

**Zionism  
& the  
Israel-Palestine Conflict**

**A Brief Survey**

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## **Part One: A Brief Historical Survey of Zionism & the Israel-Palestine Conflict**

### **Early Years**

Zionism as a political movement began in the late 19th century. It first appeared as a program for a Jewish homeland in an age when powerful ideologies such as capitalism, imperialism, liberalism, socialism and communism were capturing the allegiance of people throughout the world. As proposed by Theodore Herzl and his contemporaries, Zionism was deeply influenced by European theories of nationalism – which had their roots in the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. The earlier meaning of ‘Zion’ in Jewish history, liturgy and mass consciousness is a qualitatively different phenomenon. People did not think in terms of building nations before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the great achievements of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars was the liberation of Jews from systemic discrimination. Everywhere the French armies were successful in this era, ghetto walls were torn down and Jews were able to join professions that had hitherto been closed to them. The worst violence against Jews at this time was in Tsarist Russia and Poland, territories that had not experienced the emancipation of the French Revolution.

The Zionist movement was a response to a rising wave of anti-Semitism in Europe, beginning in the 1870’s when some writers began to use hitherto linguistic definitions of ‘semitic’ and ‘aryan’ as racial terms. Racist pseudo-science gave an apparently sophisticated veneer to primitive resentment, superstition & politically opportune scapegoating of Jews in Germany, Austria-Hungary, France, Poland, Russia and elsewhere.

On the other hand, not all Jewish people in Europe thought that anti-Semitism was the dominant trend of the times. Many thought that the basic trend was towards assimilation. For them, science, secularism, liberalism and/or socialism seemed to be the wave of the future. Vast numbers of Jews joined socialist movements. For example, in 1905 in Russia (where Jews were 4% of the population) they represented 11% of the Bolshevik Party & 23% of the Menshevik Party. The anti-Zionist Bund (a Jewish revolutionary workers’ organization) was the same size as the Bolshevik Party. Everywhere revolutionary movements of all left-wing political tendencies had prominent Jewish leaders (e.g. Leon Trotsky, Emma Goldman & Rosa Luxembourg).<sup>i</sup>

The First Zionist Congress was held in Basle, Switzerland in 1897 with the aim ‘to secure for the Jewish people a home in Palestine guaranteed by public law.’ Delegates called for a Jewish homeland/state as a defense against persecution and as a way of halting or slowing down the assimilation of Jews in a secular world.

They were not very successful at first. For twenty years or more it was the United States, not Palestine, that was the main destination for the oppressed Jews of Eastern Europe. Some even thought of America as their ‘Zion.’ During this time the Zionist movement

sought to make deals with every imperialist power, including the German Kaiser, the Ottoman Turks, the Russian Tsar and the British Empire. At various times Herzl and his colleagues advanced proposals for a Jewish settler state in Palestine, Argentina, Uganda, Cyprus & even the Midwest USA. However, the pressure from the religious faction in the Zionist movement demanded a state in Palestine and Herzl eventually agreed.

Herzl's behavior was sometimes cynically and ruthlessly opportunist. For example, in his dealings with the Ottoman Turks, who were engaged in a genocidal campaign against their Armenian minority, he offered the Sultan a deal. In exchange for giving Palestine (then a province of the Ottoman Empire) to the Jews, the World Zionist Organization would work to soften international condemnation of Turkish brutality. The Sultan was ultimately to reject his offer. Later Herzl met with Count von Plehve, the organizer of the pogroms in Tsarist Russia and argued that if Russia would pressure the Ottomans to hand over Palestine to the Zionists the "Jewish Problem" would be solved and thousands of Russian Jews would abandon their socialist-inspired rebellion against the Tsar. Nothing came of this and within a few years the Ottoman Empire was history.<sup>ii</sup>

### **World War One & the Balfour Declaration**

It was the outbreak of World War I in 1914 that really gave a boost to the idea of a Zionist homeland or state in Palestine. The 'Great War' as it has been called, was an inter-imperialist war, and although we usually think of it as mass slaughter in the trenches of Europe, much of it was fought in the Middle East. Britain, Germany, France & Russia all had vital interests there. There were geo-political considerations, markets to exploit, sea lanes, canals, pipelines & railway lines to build and protect. The area's vast oil potential was beginning to be realized.

