, in all its ambiguity, was unsatisfactory in this sense. As Judis notes, this was asking the Arabs to ignore the obvious fact, and implications that

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[81] Smith, 135
[82] *Ibid.*, 143
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid., 143-144*

came with it, that the Jews sought to create a purely Jewish state.[85] The Mandate years fostered significant anti-Jewish and anti-British sentiments among the Arabs, and the *Yishuv* were equally displeased with the British presence by this point. These sentiments contributed to the end of British Mandate Palestine.

If World War One had the effect of bolstering sympathy toward the plight of European Jews, World War Two spawned the same effect with exponentially more weight in light of the Holocaust. The impact was profound in the United States, where American Jewish support for the establishment of a Jewish state rose drastically. Membership of the Zionist Organisation of American and Hadassah, the two largest American Zionist groups, more than quadrupled between 1935 and 1945, to a total of 280,000 members.[86] In 1943, prominent Zionist leader Abba Hillel Silver gave an emotional speech to over 500 delegates at the Waldorf Astoria, pushing for the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. He emboldened his argument by drawing on the indescribable horrors of the Nazi genocide, and decorated it with allusions to the Jews' historical connection to the area. The resolution was overwhelmingly approved, and Silver's vision provided the platform for the future of American Zionism, which would be "…based on the relentless pursuit of ethno-religious nationalism, which was justified by centuries of persecution culminating in the Holocaust." [87]

Christians, Protestants in particular, also joined in the political Zionists' cause in the wake of the Holocaust. As the situation in Palestine fluctuated over the next few decades, so did support from the Christian community. For example, the existence of the state of Israel posed theological challenges for Protestants, whose support arguably

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[85] Judis, 77
[86] *Ibid.,* 196
[87] *Ibid.,* 176-177

stemmed from "a sense of humanitarianism, Christian guilt, or political pragmatism."[88]

Yet even as these challenges emerged, other Christian denominations found their own

reasons to back the Zionists. For example, evangelicals were enthusiastic about the

implications of a Jewish state for the millenialist understanding of the final salvation.

Their support is noteworthy because religious organisations such as the American

Christian Palestine Committee were influential forces with powerful political connections

and strong leaderships.[89]

In light of this, the United States' incremental trend toward supporting political

Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel should be clear. This trend,

coupled with the Palestinians' inability to make headway on the international stage,

should serve as the context in which a new "pattern of surrender" to the political Zionists'

objectives emerged in the United States. This "pattern of surrender" refers to the bowing

of United States Presidents to Zionist and Israeli pressure, starting with Harry Truman.[90]

This does not mean that Truman supported the Zionist cause. He rejected state religions

for their provocative nature, was highly sceptical of Zionism, and hoped to see a

federated/binational solution to the situation in Palestine. Truman's statements in his

diary are revealing in his thoughts toward the state of the conflict in 1947:

> The Jews, I find are very, very selfish. They care not how many Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks get murdered or mistreated as D[isplaced] P[ersons] as long as [they] get special treatment. ... Put an underdog on top and [his

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[88] Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals and Israel,* (New York University Press 2012), 296
[89] Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace,* xi-xii
[90] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis,* 124; Khalidi refers specifically to the patron-client relationship between the Americans and the Israelis during the Cold War, noting that the client often got more than the patron. The concept is widely applicable to the US-Israeli relationship, starting with this pattern of surrender.

name] makes no difference... he goes haywire. I've found very, very few who remember their past condition when prosperity comes.[91]

Failure to turn these qualms into policy cannot be blamed on a lack of effort. Locally, Hillel Silver relentlessly and persuasively campaigned on behalf of political Zionism, and the pressure to appeal to the American Christian communities in the upcoming 1948 election made his unsympathetic view of the political Zionists difficult to advocate strongly. Internationally, a complete lack of cooperation between the British, Zionists, and Arabs hindered Truman's ability to mediate.[92] Furthermore, the official proposal of the UN's 1947 Partition Plan, while attempting to stick to a viable two-state solution, was enormously flawed. Its borders were drawn with little consideration for the implications this division would have on the population. Many areas with a majority Arab population would suddenly become portions of a Jewish state. The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) Plan of Partition that served as the basis for the approved partition proposal also ironically stated that "it would be to the disadvantage of the Jewish state if the Arab state should be in a financially precarious and poor economic position."[93] At the same time, the plan awarded the proposed Jewish state the most economically viable areas of the territory.

