

A Word of Truth on Behalf of the Palestinian Marginalized and Dispossessed: Root Causes of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

by Mark Thomsen

The August '06 Israeli-Lebanon crisis illustrates once again that most U.S. persons including the President, the Congress, the media and the people are overwhelmingly sympathetic to Israel. Most U. S. citizens live in a pro-Israel bubble that is oblivious to facts relating to the origins of the nation of Israel and the profound effect that that history has upon contemporary Middle East events. Through the recent news coverage of the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, Palestine and Arab spokespersons repeatedly stated that the primary cause of the conflict was the "occupation." It is imperative that we become aware of what is meant by the "occupation" or the usurpation of the Palestinian homeland. Otherwise we cannot understand Palestinian and Arab anger.

I. Palestine: One Land, Two Communities

Dr. Schlomo Ben Ami, former foreign minister of Israel and negotiator at the 2000 Camp David peace talks reports, "When David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the State of Israel and its first prime-minister, arrived in Palestine in 1906, the country consisted of 700,000 inhabitants, 55,000 of which were Jews and only 550 could be defined as Zionist pioneers."¹ These facts indicate that at the beginning of the 20th century Palestine was a Palestinian-Arab society and had been for centuries. Palestine had not been a Jewish nation or region since 135 A.D. That is 1,865 years. In the seventh century it became part of the Muslim world and for over 400 years (1500-1900) it was included within a province of the Islamic Ottoman Empire. The present Palestinian-Israeli conflict has as its basic cause the fact that no one ever asked 700,000 Palestinian Arabs whether they wished a Jewish nation planted in their own territory!

It is constantly reiterated by American people, press and politicians that Israel has a right to defend itself and use every means possible to defeat the enemy, Hezbollah, which threatens to drive them from the Israeli countryside. What most Americans don't realize is that the Arabs in Hezbollah and the Palestinians in Hamas fight for the same reasons. When they have been driven from their own land many of them will continue to fight until they have retrieved it. It may take a century or two but they are committed to the conviction that Israel ultimately will not violate the Arab and Palestinian homeland.

David Ben-Gurion understood this from the beginning. In a speech given in 1938 he stated: "I want to destroy first of all the illusion among our comrades that the [Arab] terror [opposition to Israeli initiatives in Palestine] is a matter of a few gangs, financed from abroad... We are not facing terror but war... This is an active resistance by Palestinians to what they regard as usurpation of their homeland by Jews - that's why they fight... If some Arabs get tired, others will replace them. A people which fights against

the usurpation of its land will not tire so easily...politically we are the aggressors and they defend themselves."²

One often hears that the Palestinians of Hezbollah and Hamas are radicals who will not compromise. For example, the Hamas Charter (August 1988) reads under Article Six: "The Islamic Movement is a distinct Palestinian Movement which owes its loyalty to Allah, derives from Islam its way of life and strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine."³ Unquestionably however, the Hamas document is a response to the Likud Party Platform of 1977 that reflected similar thoughts of many Israelis, particularly West Bank settlers, when it rejected any two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli crisis:

"The right of the Jewish people to the land of Israel is eternal and indisputable and is linked with the right to security and peace; therefore Judea and Samaria will not be handed to any foreign administration; between the Sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty."⁴

How was it historically possible for a land inhabited by 700,000 Arabs in 1906 to become a land where today 5.5 million Jews claim the right to exist as a Jewish state? How was it possible for a Palestinian people to be marginalized and dispossessed?

II Israel: A Colonial Imperialistic Project

The official political process was initiated in 1917 (less than 100 years ago) by an imperial edict of the British Empire in the form of a letter of declaration from the British Foreign Minister, Arthur Balfour, to Lord Rothschild, a liaison to the Zionist Federation (a Jewish movement dedicated to return to Palestine):

"His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the 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 [over 90% of the inhabitants] in Palestine"⁵

In an era of European colonialism, which in 1918 controlled 85% of the globe, the British Empire could dismiss the rights of local populations around the empire. Lord Balfour wrote in a letter of August 1919, "In Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country."⁶

The arrogance of the British Government (His Majesty's) was challenged by an official American report from the King-Crane Commission which in 1919 reported to President Woodrow Wilson. Wilson, as the present President Bush, had dreams of democratizing the world - the world should no longer be dominated by European colonial powers. The King-Crane Commission stated that their surveys of Arab populations found that 90% of the Palestinian population opposed the Balfour proposal and over 70% of the wider Syrian population opposed the British proposal. The Commission reported that the intrusion of the Jewish population into Palestine would demand the use of military force to defeat the local population. The Commission further stated that

"Decisions, requiring armies to carry them out, are sometimes necessary, but they are surely not gratuitously to be taken in the interests of a serious injustice [non-democratic process]. For the initial claim, often submitted by Zionist representatives, that they have a "right" to Palestine, based upon an occupation of two thousand years ago, can hardly be seriously considered" ⁷.