Britain fought against the Turkish-based Ottoman Empire, which was allied with Germany and was the recipient of Germany military aid and advisors. The British waged major campaigns against the Turks in Mesopotamia (Iraq), Gallipoli (Turkey) and in Palestine. Their campaign in Mesopotamia was a success at first and then a great disaster. The campaign at Gallipoli was a debacle. But the British campaign in Palestine was successful – at least from a short-term military point of view.

The British strategy was focused upon winning the support of the Arabs. They sought to ally themselves with Arab nationalists and lead them in an uprising against their Turkish overlords. They promised to support the creation of an Arab state after the war. The Arab fighters upheld their half of the bargain. However (as was revealed by the Bolsheviks in 1918) the British were making secret treaties with the French at the same time, promising them control of Lebanon and Syria after the war, while the British would keep Transjordan (later called Jordan), Iraq & Northern Palestine. The rest of Palestine, it was agreed, would be placed under an 'international regime'. This treaty ('the Sykes-Picot Note') was considered by many - including T.E. Lawrence ('Lawrence of Arabia') - to be a betrayal of the Arabs.<sup>iii</sup>

British imperialism's double-dealing is most famously exemplified by the Balfour Declaration in 1917. This was a communication delivered by British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Walter Rothschild, a Zionist leader, prominent British financier & politician. It declared British support for a Jewish national home in Palestine provided that safeguards could be reached for the rights of the 'existing non-Jewish communities'. This declaration was to become the basis for the 1920 League of Nations mandate for Palestine (to be exercised by Britain). British motives were entirely pragmatic. According to historian Eric Hobsbawm, the British were 'anxious for international Jewish support during the war.'<sup>iv</sup>

In 1917 the population of Palestine was 93% Arab. Nevertheless Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann promised to the English that eventually Palestine would become "as Jewish as England is English."<sup>v</sup> A popular Zionist slogan came into use at this time, describing Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land."

### **The British Mandate in Palestine**

World War I ended with a weakened British Empire exercising a mandate in Palestine over an ever-growing population of militant Jewish settlers and a vast majority of Arabs embittered by their betrayal at the hands of their former allies. The British favored a two-state solution with Jerusalem remaining under international control, but this goal could not be achieved by a weakened and declining British Empire that neither possessed the resources nor the will to impose a solution.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1920's & 1930's the number of Jewish settlers in the Palestine mandate grew steadily. By 1939 there were 300,000. As anti-Semitism grew throughout this period - particularly in Poland and under the Nazi regime in Germany after 1933 - it became evident to many European Jews that they would have to flee. The Zionist project in Palestine became a more appealing destination, particularly in light of the racist anti-immigration policies of western democracies at the time.

In 1936 another British proposal for the partition of Palestine was rejected by both Jews and Arabs. This was followed by an upsurge in militant Arab nationalism called "The Great Uprising" (1936-1939). During this period, Palestinian Arabs engaged in non-violent strikes and protests as well as in acts of violence against the British authorities and Jewish settlers. The rising role of the Jewish trade union federation Histadrut (see below) and the related campaign for Jewish businesses to hire only Jewish workers was a contributing factor leading to this outburst of Arab protest. When the British subsequently placed restrictions on the amount of new Jewish land purchases, the result was an escalation of hostilities between the Zionists and the British authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, with the loss of India imminent, the British saw little reason to stay on as police in an unruly Palestine. It was a time of imperial retreat. The political mess the British had created was left behind as the Union Jack was lowered in Palestine.

During World War II the British forbade European Jews entry into Palestine. This was partly a move to maximize their support in the war among Arabs throughout the Middle East. It also allowed them to release troops in Palestine for deployment elsewhere. This policy continued after the war and it led to the smuggling of Jewish refugees from Europe into Palestine.

The restrictive policy also encouraged Zionist paramilitary units to engage in terrorist activity.<sup>2</sup> In the 1920's the armed security group Haganah had been formed to protect Jewish settlements. More aggressive underground groups split from it including Irgun and the Stern Gang whose violent activities were to become notorious during the war years and the late 1940's.

As the war progressed and as the unprecedented extent of the Nazi's mass murder became known there was a world-wide wave of sympathy for the Jewish people. For the Zionist project in Palestine it meant that Jewish opinion had swung behind them. Jewish refugees in Europe were understandably reluctant to go back to their countries of origin. Many wanted to come to Palestine. With the British Government in Palestine still banning immigration, a large underground operation (Berihah) smuggled thousands of Jews into Israel.