The Palestinians flatly rejected any division of territory, partly stemming from a view that the Jews would simply push them out anyway, a fear that was certainly not unfounded. In February 1948, a group of Zionist leaders and military commanders

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[91] Harry S. Truman Papers, *entry on July 21st* in "President Harry S. Truman's 1947 Diary Book, 1947 Diary and Manual of the Real Estate Board of New York, Inc." Transcribed by Raymond H. Geselbracht, Education and Academic Coordinator, Truman Presidential Museum and Library. Harry S. Truman Library and Museum http://www.trumanlibrary.org /diary/transcript.html

[92] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 211

[93] Document 4.2: "UNSCOP's Plan of Partition with Economic Union" in Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents.* 8th Edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 210-212.

evicted five villages by force as part of a broader plan to expel the Palestinians from any territory they deemed to be part of the Jewish state.[94] Guided by future Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, "Plan Dalet," as it was called, was essentially "a systematic blueprint for the ethnic cleansing of most of Palestine."[95] Meanwhile, the Arab leadership had to "vindicate the Palestinians' moral position at a time when world public opinion tied the fate of the Holocaust survivors... to the solution of the problem of Palestine."[96] In the end, with the support of both the Soviets and the Americans, a Jewish state was created on May 14th, 1948.

The establishment of the state of Israel was greatest Zionist success since the Balfour Declaration, emboldening their cause as never before and solidifying the Zionists' presence in the region. It was an equal tragedy for the Palestinians for the same reasons, and with the added tragedies of al-Nakba, which, while both the Jews and the Arabs committed atrocities, resulted in approximately 750,000 Palestinian fleeing or being expelled from their homes.[97] The new state of Israel took up 78% of was previously Palestine. While some Israelis still maintain that the Arabs were not forced out and thus should not be considered refugees, many scholars no longer question that "the goals of Plan Dalet were pursued, whether officially declared or not."[98]

The day after Israel was born, the first Arab-Israeli War broke out as Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq attacked the new state. With their superior military, the Israelis defeated the Arabs and ended up with 20% more land than the partition had allotted them. Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip, and Jordan captured East Jerusalem

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[94] Pappe, 330
[95] *Ibid.*, 331
[96] *Ibid.*, 332
[97] Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, 56
[98] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 118

and the West Bank. The Palestinians, hundreds of thousands more of whom were now refugees, got "official sympathy."[99] The aftermath of the 1948 war did give new form to the Palestinian's nationalist identity through a common struggle to enforce their right to return to the conquered lands,[100] but the "refugee question" has only worsened and become more insurmountable over time. It remains unresolved despite its being central to the conflict ever since. Arieh Kovachi claims there were a total of 1, 317, 749 Palestinian refugees by 1966.[101] 1948 was a turning point of the conflict in the sense that it had a new central characteristic. Instead of centering around the territory of Mandatory Palestine, it would now be centered around conflicting nationalisms and a new Jewish state. The Israelis were now in an exponentially better position than the Palestinian Arabs in terms of their nationalist objectives, and they would do everything in their power to protect their new state from hostile Arab neighbours. American support would be instrumental in this sense. Over the next few decades, partly shaped by the balancing act of the Cold War, the Americans would take an increasingly pro-Israeli stance.

