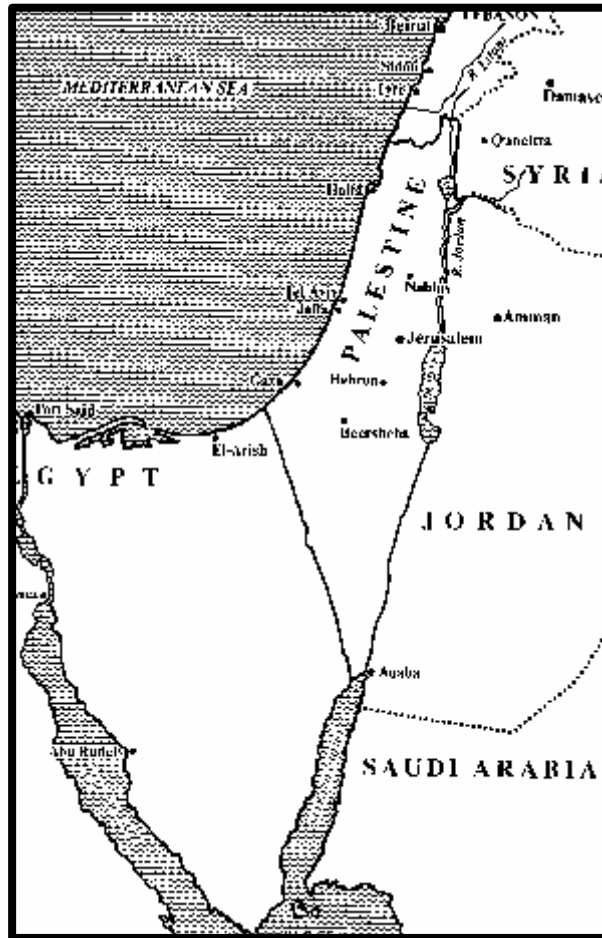


A BRIEF HISTORY OF PALESTINE



Map of British Mandate of Palestine

Shelina Janmohamed, February 1999

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courtesy & © Shelina Janmohamed*

At 2 o'clock on the morning on the 10th of April 1948, three years after the holocaust, a small Palestinian village called Dayr Yaseen was gunned down by the members of three Zionist terrorist groups. They shot at everyone within their firing range, demolished all Arab homes, searched all the demolished houses and gunned down whoever remained alive. 360 people were killed.

One survivor said he was 12 when the massacre took place. He said, "The Israelis ordered my family to stand facing the wall, and they fired at us. I was shot in the waist and bullets tore through my sister's head. Her name was Qadryya, she was only 4 years old."

Another said "I saw an Israeli terrorist firing at my sister-in-law, who was about to give birth. She was shot in the neck. The terrorist then slit her stomach open with a butcher knife."

Manjaheem Begin the former Israeli Prime Minister, who led the massacre, regarded it as one of his finest moments, and other Israeli terrorists mentioned that "were it not for the massacre of Dayr Yaseen, Israel would not have come into existence."

Massacres like this one happened in many villages across Palestine in 1948 forcing almost 650,000 Palestinians to flee from their homes for fear of losing their lives in this horrific manner. These Palestinians were then later accused of abandoning their homes, and not caring about their land.

This was the beginning of the state that today is recognised by the world as Israel, a state whose very origins are drenched in blood.

Since 1860 the Jews had already started to make attempts to populate Palestine by setting up small villages mostly funded by the wealthy Baron Rothschild. In 1914 with the outbreak of world war one, Britain promised the independence of the Arab lands under Ottoman rule in return of Arab support against Turkey which had entered the war on the side of Germany.

In 1917 the British government issued the Balfour Declaration which declared Palestine to be a homeland for Jews. In his letter to Lord Rothschild, Lord Balfour stated that his declaration was in sympathy with the Jewish Zionist aspirations and that "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object". Balfour said: "Zionism is more important than 700,000 Arab Palestinians". At the time Jews made up approximately 8% of the population of Palestine and owned approximately 2.5% of the land.