During the war and in its immediate aftermath, however, the nationalist ideology of building the state of Israel took priority over the principle of solidarity with the victims of the Holocaust. The Jewish Agency (the government of the pre-state Jewish settlements in Palestine) did not want *all* the refugees. They did not want to absorb millions of impoverished refugees with no great passion for Israel. They didn't want the elderly. As Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion said, "It is the job of Zionism not to save the remnant of Israel in Europe but rather to save the land of Israel for the Jewish people and the Yishuv (i.e. the pre-state Jewish settlement in Palestine)."<sup>vi</sup>

Zionism benefited substantially from the fact that the Nazis and their fascist allies had virtually liquidated the Jewish anti-Zionist revolutionary Left in Europe. Thousands of these people were resistance fighters and many were leaders in their respective countries (e.g. the Warsaw Ghetto).

### **Proclamation of the State of Israel or Al- Nakba ('the Catastrophe')**

Conflict between the British and Zionists in Palestine increased after World War II. In June 1946 the British arrested a large number of Jewish fighters. In retaliation a month later the Jewish militant group Irgun (under the leadership of future Prime Minister Menachem Begin) blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. This was the base for the British Secretariat, the military command and a branch of the police criminal investigation unit. Ninety-one people were killed, including 41 Arabs, 28 British and 17

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<sup>2</sup> By terrorism I mean violent actions against civilians, whether perpetrated by individuals (e.g. suicide bombers) or state-sanctioned (e.g. bombing of cities or targeted assassinations with 'collateral damage').

Jewish. This event further undermined British resolve to carry on in Palestine. (Incidentally, the anniversary of the King David Hotel bombing is still celebrated in Israel by right-wing forces. Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attended the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary ‘celebrations’ in July 2006).<sup>vii</sup>

World-wide sympathy for the Jews after the Holocaust, combined with the exhaustion of the British will to continue in Palestine, led to the adoption of the 1947 U.N. Partition Plan. Palestine was to be split in three parts: a Jewish state (55% of the land) with a majority Jewish population, a Palestinian state (45% of the land) with a majority Palestinian population, and an International Zone comprising Jerusalem and the surrounding area, where Jewish and Arab populations would be about the same. Neither side was happy with the plan, especially the Palestinians and the Arab League, who thought it unfair that the Zionists should receive more than half of Palestine when they comprised only one third of the population. Militant Jewish groups, such as Irgun, rejected the plan, but the Jewish Agency, the de facto government of the Yishuv<sup>3</sup> campaigned for its approval.

The U.N. General Assembly approved the plan on November 29, 1947. Significantly, it was supported by both the USA and the USSR. Shortly after the partition plan was adopted heavy fighting broke out. At the beginning the Jewish forces, mainly the kibbutz-based Haganah, confronted the Arab Liberation Army, a volunteer guerilla force created by the Arab League after a summit meeting in Cairo. The Arabs initially sought to cut off Jerusalem from Tel Aviv by ambushing Jewish truck convoys in a ‘battle of the roads’. However, the initial Arab advantage was short-lived. The Haganah grew rapidly and soon developed the capacity to go on the offensive. It began attacking Arab towns in the spring of 1948.

The two Jewish terrorist groups, the Irgun and the Stern Gang, also carried out raids on Arab villages, including the notorious massacre at the peaceful Palestinian village of Deir Yassin. Reports on the atrocities committed in this town, where about 120 Arabs were slaughtered (including many elderly, women & children) exerted a powerful influence on the subsequent Arab flight from the Israeli-controlled zones.<sup>viii</sup> Later, when the tide began to turn in favor of the Israelis, the Haganah launched a campaign of psychological warfare, encouraging Jewish leaders who had contact with Arabs to spread rumors that Jewish forces were coming to burn their villages and warning them to flee for their lives. Deir Yassin survivors’ accounts of summary executions, rape, dynamiting of homes and other brutalities fostered an atmosphere of panic among the Arabs which contributed to the large-scale exodus that was to follow in the coming months.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The “Yishuv” (Hebrew for “settlement”) was the Zionist term for Jewish residents of Palestine before the proclamation of the State of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Another contributing factor to the Arab exodus was simply the confidence of many refugees that victory was imminent and they would soon be returning with the triumphant Arab armies.