Khalidi argues, "in its current configuration, [the Arab-Israeli] conflict was born, developed and largely shaped in the Cold war era." [102] The Middle East's geographic location, historical use as a passageway for East-West transit, and valuable gas and oil reserves were immeasurable strategic assets for the Soviets and Americans during this period.[103] After 1955, arms supply became a crucial component of the US-Soviet contest

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[99] Smith, 224

[100] Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict,* 81

[101] Arieh J. Kovachi, "The US, Britain and the Palestinian Refugee Question after the Six Day War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48: 4 (2012): 543, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00 263206.2012.682575 (Accessed February 27, 2015)

[102] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis,* 114

[103] *Ibid.,* 108

in the Middle East.[104] Israel was a desirable ally in this sense, but the Eisenhower administration still held qualms about aligning too closely with them for fear that it might push the Arab nationalists toward the Soviets.[105] At this point, France was Israel's primary arms supplier and both they and Britain maintained relatively strong influence in the region. Some of this changed when Israel, Britain and France, invaded Egypt in an attempt to maintain access to the Suez Canal, which Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had recently nationalised. Eisenhower, who wanted desperately to keep Egypt out of the Soviet sphere of influence, was furious about the invasion. Britain and France had effectively destroyed any image they had maintained about neutrality in the region, and Israel had overstepped. The event had the effect of confirming the US and the Soviets as the prevailing powers in the region.[106]

Compared to the tumultuous decades surrounding the founding of the state of Israel, the period from 1957-1967 was relatively quiet in the region in terms of military confrontation.[107] Nonetheless, this was a formative decade for US-Israeli relations, centered predominantly around Israel's nuclear program. President John F. Kennedy adopted a stern non-proliferation policy with regard to nuclear weaponry. By contrast, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was eager to make Israel a nuclear power as a protective measure against increasingly hostile Arab neighbours. In the shadow of the Nazi genocide, Ben-Gurion was perpetually concerned that the Arabs were a threat to Israel's existence, and that the only way to combat this threat was to obtain nuclear

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[104] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 118-120
[105] *Ibid.*, 116-117
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] Sand, *The Invention of the Land of Israel*, 240

supremacy in the region.[108] As early as 1958, Israel was in the process of constructing a nuclear center at Dimona through a nuclear program that to this day remains shrouded in secrecy.[109] Its existence challenged JFK's dedication to non-proliferation (which he considered important if the region was to avoid another Arab-Israeli war),[110] leading to tensions between the US and Israel that would shape the future of their relationship.

While assured by Israel that Dimona was a site of nuclear research for peaceful purposes only, the US adamantly requested visitation/inspection rights to Dimona on an annual basis.[111] Both countries wanted to avoid provocation of the surrounding Arab states, particularly Egypt, who the US feared would turn to the Soviets if rumours of an Israeli nuclear weapons project got out.[112] But Ben-Gurion delayed the visit as much as possible by drawing on the preoccupations of domestic political affairs and religious holidays. When Ben-Gurion did finally agree to annual visitation rights, he placed restrictions on the visits that would make it almost impossible for the inspectors to draw any concrete conclusions other than those supporting Israel's claim to entirely peaceful motives.[113]

In July 1962, Egypt conducted ballistic missile demonstrations that greatly impacted Israel's defense authorities, convincing Ben-Gurion even further of the importance of Israel's military superiority.[114] Meanwhile, JFK's dedication to non-

[108] Avner Cohen, *The Worst Kept Secret: Israel's Bargain with the Bomb*, (Columbia University Press: New York), 4-6 (Googleplay e-book preview) https://play.google. com/books/reader?printsec=frontcover& output=reader&id=oaNXMDn-OekC&pg=GBS.PR1
[109] *Ibid.*, 42
[110] *Ibid.*, 44
[111] *Ibid.*
[112] Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, (Columbia University Press: New York 1998), 99-100, (Googleplay e-book) https://play.google .com/books/reader?printsec=frontco ver&output=reader&id=RGcwET30-noC&pg=GBS.PP1
[113] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb,* 98-99, 182
[114] *Ibid.*,108-109