The American democratic vision was rejected by the Imperial-Colonial powers of Europe and as a consequence the League of Nations in 1920 assigned the responsibility (mandate) for Palestine to Great Britain. In doing so, the League of Nations (the U.S. was not a member) wrote: "... recognition has hereby been given to the historical connexion of the Jewish people with Palestine and to the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country" ⁸. It is ironic that the State of Israel and the United States today continually discount the role of the United Nations when it was the preceding body, the League of Nations, which contrary to all Arab-Palestinian democratic dreams, imperialistically created the possibility of the future Jewish State of Israel.

III. Israel: A Christian-Zionist Project

Many American are aware of the devout support of the State of Israel by the American Christian Evangelical Fundamentalists. Few are aware that the same Biblical theology that inspires the contemporary *Left Behind* novels inspired Lord Balfour as he wrote the Balfour Declaration in 1917. Lord Balfour was a member of the "Brethren," a Christian community deeply influenced by John Nelson Darby, the father of contemporary visions of Armageddon, the end of the world and Israel's role in the end-times. As Darby read the Bible, he believed that God worked in history and that God's history was divided into seven different epochs or *dispensations*, beginning with creation and ending with Christ's thousand-year reign of peace. As history moves toward the great millennial reign of peace, Darby posited that the nation of Israel, destroyed by the Romans between 70-135 A.D., would be restored. Diaspora Jews from all corners of the globe would return to Palestine, fulfilling what he thought were Biblical promises found in the books of Thessalonians, Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel, etc. The restoration of Israel will prepare history for two comings of Christ: first, he will appear in the heavens and "born again" Christians will be swept up to meet him in the heavens (I Thess. 4:15, the Rapture); and second, after 7 years of chaos and torment (the Great Tribulation) wherein two-thirds of all Jews will die, Christ will return a second time to reign on earth. ⁹ The Armageddon vision was popularized by Hal Lindsey in the book, *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (1970) and recently in the *Left Behind* novels written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Lord Balfour not only accepted this new view of the Bible, he also determined to help God make it happen.

True believers in this Biblical interpretation of scripture were thrilled when Jewish refugees returned to Palestine and then in 1948 declared their independence. That excitement reached a peak in 1967 when Israeli troops occupied the West Bank and "liberated" the temple wall in Jerusalem. Evangelical Fundamentalists who believed that the future of Judaism was either annihilation or conversion to Christ enthusiastically

supported Israel because only a Jewish state and a temple reconstruction would make it possible for Christ's first coming and the rapture of born-again Christians. Fundamentalist leaders like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson claimed to speak for millions as they advocated a fanatic support of Israel by the U.S.A. In reward for this political and financial support the Prime Minister of Israel, Menachen Begin, gave Rev. Jerry Falwell the Jabotinsky Award from the government of Israel. (Jabotinsky was the father of a radical Zionism which would militarily drive the Palestinians from their homeland and create a great Israel that included both sides of the Jordan River.) The Israeli government also presented Jerry Falwell with his own private jet. Most absurdly, Hal Lindsey was appointed a Middle East consultant to the Pentagon.¹⁰

It is hard to believe that in the 20th and 21st centuries American theology and foreign policy could be permeated by this new, ill-conceived and heretical Biblical interpretation that totally separated visions of Israel's future from the Biblical prophetic dreams of justice and peace.

However, this article cannot incorporate a critique of Evangelical Fundamentalism but only point to its profound impact on the origins and contemporary U.S. support of the State of Israel. This theology played a role in Lord Balfour's letter of 1917 and continues to play a powerful role in contemporary American politics. President George Bush is a believer and unquestionably believes he is about God's business of protecting God's chosen people, the nation of Israel. Christian Zionism terrorizes contemporary Palestinian Christian people who are committed to a non-violent struggle against Israel's injustice. Pastor Mitri Raheb, Lutheran pastor in Bethlehem, says that we are committed through love to transforming our enemies into our friends.¹¹

On August 22, 2006, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Episcopal Bishop of Jerusalem and the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land in "The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism" stated: "We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as false teaching that corrupts the Biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation... We are committed to non-violent resistance as the most effective means to end the illegal occupation in order to attain a just and lasting peace."¹²