In 1920 the League of Nations decided that Britain would hold the mandate for Palestine, and in its turn, Britain appointed Herbert Samuel, a declared Zionist as its high Commissioner who accepted the co-operation with the Jewish Organization.

Encouraged by the declaration, massive Jewish immigration to Palestine took place between the two world wars, ceased briefly during the years of WWII and then resumed, fuelled by European guilt at having allowed the genocide of Jews in Nazi Germany.

In 1947, the newly created United Nations in Resolution 181 announced that it would partition Palestine so that the Palestinian Arabs, who accounted for 70% of the population and owned 92% of the land were allocated 47% of the country.

Israel declared itself a state in 1948 beginning its murderous history with massacres such as the one described at the beginning. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims were forced out of Palestine under the military pressure of Zionist terrorist groups which were financed and armed by the British army.

Winston Churchill said in response to the Arabs' demand of revoking The Balfour Declaration: "They ask for me to reject the Balfour Declaration and stop Jewish immigration. I can't do that, and I don't wish also. I think it is much better for world, Jews, Britain and Arabs also to implement this Declaration. Establishing a Jewish state on Jordan's River banks with 4 or 5 million Jews will be in Britain's interest". Churchill obviously did not concern himself about the fairness of removing an entire population from their homeland but was more concerned about what was in Britain's and Zionist interests.

For decades after the creation of Israel there was an almost universal denial of the existence of a Palestinian people. Golda Meir, a former prime minister of Israel infamously once said that "There are no Palestinians". The world was subjected to a constant stream of propaganda claiming that the "promised land" was a barren and empty place with nothing but a few primitive Bedouin and that the new occupiers had made the desert bloom.

In 1967 Israel attacked Egypt, Jordan and Syria and occupied more land including the West Bank, the Gaza strip, the Syrian Golan heights and the Egyptian Sinai peninsula, as well as Masjid Al-Aqsa. The Arab armies were defeated in The Six Day War as it came to be known. More refugees were created and Israel moved quickly to ensure that none who fled the borders with Jordan and Syria could return.

In 1987, the mass Palestinian uprising called the Intifada began in the West Bank and Gaza Strip against the continued Jewish occupation. This is an uprising of stones and voices but it continues to show that Muslims will not stand for the occupation of our lands, even whilst the world and Israel is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. There is a bitter irony that while the holocaust was portrayed so vividly on television and across the media last year, and the Israeli state is demanding reparations for the holocaust, the same people are abusing human rights in their own country and are unashamed about it.

One of the commissioners of Citizen's rights under the Palestinian Authority asks us the question: Do you know what does it mean to live under Israeli military occupation?

You are given an identity number and a permit to reside. If you leave the country for more than three years in succession, you lose that right to residence. When you leave the country on a trip, you are given a travelling document, valid for one year and it tells you in its recording that you are of undefined nationality. Israeli occupation means that you are called twice a year by the intelligence for routine interrogation and persuasion to work as an informer on your brothers and sisters. No one is spared. If you are to be a member of a political organisation you will be sentenced for ten years. For a military action you will be sentenced to life. To survive under the Israeli occupation you are given the chance to work in the jobs that Israelis do not like, sweeping the streets, building houses, collecting fruit or harvesting. You will have to leave your home in the refugee camp in Gaza at 3 am, go through the road blocks and check posts, spend your day under the sun and surveillance returning home in the evening to collapse in bed for a few hours before the following day.

We simply became the slaves of our enemy. We are building their homes on our villages, and we clean their streets. Do you know what does it do to you when you have to be the slave of your enemy in order to survive. No you will never know how painful it is unless your country is occupied by another force. Only then will you learn how to watch in silence pretending not to see the torture of your friends and the humiliation of your father.