proliferation was exaggerated by a stalemate with the Soviets over the conditions of its

policy and by the Cuban Missile Crisis. The CIA also released a memorandum

highlighting the dangers of Israel obtaining nuclear weapons, summarizing that

"However much the US expressed disapproval for Israel's achievement, it would be

difficult to avoid an increased tendency for the political confrontation in the Middle East

to take the form of the Bloc and Arabs against Israel and its friends in the West."[115] The

memorandum references Israel's already clear military superiority, arguing that rather

than taking a more "moderate and conciliatory posture" toward the Arabs, gaining

nuclear weapons would cause Israel to "seek to exploit the psychological advantage of its

nuclear capability... [,] compound Arab frustrations[, and] promote disunity in the Arab

world."[116]

Kennedy reacted to these developments by having a memorandum (NSAM 231)

sent on March 26, 1963 requesting the US be allowed to take "every feasible measure to

improve [America's] intelligence on the Israeli nuclear program as well as other Israeli

and UAR advanced weapons programs and to arrive at a firmer evaluation of their

import."[117] The memorandum urged that a thorough inspection of Dimona be organised

as soon as possible, but as before, Ben-Gurion resisted this urgency and found reason to

delay.

Approximately one month later on April 17th, Egypt, Iraq and Syria signed a

proclamation to unite their militaries in a joint effort to liberate Palestine. The

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[115] "Consequences of Israeli Acquisition of Nuclear Capability (March 8, 1963)," *Central Intelligence Agency: FOIA Collection*, Document Number 0000862942), http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/89801/DOC_0000862942.pdf (accessed Tuesday, March 31, 2015).
[116] *Ibid.*
[117] "National Security Action Memorandum No. 231: Middle Eastern Nuclear Capabilities (March 26, 1963)," *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/o9tKrOeAA0CRn-2Az_yETw.aspx (accessed March 30, 2015)

proclamation itself was not a particularly transformative move among the Arabs, and

Israel's foreign minister, Golda Meir and the senior staff saw no reason to take it too

seriously.[118] By contrast, Ben-Gurion wrote to Kennedy claiming the proclamation could

spell end of Israel, comparing the proposed threat to the Holocaust. He requested a joint

US-Soviet effort to "guarantee the territorial integrity and security of all Middle Eastern

states...[and] suggested cutting off assistance to states threatening their neighbours or

refusing to recognise their existence."[119]

Of course, in light of Israel's undeniable military superiority, Kennedy saw no

reason for the Prime Minister's panic, and informed him as such. Kennedy pressured

Israel increasingly aggressively, and was willing to threaten America's commitment and

support for Israel if Ben-Gurion continued to shroud Israel's nuclear progress in

secrecy.[120] Ben-Gurion found himself faced with the decision to proceed with the nuclear

program and obtain nuclear defense at the cost of American support, or a continued

American commitment to Israeli security at the cost of an independent nuclear

program.[121] This standoff between Ben-Gurion and Kennedy was cut short by Ben-

Gurion's resignation in June followed by Kennedy's assassination in November. Their

respective successors were Levi Eshkol and Lyndon B. Johnson.

President Johnson did not share Kennedy's stringent adherence to nuclear non-

proliferation, nor his willingness to compromise America's commitment to Israel at the

risk of sparking an American-Israeli crisis. Similarly, Eshkol was more concerned with

domestic rather than international politics and was initially more accommodating to

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[118] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 111
[119] *Ibid.*, 112
[120] *Ibid.*, 126
[121] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb,* 120-122

Kennedy's stance. But it was up to Johnson to implement these requests, and he was not particularly enthusiastic in light of the upcoming 1964 election. The compromise was that "Israel would not be the first state to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East, while the United States would provide Israel with sophisticated conventional armaments so that Israel could defend itself without recourse to nuclear weapons."[122]

By 1966, the US had supplied Israel with hundreds of M-48 tanks and 48 A-4 Skyhawks, and Israel maintained a high level of secrecy over their nuclear program. It is not as though the American visits to Dimona did not yield suspicion, but Johnson granted Israel enough control over the visits that any suspicious conclusions drawn by the Americans could only be tentative.[123] Thus Israel – with the help of Johnson's less confrontational approach - continued to frustrate the Americans' attempts to mediate in the region, and the Americans were less and less enthusiastic about how much pressure they were willing to put on Israel.