IV. Israel: A Holocaust Terror Project and the Birth of a Vision

For three hundred years the early Christian movement faced intermittent persecutions from officials in the Roman Empire. Jewish leaders and people at times participated in those persecutions as recorded in the New Testament book of Acts, the letters of Paul, etc. However, when Christianity became the recognized religion of the Empire, the situation changed drastically. Already in the 2nd century Justin Martyr in his Dialogue with Trypho, stated that "Jews cannot be saved." The famous 5th century Christian preacher, John Chrysostom, proclaimed that Jews worshipped demons, were Christ-killers and were to be hated and ostracized. Through early and medieval history Church canons prohibited marriage between Christians and Jews and Christians eating with Jews (Synod of Elvira, 306); Jews from holding office (Synod of Clermont, 535);

Jews from appearing publicly during Passion Week (3rd Synod of New Orleans, 538); and Christians from visiting Jewish doctors (Trulanic Synod, 692). Other canons advocated the burning of the Talmud and other Jewish writings (12th synod of Toledo, 681), the marking of Jewish clothes with a badge (Council of Oxford, 1222), the creation of compulsory ghettos (Synod of Breslau, 1267), etc. The bigotry and hatred reflected in Canon Law was and is still experienced by the Jewish community. ¹³

The fear and rage of contemporary Judaism is reflected in Abram Leon Sachar's account of Christian persecution of Jewish people:

"Jews have known little of him (Jesus) and have wished to know less. Throughout their long history, he was not to them the Prince of Peace. In his name every conceivable outrage was perpetuated on the despised and cursed race that gave him life. When the crusaders [1099-1200] set fire to Jewish villages, plundered Jewish homes, and outraged Jewish daughters, it was in the shadow of the cross they bore. When Torquemada [Spanish master of the Inquisition] burnt thousands of wretched *marranos* [Jews converted to Christianity by terrorism] at public *auto-da-fe* in every Spanish city and capped his career by driving two hundred thousand peaceful Jews out of the country, it was in the name of the gentle Savior who preached the message of brotherly love... Hounded from one land to another, burnt, hanged, spat upon, compelled to live in filthy ghettos and to wear degrading badges, denied the right to exist as human beings...all because of Christian bigotry, it was impossible for Jews to regard the Prophet of Nazareth as other than the scourge of God, a fiend unmentionable." ¹⁴

Sixteen hundred years of Christian bigotry, anti-Semitism and horrendous terrorism culminated in the Nazi Holocaust in which 6,000,000 European Jews were annihilated by the Nazis supermen (*ubermenschen*). Fiery furnaces across eastern Germany consumed screaming children, men and women in the name of the New One-Thousand Year Reich. Many "German Christians" confessed that this bigotry and violence were in keeping with the Christian faith.

This German "Christian" descent into depravity was particularly inspired by Martin Luther who in his later years ranted against the Jewish population who refused to accept the Christian faith. Luther called them "a den of devils in which self-glory, conceit, lies, blasphemy and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously" ¹⁵. Luther recommended the following treatment of the Jews: synagogues to be burned, Jewish homes to be razed and destroyed, Jewish sacred writings to be taken from them, rabbis forbidden to teach, safe-conduct for Jews on highways to be abrogated, usury (interest as bankers) to be prohibited by them." ¹⁶

The Christian harassment of Jewish people finally led to Jewish Zionist plans to create a Jewish State where Jews could live freely as human beings. In the later 19th century a new Zionist movement began to encourage Jews to return to the ancient homeland of Israel - Palestine. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), a Viennese newspaper correspondent, became a political force in transforming this Zionist movement to an organization. In 1896 he published a book, *The Jewish State*, and in 1897 he organized the first Zionist

Congress in Basel. From this point, Jewish leaders began planning and developing future plans for a Jewish state. Early structures were in place in Palestine when the refugees from Nazi Europe arrived in the thirties and forties.

The demonic terrorism of Nazi Germany forced thousands of Jews to flee from their own homelands beginning in the 1930s and this exodus led to a deluge of Jewish immigrants seeking a new homeland in Palestine. The Jewish population of Palestine leaped from 50,000 in 1906 to nearly 500,000 at the time of the creation of the State of Israel in 1947-1948. A report of the British Council of Churches from 1982 describes the impact of the Holocaust upon the origins of Israel in these words:

"The most significant and terrible action by an outside power which contributed to the establishment of the State of Israel (and consequently the Arab-Israeli conflict) was the Holocaust in Europe. It was the experience of persecution in Europe, culminating in the Nazi attack of the Jews, which gave the longings for a state practical form. Persecution amounting to threatened genocide motivated the Jews to make a life or death attempt to create a Jewish State of their own." ¹⁷

The western world was revolted by the Nazi massacres of Jewish peoples, resulting in an immense empathetic movement in support of the Jewish victims. Beneath this movement of sympathy also lay a deep sense of guilt for the participation of western Christianity in its sixteen centuries of bigotry and hate focused upon Jewish people.