Between 1987 and 1996, 1,474 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in Israel and the Occupied Territories of which 132 were killed by Israeli civilians, and 161 were killed by Israeli death squads. In the same period 304 Israeli civilians and security force personnel have been killed by Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

From time to time, the state of Israel closes access to and from the Gaza strip. This prevents the Palestinians from travelling for education, medical treatment and for work purposes and restricts the transport of goods which devastates the economy of the Occupied Territories. Such a closure as a policy, in the manner it is imposed and in its effects, violates international law and is viewed as a form of collective punishment - acts of this nature are prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention and denying freedom of movement is in contravention of a basic human freedom.

It is estimated that economic losses due to closures between 1992 and 1996 were six billion dollars. Aid to the Palestinian National Authority totals only just over 2 billion dollars. Israel claims that the closures are for the guarantee of security. This has been disproved as the closures actually create greater risk of insecurity and in any case, the closures are in contravention of international law.

Water, a precious resource in the desert climate, is also stolen from the Palestinians. According to a 1993 World Bank report, 80 to 85% of all the available water of the West Bank and Gaza has been diverted to Israel and the settlements.

Since the declaration of the state of Israel, strict laws of return have been put into place. The law permits anyone recognised as a Jew to obtain immediate citizenship and legal civilian status in Israel, regardless of where the person was born. However, Palestinian Arabs who are not Jewish but who were born in Palestine prior to 1948 and who fled the brutal fighting during the Zionist take-over of Palestine in 1948 may not be granted citizenship rights under the same law and have no rights under Israeli law to return to their homes

Since 1948 Israel has prompted the UN to pass at least 65 resolutions condemning various actions and demanding that it stop. Israel does not obey UN resolutions, it contravenes them habitually. However, it is not bombed for doing so. In fact, although the US Foreign Assistance Act, in Sections 502 (B) and 116(a) prohibits military and economic aid to any country which engages in 'a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognised human rights'. From the period from 1967 until 1996, Israel received \$77,726,000,000 in U.S. aid and 5.5 billion dollars in grants and loans in 1996 alone. This is equivalent to \$15,000,000 per day or \$628,000 per hour. This is in spite of the fact that the Israelis are in violation of every fundamental provision of international law that deals with human rights and the rights of a native population under Occupation.

If the Israeli government refuses to comply with international law, sanctions must be imposed against it just as sanctions have been imposed against other countries who have contravened international law. Economic sanctions were imposed against the racist apartheid regime of South Africa in order to end the oppression; and from the few examples given, the Israeli regime is neither different in kind nor in method from the old apartheid South African government.

Last year, the Wye Peace Settlement was signed between the Palestinian Authority led by Yasser Arafat and the then Israeli prime minister Netanyahu. It had various provisions but I will pick out a few:

- A comprehensive security agreement designed to curb violence in the region and strengthen Israeli security;

this simply means that the security and army presence to monitor and harass Palestinians will be increased.

- Reaffirmation of changes in the Palestinian National Charter to delete language calling for the destruction of Israel;

In summary, the Palestinians are now forced to recognise Israel as a legitimate state and to support its ongoing existence. This is contrary to everything that Palestinians and Muslims have been fighting for, for the last fifty years.

- Steps by the Palestinian Authority to stop incitement against Israel;

The Palestinian authority is now responsible to Israel to report on people fighting for the liberation of Palestine, and to control them and prevent attacks on Israel and Israelis

- The opening of corridors of safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank;

- Allowing students in Gaza to travel to the West Bank and vice versa.

Why were these forbidden in the first place - aren't they basic human rights for someone who is part of that country?

All of these still mean that the Muslims are still subject to the security, defence and foreign affairs of Israel - they simply confirm and consolidate the existence of the Jewish state, and act to support and strengthen it.

One of the ironies is that Israel is likely to get a special US \$1 billion grant on top of the \$3-5 billion in annual aid it currently receives. The Palestinian Authority may get \$100 million.

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