The US-Israeli Alliance

After Israeli forces were forced to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and sacrifice their access to the Straits of Tiran through Sharm al-Shayhk following the Suez debacle, Ben-Gurion had promised to interpret any future Egyptian blockading of the area as a justification for war.[124] In this context, a provocative decision by Nasser to mass troops to the Sinai and blockade the Straits of Tiran in May 1967 led unsurprisingly to the outbreak of the Third Arab-Israeli War, better known as the Six Day War. For a war that lasted only six days, the consequences were immeasurable. With regard to this essay, the two

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[122] Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 187-188
[123] *Ibid.*, 182
[124] Smith, 246-7

most important outcomes were Israel's striking, though not entirely unexpected,[125] occupation of the Sinai, the Golan Heights and the West Bank, and the United States' response to their colossal victory, marking a drastic turning point in the United States' relationship with the Israelis.

As a result of Israel's territorial gains, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, many of whom were refugees from the '48 war, now had to flee to the East Bank in Jordan.[126] In the United States, the victory was greeted with tremendous support from the public.[127] It was interpreted as a victory of democracy over communism, which in light of the Americans' controversial involvement in Vietnam, was of crucial importance to administration's public image. Thus the United States gladly embraced the war as a proxy victory over the Soviets, and publically announced their support for Israel.[128] Members of the Johnson administration were more outwardly supportive of Israel than any previous administration.[129]

Smith argues that, at least at this juncture, America's sudden explicit alliance with Israel was more a grasp at public support than an actual change of position. He states that the Johnson administration still secretly took a more moderate stance, condemning Israel for annexing Jerusalem.[130] The point here is not how the President felt in secrecy, however. As we have seen, Truman's qualms with the Zionist cause were more or less buried with the pressure of external factors. The difference now was not the administration's private feelings toward the conflict, but their outward approach. The

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[125] Kenneth Pollack, "Air Power in the Six Day War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 8, no.3 (2005): 471-503, doi:10.1080/01402390500137382. http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/abs/ 10.1080/01402390500137382. (Accessed February 24, 2015), 477-479.
[126] Kovachi, "The US, Britain and the Palestinian Refugee Question after the Six Day War," 537, 543
[127] Smith, 301
[128] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 122
[129] *Ibid.*, 122
[130] Smith, 290

Johnson administration publically supported Israel, something the American leadership had not yet done so explicitly.

The implications of this were huge, exposing unwillingness on the part of the Americans to put any serious pressure on Israel. This is best demonstrated by the American response to the *USS Liberty* debacle. On June 8th, Israeli planes and torpedo boats sank the American intelligence-gathering ship, the *USS Liberty*, off the coast of the Sinai near Israel.[131] Controversy remains over whether or not the incident was an accident. The Israelis assured the Americans it was, while others hold suspicion to this day that it was an intentional attack to hide information about Israel's plans to move against Syria,[132] or perhaps details of their nuclear project.[133] Much is still unknown, but recent research has revealed that the pilots were ordered to attack any ship that wasn't Israeli, while the torpedo boats attacked after the ship had already been identified as American.[134] The only significant retaliation for this event was American demands for an investigation, which yielded largely inconclusive results.[135] The Americans accepted Israel's apology for an "accident" that resulted in the deaths of 34 American crew members aboard the *Liberty*.[136] Despite the explosive nature of the incident, there were virtually no repercussions for the Israelis.[137] Kennedy was the last president willing to pressure Israel and jeopardize the American-Israeli relationship. The Johnson administration clearly was not.