Jewish people with Zionist dreams returned to Palestine, fleeing from death and destruction. In 1951 David Ben-Gurion spoke of the "Law of Return" imbedded in Israel's Declaration of Independence (1948). "The State of Israel shall be open to immigration and Ingathering of the Exiles. It may be said that for that purpose the State was founded." ¹⁸ In establishing the State of Israel Zionist Jews vowed that "never again" would modern Israelites allow themselves to be annihilated. Western nations offered their sympathetic support in creating a new nation.

Unfortunately and tragically, few noticed that the new Israel would be created in an old Palestine inhabited by Arab Palestinians for well over fifteen hundred years. Once again no one asked Arabs or Palestinians whether they democratically approved or sympathized with this conquest of their homeland. A Quaker report from 1970 stated that "The Palestinian Arabs, a Semitic and largely Muslim people, concluded that they were being required to pay for the anti-Semitic sins of the Christian west."

V. Israel: A Zionist Vision and Terrorist Project

Today, most references to "Palestinian or Arab" immediately conjure up images of terrorists and suicide bombers. Seventy years ago, when the British military struggled to control Palestine, the most feared terrorists were Jewish Zionists. In a Jaffa market they planted dynamite under a pile of oranges in a truck. The explosion killed 100 people including many children. In Jerusalem they bombed the King David Hotel, killing 27 British, 41 Palestinians, 17 Jews and a few others. Starting in 1936 scores of terrorist bombings were carried out by Irgun and Stern units (Jewish Zionist terrorists).

Michael Prior in his well-researched book, *Zionism and the State of Israel*, writes:

"The Irgun [Jewish armed group of terrorists] blew up bridges, mined roads, derailed trains and sank patrol boats, robbed pay vans and in a single night blew up twenty warplanes. Irgun and LEHI [the Stern gang - another Jewish terrorist group] blew up the British Embassy in Rome, dispatched letter bombs to British ministers, and sent an assassination squad into Britain with the mission -not accomplished - of executing General Evelyn Barber, the former commanding officer in Palestine...They captured and flogged British officers, and on 30 July 1947, they hanged two sergeants from a tree and booby-trapped their dangling corpses." ¹⁹

The primary focus of early Zionist terrorism in the 1930s and 1940s was to drive the British Empire out of Palestine. After the League of Nations had mandated Palestine to Britain in the 1920s the British government began to have second thoughts about the creation of a Jewish homeland. The local Palestinian population was increasingly and violently opposing the growing Jewish population in Palestine. Furthermore, it became clear that the Zionists would not be content with a Jewish homeland but were demanding a Jewish state. The British first crushed the Palestinian opposition (1936) and briefly considered a two-state plan (the Peel commission, July 1937). However, the Palestinian opposition to this acceptance of Jewish wishes was so powerful that in 1939 the British Government acceded to Arab demands and issued a white paper which cut Jewish immigration to Palestine to 15,000 annually and limited even that to 5 years. This negated all Zionist hopes for a Jewish State and led the Jewish Zionist leadership to cut their ties with the British Empire. (Laqueur and Rubin, p. 44). However World War II forced the Israelis to postpone this separation. Israeli Zionists joined in the war against Nazi Germany and developed their military expertise in this struggle. Following the defeat of the Axis Powers, the Zionists threw themselves into opposition to British plans and actions in Palestine. Contrary to White Paper plans (1939) the Zionists demanded a Jewish State and terrorism was one of the weapons in the Zionist arsenal.

The British Government recognized that they could not manage the chaos of terrorism in Palestine following WWII and in February 1947 turned the problem over to the newly formed United Nations. In November 1947 the United Nations divided Palestine into two political entities, one Jewish, one Arab. This two-state solution which seized a portion of the Palestinian homeland was opposed by the Palestinian Arab community as well as the rest of the Arab world. The U.N. proposal gave 57% of Palestine to the Jewish community (in spite of the fact that only one-third of the population was Jewish and they owned only 7% of the land!) and 43% of the land designated for Palestinians who made up 2/3 of the population. Furthermore, in the new Jewish State the Arab population of 500,000 was slightly less than the Jewish population.