Following Deir Yassin, Arab regular troops crossed into Palestine and the siege of Jerusalem was intensified. On April 13, a Jewish medical convoy heading for Jerusalem was attacked and 77 doctors, nurses and civilians were killed.<sup>ix</sup> Nevertheless Jerusalem held out and the Israeli forces grew stronger as the weeks went by. The Jewish settlements had a much greater industrial base than the Arabs, and consequently were better able to convert their industries to the manufacture of munitions. The Haganah was able to purchase artillery in arms markets around the world, including machine guns from Mexico, war-surplus tanks from Italy, war-surplus jeeps and trucks from the USA, and most important, a fleet of German Messerschmitt fighter planes from Czechoslovakia. By June the Haganah had the most powerful air force in the Middle East.<sup>x</sup> In addition, thousands of Jewish volunteers arrived from abroad every month.

On May 15, on the same day that the British Mandate expired, the State of Israel was proclaimed. The proclamation was in violation of the U.N. Partition Plan which declared that no Jewish or Arab state be established in Palestine until two months after the end of the Mandate.<sup>xi</sup> However, quick recognition by the USA and the USSR made the legality of Israel a moot point. The Haganah was quickly transformed, along with several other smaller fighting groups, into the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). By June they outnumbered the combined Arab forces, and by the end of the war they outnumbered the Arabs by 2-1.

Despite several truces in the summer and fall of 1948 the war continued and Israel captured more territory. Ultimately, when a ceasefire was declared in 1949 with the “Green Line” as the border, the new Israeli state increased its holdings to 78% of Palestine rather than 55% as provided for in the Partition Plan. Jordan held on to the West Bank and Egypt took control of the Gaza Strip.<sup>5</sup>

To much of the world the Israeli victory against the combined might of the Arabs appeared to be nothing short of a miracle. A more careful look, however, reveals that more human factors had intervened. Paramount among these was the division among the Arabs, re-enforced as it was by the continuing legacy of British colonialism. King Abdullah of Transjordan, for example, had his own agenda. He wanted his capital to be East Jerusalem and he was secretly asking the British to support his annexation of the part of Palestine allocated to the Arabs by the U.N. Partition Plan. At the same time he was meeting with more radical Arab leaders who were rejecting the plan.<sup>xii</sup> Egypt was willing to send arms and money for a Liberation Army, but was reluctant to commit regular troops. It feared having to supply its army across the Suez Canal, which Britain still controlled.<sup>xiii</sup> Saudi Arabia’s ruling dynasty had a rivalry with the Hashemite kingdoms of Transjordan and Iraq, both of which had been set up by the British after having been expelled by the Saudi clan after World War I. Iraq was close to Britain and sought its support in its attempt to annex Syria. The Iraqi king let the British know that he would secretly compromise in Palestine.<sup>xiv</sup> Although it was not reflected in their bellicose rhetoric, the Arabs were divided on the question of accepting a Jewish state in Palestine.

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<sup>5</sup> Egypt declared that it was holding the Gaza Strip for the Palestinian people. Jordan illegally annexed the West Bank and East Jerusalem, though this was never recognized by the Arab League, the Palestinian people, the U.N. or the USA.



The Arab armies were poorly trained compared to the Israelis. They lacked experience in modern warfare. The best of them, the Arab Legion of Transjordan, had its British military advisers withdrawn before the fighting began, because the British feared the diplomatic and political repercussions (especially from the USA) if they were captured in the conflict. On the other hand, the Haganah had a vast amount of combat experience. It is estimated that up to 25,000 members of the Haganah served in World War II with the allied forces.<sup>xv</sup>

Palestinian Arabs were themselves divided around the person of Haj Amin, the Mufti (spiritual leader) of Jerusalem, whose goal had long been to drive both the British and the Jews from Palestine. To this end the Mufti had thrown in his lot with Nazi Germany in the last months of World War II. While not seated at the table at the Arab League summit meeting in Cairo on the eve of the war, he was present in the city and conferred regularly with the Arab heads of state. Haj Amin preferred support for immediate guerilla warfare in Palestine without the presence of the regular Arab armies. Palestine's two Arab paramilitary groups were themselves divided on the political stand taken by the Mufti.<sup>xvi</sup>