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[131] Smith, 285
[132] *Ibid.*, 285
[133] Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East,* Translated by Jessica Cohen, (New York: Metropolitan Books 2007), 386
[134] Smith, 285
[135] *Ibid.*, 568-570
[136] *Ibid.*, 285
[137] Segev, *1967*, 569-570

The Johnson administration's indisposition toward confrontation with Israel was further exemplified by negotiations over Resolution 242, which has "remained the official basis of negotiating efforts [between the Arabs and Israelis] to the present."[138] The resolution strove to encourage a basis for peace talks, but followed the trend of troubling terminology that characterised the Balfour Declaration. An early draft called for Israel to withdraw from "the territories" gained in 1967, which was changed to just "territories" in the final draft, an intentional omission to allow a fluid interpretation based on the fact that Israel refused to withdraw from all the territory it had taken.[139] Israel wanted secure boundaries set, but felt this required "significant rather than minor revisions of the 1949 armistice lines."[140]

The Arabs were adamant about a complete Israeli withdraw, supported by the resolution's assertion of "the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war."[141] Founded in 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) charter called for a Palestinian Arab state on all of Mandate Palestine and refused to recognise the legitimacy of the state of Israel. Before 1967, its effectiveness was hampered by subordination to Nasser and conflicting interests with King Husayn over the West Bank, thus the PLO struggled under the tutelage of the Arab states.[142] As in 1948, however, the Israeli victory in 1967 similarly gave new form to the Palestinians' nationalist identity. The war weakened the structure of the PLO, including the Arab states' control over it, allowing Yassir Arafat and his own Palestinian nationalist group - the Fatah - to take over. By

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[138] Smith, 305
[139] Document 7.1: "UN Security Council Resolution 242, November 26 1967" Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents.* 8th Edition, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 337
[140] Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* 306
[141] Document 7.1: "UN Security Council Resolution 242, November 26 1967" in Smith, 337
[142] Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict,* 81-82

embracing armed struggle against the Israelis, the PLO under Arafat was more effective at gaining international recognition for their cause, but as far as the United States' role in the conflict is concerned, this increased effectiveness by a Palestinian nationalist organisation came at a time when the Americans had already appeared to have lost interest in prioritising mediation in the conflict. When Resolution 242 was approved and the negotiating climate threatened to demand further confrontation by the US, they withdrew from active involvement.[143]

Not only that, but the Americans drastically escalated their armament of the Israelis with little consideration as to the impact this would have on future negotiations. Clearly, "superpower one-upmanship" was more important at this juncture than aggressively pursuing the implementation of Resolution 242.[144] Any remaining qualms the American President had with Israel were made irrelevant by his refusal to confront the Israelis, starting with his treatment of the nuclear project and exemplified by the *USS Liberty* debacle and the negotiations over Resolution 242.

Johnson did not run for re-election in 1968. The marked transition in the American-Israeli relationship that began with Johnson would inevitably be solidified with the next presidential administration, as both election candidates declared full support for Israel. Richard Nixon was elected in 1968, after which point American support for the Israelis would not only now be publicly declared, it would also unapologetically reject diplomatic initiatives toward the conflict.

The Nixon administration experienced crippling internal divisions as a result of an intense rivalry between national security advisor Henry Kissinger and Secretary of State

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[143] Smith, 307
[144] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 129-131

William Rogers that divided the National Security Council and the State Department. Rogers advocated for a nearly full Israeli withdraw and a mutual recognition of sovereignty between the Arabs and Israelis, but Kissinger wanted complete control of the negotiations before taking a diplomatic approach.[145] The Rogers-Kissinger rivalry worked to the Israelis' advantage by stalling Rogers' diplomatic initiatives,[146] allowing Israel to take advantage of a stalemate in the Arab-Israeli negotiations that lasted until 1973. During this time, Israel established settlements in the territories still technically under negotiation, despite Foreign Affairs Minister Abba Eban's promise that Israel had no colonial aspirations.[147]