The number of Arabs in the designated future state of Israel led to the second great Zionist terrorist attack. After the decimation of the Palestinian forces by the British (1936-1939) and after the experience of World War II, the Jewish military (Haganah) and militia (Irgun and Stern) were far superior to the Palestinian military force. The Jewish

forces decided in the night of March 31-April 1, 1948 to depopulate the future Jewish state of 500,000 Palestinian Arabs before the British Mandate ended in May 1948. In April they attacked a series of small Arab villages near Jerusalem, destroying them and expelling the population. To implement the expulsion, Haganah radio stations broadcasted the Jewish onslaught and then gave directions to the Palestinians for escape. The most brutal and tragic terrorist attack took place on the night of April 9, 1948. Members of the Irgun forces which were led by Israel's future Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, and Stern forces led by another future Israeli Prime Minister Yitzach Shamir, attacked an Arab village of Deir Yassin. By noon the following day some 254 inhabitants including 100 women and children - the numbers are disputed - had been slaughtered, some of their bodies were thrown into a well, doused with kerosene and set alight. Cases of mutilation and rape were also reported.²⁰

The famous Jewish historian, Morris, wrote that the troops did not intend to commit a massacre but lost their heads.²¹ However, following the attack, Begin congratulated the Irgun and Stern troops with the words, "Congratulations on this splendid act of conquest." In his memoirs he wrote the legend of Deir Yassin was "worth a half dozen battalions to the forces of Israel."²²

Terrified by Zionist brutality, 300,000 Palestinians fled their homes within weeks. At the end of the 1948 conflict 700,000 of the 1.3 million Palestinian inhabitants had fled in fear. That experience of annihilation has been called ever after "The Catastrophe" (Naqbah). They fled with keys to their homes and property hoping to return after the terrorism ended. That never happened. The Zionists confiscated their properties and for 60 years Palestinian youth, raised in poverty-ridden refugee camps, have been tortured with rage. They still dream of days when Israelis would experience an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a tooth. This is the root cause of the present Palestinian-Israeli crisis.

Zionist terrorism of the thirties and forties was a major factor in creating the State of Israel. This terrorism was not carried out by a few fringe elements led by deviants named Begin, Shamir and a youthful Ariel Sharon but went to the very top of the Israeli forces, to the George Washington of the new nation, David Ben-Gurion. When the Palestinian city of Lydda was under attack and a local Jewish leader was trying to convince Palestinian locals to remain Ben-Gurion commanded, "Drive them out."²³ This is the Lydda where "the population was told they would be safe if they went into a mosque, but once inside, more than eighty prisoners were machine-gunned to death."²⁴

Schlomo Ben Ami writes of the early Israeli violence of the 30's and 40's including the war of 1948, "The new nation Israel expelled the Arabs, committed atrocities against them and dispossessed them." He concludes his account of the Palestinian/Arab-Israeli conflict with these words: "No one in this conflict has a monopoly on suffering and martyrdom; nor is the responsibility for war atrocities exclusive to one party. In this tragic tribal dispute, both Jews and Arabs have committed acts of unpardonable violence, and both have succumbed at times to their most bestial instincts."²⁵

Zionist terrorism created Israel, expanded and still maintains Israel. Tanya Reinhart, an Israeli linguistic scholar and columnist, in a recent book, *Israel/Palestine: How to Win the War of 1948*, describes the violence of Israeli policies which terrorized Palestinian peoples between the years 2000-2005. She sees Israeli policies fluctuating between apartheid "under the cover of negotiations" to ethnic cleansing and mass evacuations.²⁶ Contemporary Israelis portrayed as law-abiding victims defending their homeland from Palestinian terrorists is historically inaccurate. It is not possible, historically or morally, to commit abominable atrocities in achieving a territorial political goal and then when one has the upper hand to announce the war is over; accept the new reality.

For many Palestinians and Arabs the war is not over and in the Middle East another 500 years of conflict is conceivable. In the Middle East time takes the form of centuries, not years or decades. In a personal conversation, a Syrian Orthodox Patriarch stated that Muslims were newcomers to the Middle East in spite of the fact that they arrived one thousand three hundred years ago. One should not forget that 5,000,000 Jewish Zionists returned to Palestine after 2000 years and said, "By the way, this is ours." If these words are taken seriously there is a recognition of the fact that when the Arabs and Palestinians eventually regain the power struggle in the Middle East they too will legitimately say, "By the way, this is ours." In a modern or postmodern world where humanity finds dignity and value in rational thought, such claims cannot be taken seriously.