With the expulsion and flight of the Arabs during the war Jews were now a majority of the population within the 1949 truce lines. This event is known among Palestinians as "Al-Nakba" ("The Catastrophe"). The number of Palestinian Arab refugees after the 1947-49 conflict is generally agreed to be about 750,000. At the same time many Jews were either expelled from or voluntarily left their homes in neighboring Arab countries and about 600,000 eventually settled in Israel. In 1949 Israel offered to repatriate 100,000 of the Palestinian refugees but the latter rejected the offer, seeing it as a compromise that could be construed as recognition of Israel. In 1950 the Knesset (Israel parliament) passed the Law of Return, which granted Jews throughout the world the right to immigrate to Israel. The contradiction between the Law of Return and the unresolved issue of the Right of Return of the Palestinian refugees is one of the reasons why many critics of Israel call it a racist state (see below). Israel was accepted into the United Nations in 1949 only after it accepted the Palestinian of Right Return (Resolution 194) and the borders of the 1947 Partition Plan (Resolution 181) as a basis of negotiation.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **Israel & the Arab States in the 1950's & 1960's**

In the 1950's the new Israeli state intervened on the side of the British & French during their ill-fated expedition to overthrow the Nasser government in Egypt, which had nationalized the Suez Canal. Israel entered into a military alliance with the European powers and declared war on Egypt in 1956. The result was a fiasco for Britain and France and Israel was compelled to withdraw its forces from the Sinai Peninsula. Also in the 1950's, Israel sided with French colonialism in Algeria, where the National Liberation Front was leading a struggle for independence. Zionism claimed to be a national liberation movement, but Israel had already aligned itself with the imperial metropolis in two conflicts. Critics argued that in so doing, they were simply carrying on with the pro-European imperialism policy of Herzl, Weissman and the other founders of Zionism.

The Six-Day War in June 1967 was a major turning point in the Middle East conflict. When Egypt expelled a U.N. force from the Sinai (stationed there since the 1956 Suez conflict) and announced a blockade of the Strait of Tiran (cutting off Israeli access to the Red Sea), Israel launched a devastating pre-emptive attack on Egypt's air force. The ensuing brief war between Israel and the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, Jordan & Iraq resulted in a resounding victory for Israel. At the war's end Israel had gained control of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. The latter was returned to Egypt in a separate peace treaty between Israel and the Egyptian government of Anwar Sadat after the U.S.-brokered Camp David Accord was signed in 1978. Israel still clings to the other territories.<sup>6</sup>

After the Six-Day War about 300,000 of the one million Palestinians living in the West Bank fled to Jordan, adding to the total number of Palestinians living in refugee camps. A large settlement effort was subsequently launched by Israel in the occupied territories in defiance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, passed on November 22, 1967. The resolution called for Israel "to withdraw from the territories occupied in the recent conflict." It was formally agreed to by the Israeli government in a letter signed by Foreign Minister Abba Eban and delivered to the U.N. Secretary General.<sup>xviii</sup>

For Israeli political parties the 1967 war was a turning point. The military and civil costs of maintaining the occupation, and of subsidizing the illegal settlements that followed, changed the balance of power in the Knesset. The long era of Labor Party domination of Israel's governing coalitions came to an end. While Labor remained a powerful influence and sometimes was able to form governments, it never regained its preeminent position in Israeli politics. Governing coalitions have subsequently been led most-often by parties of the right. While this trend may be partly explained by the general swing to the right throughout the world, it is also because the administration and ideological justification of the occupation and the illegal settlements has played into the hands of the right-wing parties.

The brief period of Soviet support for Israel at the United Nations ended in the 1950's as the USSR sided with Arab nationalism in the Middle East conflict. By the time of the Six-Day War the Israeli-Palestine conflict had become linked with the Cold War and the United States had entered the arena as Israel's greatest supporter. The Soviets and Americans were not willing to risk a major confrontation in the Middle East, but there is no doubt that as early as 1967 substantial U.S. military aid made its way to the Israelis, just as substantial (although less sophisticated) Soviet aid found its way to the Arabs. In 1993 former U.S. Defence Secretary Robert McNamara revealed that during the 1967 war the U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet aircraft carrier battle group, on a training exercise near Gibraltar, was repositioned to the Eastern Mediterranean to defend Israel if necessary, thereby causing a brief crisis with the Soviets.<sup>xix</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> After the war Israel illegally annexed East Jerusalem and extended the city's boundaries by 65 square kilometers into the West Bank. The expansionary process continued with the Greater Jerusalem plan in 1980, which further extended Israel's borders into the occupied West Bank.

## **The PLO, the Arabs & Israel in the 1970's**

The PLO was founded in 1964 to work for the right of Palestinian refugees to return, and initially, the destruction of Israel. It advocated armed struggle. From the beginning the PLO was a secular and decentralized coalition of political and military factions: the dominant centrist nationalist group (Fatah), several militant communist groups (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine & the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) & various other nationalist factions. It was led by Yasser Arafat from the beginning until his death in 2004.