Despite these enormously provocative actions by Israel that exacerbated the already catastrophic refugee problem, the Americans remained disinterested in the pursuit of Resolution 242. Then when Egypt and Syria launched attacks on Israel that started the 1973 war, three things became glaringly clear. One was the "limits on the capabilities of the superpowers to restrain their clients."[148] The second was the Americans' and Soviets' exploitation of the conflict to gain an advantage at the expense of the other. The third was an exclamation mark on the priorities exposed in the Johnson administration; Cold War considerations trumped peace negotiation between the Arabs and Israelis.[149] Rather than being treated as a belligerent in an increasingly tumultuous conflict, Israel became the preeminent American ally against communism, and both Kissinger and Nixon advocated for arms shipments to Israel despite the accelerating drain of the Vietnam War, and despite the implications this had for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The US now

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[145] Smith, 302
[146] *Ibid.*, 312-313
[147] Smith, 303
[148] Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 127
[149] *Ibid.*, 129-131

effectively acted more as Israel's lawyer than a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Conclusion

This American-Israeli relationship has had a profound impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ever since. In the aftermath of the post-1973 stalemate and the United States' complete alignment with the Israelis, the Palestinians were almost completely pushed out of the picture, despite their centrality to the conflict. This was exemplified in 1979 when Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty after talks sponsored by the United States did not include the Palestinians. It also effectively took Israel's only real military threat from the Arabs out of the picture.[150] Despite having their nationalist objectives shattered and their livelihoods destroyed by the colonisation of their land and the ethnic cleansing of their people, the Palestinians were simply absorbed into the broader Arab-Israeli conflict as if their distinct Palestinian identity no longer mattered.

Since the late 19th century, the United States has done little to advance the Palestinian cause and much to advance that of the Zionists, and later, the Israelis. A lack of acknowledgement of a specifically Palestinian identity has plagued Zionist and American understandings of the region since the earliest origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through the late 19th and early 20th century, rather than being exposed and reconciled with the emergence of a Jewish national identity, the Palestinians' identity was effectively ignored and then suppressed in favour the Zionists' nationalist objectives.

With a predisposed sympathy towards the Zionist cause, the United States contributed to this process by bolstering the aims of the Zionist movement in the first half

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[150] Lawrence Wright, *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin and Sadat at Camp David,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), xiii-xiv

39

of the 20th century, during which time the Zionists took every advantage to undermine the Palestinians' nationalist objectives. Between 1917 and 1947, Zionist fervour and British self-interest aggravated the conflicting interests of two national identities that were never as inherently contradictory as they were treated. The ensuing conflict nonetheless pitted these two identities against each other, causing unnecessary violence and turmoil in the region. While the American public remained largely sympathetic toward the Zionists, the American leadership was sceptical of their agenda. This had little impact on the overall conflict, however, as this scepticism never amounted to anything other than moderate expressions of disapproval that were lost in overwhelming political influence of the Zionists on the international stage, and pressure to support them on the domestic front.

The United States then supported the establishment of the state of Israel. The success of the Israeli state came at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians' lives and livelihoods, and the Israelis became perpetually nervous about the hostility of the surrounding Arab nations and frequently drew on memories of the Holocaust to justify these fears. Between 1947 and 1967, the United States at least attempted to act as a mediator, but were unwilling to confront Israel to any significant degree in light of the precarious balancing act of the Cold War. In 1967, however, the American leadership publically announced staunch support for the Israelis as peace in the Israel/Palestine region became a background priority in favour of the Soviet-American Cold War rivalry. The Israeli-American relationship formed after 1967 has had a profound impact on the overall Israeli-Palestinian conflict ever since, not the least of which has been the reduction of the Palestinians' grievances to only one component of a broader Arab conflict.

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