VI. Israel: A United Nations-U.S.A. Project

At the end of World War II, in April 1945, the western Allies led by the United States of America gathered on the West Coast in San Francisco to design and implement the United Nations. The U.N. received the responsibility for the British Mandate of Palestine. On November 29, 1947, the U.N. adopted a "Resolution on the Future Government of Palestine" (Partition Resolution). In great detail the U.N. laid out plans for the transition to a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The British responsibility for the Mandate would terminate not later than August 1, 1948, and the transition to independence would not be later than October 1, 1948. The British then said they would leave Palestine in May 1948.

The United Nations once again, like the British Empire and the League of Nations, represented an international force that imposed a Jewish people and State upon a Palestinian and Arab population. Until this day Palestinians claim that their homeland has been usurped and occupied by illegitimate powers and peoples. David Ben-Gurion recognized this fact in 1919 when he stated:

"Everybody sees a difficulty in the question of relations between Arabs and Jews. But not everybody sees that there is no solution to this question. No solution! There is a guilt and nothing can bridge it... We as a nation want this country to be ours; the Arabs as a nation want this country to be theirs."²⁷

The United States has been the most powerful advocate of Israel within the U.N. It was President Harry Truman who was largely responsible for the passage of the U.N.

Resolution creating the State of Israel. David Hirst in *The Gun and the Olive Branch* writes on Truman's role in these words:

"The United Nations to which a despairing Britain had handed over the whole problem, ruled in favour of partition. That vote was a story of violence in itself - albeit diplomatic violence - in which the United States went to the most extraordinary lengths of backstage manipulation on behalf of its Zionist proteges. Partition went against the better judgment of many of those nations which cast their vote in favor of it. America also - at least in its State Department officials who knew something about the Middle East - had grave misgivings. But the White House, which knew a great deal less, overruled them. It sanctioned what a deeply distressed James Forrestal, the Secretary of Defense, described as coercion and duress on other nations which 'bordered on scandal.'²⁸

In 1945, rationalizing his political decision to create a Jewish State, President Truman said to a group of American Ambassadors to Arab countries, "I am sorry gentlemen, 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."²⁹

In May 1948 the State of Israel announced its independence. Israel had already dispersed the Palestinians who could raise opposition. However, the surrounding Arab nations rejected the U.N. creation of Israel and attacked Israel. Jordan, Syria and Egypt threatened the new State of Israel but were defeated by the Israeli nation. At the end of the conflict Israel controlled 77% of Palestine. When the State of Israel announced its independence, President Harry Truman immediately recognized the legitimacy of Israel. With that fact, the conflict went on in the wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, 2006 as Palestinians, Arab nations and Israelis defended their right to exist in Palestinian territory. In almost every case the U.S. Government has been an ardent, unquestioning supporter of the State of Israel. This was particularly true following the Israeli 1967 "pre-emptive war," (a concept used by Menachem Begin in an address in 1982 to Israel's National Defense College speaking of the 1967 war against the Arab States of Egypt, Jordan and Syria.) In this conflict Israel conquered and occupied the West Bank moving its borders east to the Jordan River. Following the truce the United Nations passed Resolution 242 calling for Israel to return to the pre-'67 war borders. On numerous occasions the U.N. has voted to have this resolution implemented. The United States has vetoed these calls for its implementation supporting Israel in its refusal to comply with the resolution. Since the war of 1948 the Palestinians have continually called upon Israel to return to the earlier borders of '48 or '67. The Israelis have continually stated that the Palestinians should accept the new expanding reality made possible by the superior military and diplomatic skills of the Israelis. (See *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace* pp. 312-332.)

It has been habitual for Israel and the U.S. to use the U.N. in the establishment and support of the State of Israel but to ignore the U.N. whenever it was contrary to U.S.-Israeli policy. Between 1967-2000 the State of Israel was the subject of 138 resolutions of the United Nations, most of which were ignored. In contrast, Iraq was the subject of 69 and the U.S. demanded an invasion. The only time in recent history when the U.S. was in a balanced position to be a peace-making force was under Secretary of State,

James Baker. President Clinton's efforts in 2000 were still so pro-Israel that his 2-state solution would have left the Palestinian State nothing but an Israeli vassal. Clinton could only argue that it was the best deal they would get.

Tanya Reinhart, the Israeli scholar, writes of the Ehud Barak-Clinton offer to the Palestinians at Camp David, "[T]he myth of the generous Israeli offer at Camp David, then is nothing but a fraud perpetuated by propaganda. The desperate attempt of Clinton at Taba to conclude a peace pact before his term ended had no meaningful significance since Barak made clear that the agreement would not be binding after Israel's approaching election."³⁰

Israel has received overwhelming support not only from Democratic and Republican administrations, but also from the U.S. population and Congress. The Democratic Party has been deeply influenced by the Jewish vote within its constituency and the Republican Party in recent years is deeply influenced by the Fundamentalist Zionist vote. A CNN poll of August 3, 2006 indicated that over 65% of the U.S. sympathizes with Israel and a greater percentage of Democrats than Republicans favored U.S. support for Israel in the 2006 conflict. This incredible U.S. support for Israel in relationship to the Palestinian situation means that there is greater debate in Israel's Knesset in regard to Israeli policies than in the U.S. Congress.

This improbable situation is rooted in the factors noted above. One, after questioning and rejecting the proposals of the British Empire and the League of Nations for a Jewish homeland, the United States during and after WW II became the champion of the State of Israel. The U.S. became the banner bearer for the historic ties of contemporary Jews with ancient Palestine and for the myth that contemporary Israel is still a righteous victim rather than the aggressive organization which it is. Two, the dispensational prophetic interpretation of the Bible has been naively accepted as having a legitimate message for the 21st century. It is argued that Israeli existence and geo-political politics are Biblically based and therefore of God. Many Americans outside of Evangelical circles are also influenced by this simplistic and distorted theology. It influenced Lord Balfour and the British Empire, the European League of Nations, President Harry Truman and today influences George W. Bush and the U.S. Congress. In his recent book, *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, President Jimmy Carter sharply criticizes Israeli policies in Gaza and on the occupied West Bank. As a consequence some Jewish organizations within the U.S. have criticized him for not only attacking Israeli policy but also labeling him anti-Semitic. This criticism is made in spite of the fact that Carter as an Evangelical Christian sees Israel as a legitimate expression of the Old Testament claim that God gave Palestine to Israel; considers the establishment of Israel by the U.N. as International Law; expects Israelis to conform to the Old Testament vision of justice; constantly gives Israelis the benefit of the doubt and continually insists that Palestine should not resort to violence.³¹

VII. Concluding Reflections

1. The Israelis and the State of Israel are not innocent victims of Palestinian and Arab aggression and terrorism. The Palestinians are a people whose homeland has been usurped and occupied by another people. The world can expect opposition to this usurpation and occupation. When that kind of occupation is imposed upon a minority ethnic group as with our Native Americans the minority has no choice but to acquiesce to the injustice. However, when almost six million Jews and their imperial allies attempt to usurp Palestine whose world includes over 100 million Arabs and over 1 billion Muslims then if the process is not radically revised the overwhelming majority eventually (perhaps in a century or more) will not destroy but swallow the occupying intruder. Israelis may hope that when that day arrives the Palestinians will be represented by persons like Ali Abunimah. In a recent book, *One Nation*, he writes that Palestinians will welcome Israelis into an ethnically and religiously diverse state.³²
2. Israel will have no future in Palestine until it recognizes and compensates in some way for its expropriation of another peoples' land (right of return); until it is committed to be part of the Middle East rather than a U.S. outpost; until it is committed to cooperation with Palestinians and Arabs in developing an economically prosperous Palestinian State, rather than an oppressed vassal state; and until it is willing to share in developing the water resources of the Jordan River. It is questionable whether this will ever materialize after nearly 60 years of military and structural terrorism.
3. Israel has depended upon a foreign superpower for support of its existence. First it was the British Empire and the League of Nations. When that failed it turned to the U.S.A. (includes \$4 billion a year) and the United Nations. In both cases there were Bible reading Christians who were naively convinced that there was some ancient relationship between God, Jews and Palestine which was relevant in 21st century geopolitics. The next superpower will probably not even read the Bible nor find this 20th century rationale for the conflict comprehensible. Already in 1919 President Wilson's King-Crane Commission simply said the "claim" could hardly be seriously considered.
4. If the U.S. does not seek a balanced position in the Middle East, we will simply encourage the State of Israel to once again - as in 597 B.C. and 132-135 A.D. - commit national political suicide.
5. The inhabitants of the pro-Israel bubble continually reiterate that Israel has a right to exist. Israel's existence always takes priority over the right of a Palestinian State to exist. Even Jimmy Carter says a Palestinian State must be de-militarized so it cannot threaten Israel's right to exist. This is necessary even though Israel is a powerful nuclear military state.³³ The claim seems to say that the State of Israel has some "right" in terms of international law or the eternal will of God. It would appear in the light of this discussion that Israel's sole right is the right of superior power. The

powerful military might and international political skill of the British Empire, the League of Nations, the United States of America, the United Nations and Zionist terrorism created Israel. In the words of Thrasymachus in Plato's dialogues of antiquity, "Justice is nothing else than the interest of the stronger." ³⁴ When one lives by "Might is Right" one is always vulnerable to a future more powerful "might is right."

6. If someone is looking for God in this contemporary hell it is possible to catch a glimpse of eternity in the tiny, Christian, Lutheran, Palestinian community led by Bishop Munib Younan committed to a non-violent struggle to seek justice for all people and to transform enemies into friends. Further glimpses are revealed in other small Palestinian churches committed to non-violent struggles for peace and in Israeli-Palestinian inter-faith groups made up of Jews, Muslims and Christians advocating for peace and reconciliation in the midst of terror. In contrast, identifying God with the military victories of Israel and the U.S. is a blasphemy against God and the crucifixion of Christ.

- January 2007

Endnotes:

- ¹ Schlomo Ben Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israel-Arab Tragedy*, Oxford: Oxford Press, 2006, p. 2. This is an excellent account of the Palestine/Arab-Israeli conflict written by a former Israeli Foreign Minister. Ben Ami recognizes the tragedy that overcame the Palestinian people but his Israeli bias is very evident throughout the book. Estimates are that there were 30,000 Jews in Palestine in 1880.
- ² Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land?: The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002, p. 63-64.
- ³ Eds. Walter Laqueur and Bary Rubin, *The Israel-Arab Reader*, 6th edition, New York: Penquin Books, 2001, p. 341.
- ⁴ Ibid, p. 206
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 16.
- ⁶ Michael Prior, *Zionism and the State of Israel: A Moral Inquiry*, New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 16 (quoted from *Palestinian Papers 1917-1922: Seeds of Conflict*, Doreus Ingrams, London: John Murray, 1972, p. 73.)
- ⁷ Laqueur and Rubin, p. 24.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 30.
- ⁹ See Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, New York: Basic Books, 2004, pp. 47-80. It is interesting to note that Pres. Truman spoke of himself as Cyrus when influencing the U.N. into the acceptance of the State of Israel.
- ¹⁰ Prior, p. 143. See also *Prophecy and Politics* by Grace Halsell, Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1986, pp. 71ff.
- ¹¹ Mitri Raheb, *Bethlehem Besieged*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004, pp. 117-125.
- ¹² ELCA news release.
- ¹³ Raul Hillberg, *The Destruction of European Jews*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961, pp. 4-7.
- ¹⁴ Abram Leon Sachar, *The History of the Jews*, 5th Edition, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964, pp.124-125.
- ¹⁵ Martin Luther in "On the Jews and Their Lies," *Luther's Works*, Vol. 47, American Edition, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, p. 172.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 268-271.
- ¹⁷ *Towards Understanding the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 1982, quoted in *Whose Promised Land?*, pp. 71-72.
- ¹⁸ Chapman, p. 80.
- ¹⁹ Prior, p. 22.
- ²⁰ Ibid., p. 26.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 26. See Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 115.
- ²² Marc Ellis, *O Jerusalem! The Contested Future of the Jewish Covenant*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, p. 31
- ²³ Recorded by Yitzhak Rabin, quoted in Schlomo Ben Ami, p. 44.
- ²⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002, p. 134. For a detailed list of the Haganah, Irgun and Stern atrocities see Walid Khalidi's *Before their Diaspora*, Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2004.
- ²⁵ Ben Ami, p. 332.
- ²⁶ Tanya Reinhart, *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948*, New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002. p. 222. Israel's Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livini, is considered a moderate within Israeli circles; however, she represents life within the pro-Israeli bubble, when she says, "The principle of two nation states is not only a gift to the Palestinians but a promotion of Israeli interest." Time, Jan. 22,2007, P.31. For another critique of Israeli policy on the West Bank see Norman G. Finkelstein, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*, Berkeley and Los Angeles:University of California Press, 2005.
- ²⁷ Quoted in TIME, July 24, 2006, p. 20.
- ²⁸ Chapman, p. 69.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 70.
- ³⁰ Reinhart, p. 111.

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- ³¹ Jimmy Carter, *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.
- ³² Ali Abunimah, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli -Palestinian Impasse*, New York: Metropolitan Books-Henry Holt and Company, 2006, pp. 104ff.
- ³³ Carter, p. 212.
- ³⁴ Plato, *The Republic, Book I*. See *The Indispensable Plato* edited by Scott Buchanan, New York: The Book Society, 1948, pp. 298-299.

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