The first Palestinian attack to become world-wide news was at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, where the Black September group, a militant faction of the PLO, killed eleven Israeli athletes in a protracted siege that launched a new age of media-driven terrorist activities. Yasser Arafat denied that the PLO had links with Black September, claiming that it was a rogue element, but given the decentralized nature of the PLO, it was difficult to determine the truth.

The PLO was recognized as the “sole legitimate representative” of the Palestinian people by the Arab League in 1974 shortly after the October 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict known as the ‘Yom Kippur War’ or the ‘Ramadan War’. This time Israel fought primarily against Egypt, Syria and to a lesser extent Jordan, Iraq and a small Palestinian contingent. The Arab states sought to regain the territories lost in 1967. Their campaigns were confined to the illegally-occupied Sinai and Golan Heights. Given that Israel had defied U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 (a binding resolution), and the Arab armies did not attack across the 1949 armistice lines, Egypt and Syria had a strong case that international law was on their side. Nevertheless, although the Arabs were successful in the early fighting, the Israelis ultimately prevailed once again. Consequently, after having lost major wars in 1948, 1967 and 1973, several key Arab states concluded that they could not defeat Israel. The 1973 war was the last time combined Arab armies clashed with the Jewish state. Henceforth the essential protagonists in this conflict would be Israel and the Palestinians themselves.

Arab unity was problematic even going into the 1973 war. Egypt and Syria had built up their military capacities and were keen to revenge the 1967 humiliation and win back their lost territories, but Jordan was less keen. The PLO had been promised control of the West Bank and Gaza in the event of an Arab victory, but Jordan still clung to the hope of annexing the West Bank. That was not the end of Arab disunity: Iraq and Syria had strained relations and were relatively ineffective in the fighting.

Arab goals also conflicted with those of their main backer, the USSR, which was pursuing détente with the United States. In 1972 Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who had succeeded Nasser in 1970, expelled 20,000 Soviet advisors. While Syria and Iraq remained close to the USSR, Sadat now sought closer relations with the USA, at the same time as he prepared for war with Israel. However, the USA was already Israel's main supplier of armaments and economic aid.

In the last days of the war the Israeli forces successfully crossed the Suez Canal and trapped Egypt's Third Army, cutting it off from food and water. Egypt was now dependant upon U.S. diplomacy to save its army from being totally destroyed. The army was saved after intense negotiations, especially between the USA and the USSR, and a ceasefire was accepted by Israel, Egypt, Syria & Jordan.<sup>xx</sup>

Just before the ceasefire, in response to the USA's support of Israel, Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting States (OPEC), led by Saudi Arabia, decided to reduce production by 5% per month and threatened an oil embargo. Defying this threat, President Nixon appealed to Congress for an additional \$2.2 billion for arms shipments to Israel. On Oct. 20, Saudi Arabia declared an oil embargo against the USA and later extended it to other states.<sup>7</sup>

Egypt continued to pursue détente with Israel and the USA throughout the rest of the 1970's. In 1978 Anwar Sadat met with Menachem Begin and U.S. President Jimmy Carter at Camp David near Washington, D.C. The Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty (the "Camp David Accords") was signed soon afterwards. Egypt recognized the State of Israel and Israel withdrew its forces from the Sinai. According to Carter, Menachem Begin promised on behalf of the Israeli people to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza before leaving the conference.<sup>xxi</sup> But the part of the Camp David Accords that dealt with the Palestinian problem was deliberately vague and Israel proceeded with its policy of settlements in the occupied territories. As a result Egypt was expelled from the Arab League. Two years later Sadat was assassinated by army members who were outraged at his negotiations with Israel.

### **The First Lebanon War**

The next flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestine conflict was Lebanon in 1982. Its post-1948 Palestinian refugee population of 110,000 had been augmented by the arrival of the PLO leadership and tens of thousands of additional Palestinian refugees in the period from 1972 to 1975. This generation of refugees had previously been staying in camps in Jordan, but had left after the PLO had fallen out with the government of King Hussein.<sup>8</sup>

Civil war had been raging in Lebanon since 1975 with Christian and Moslem communities at loggerheads and Syria and Israel competing for influence. In this volatile situation, the PLO pursued its own agenda, sometimes fighting against pro-Israeli Maronite (Christian) forces and sometimes against pro-Syrian Amal (Moslem) forces.

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<sup>7</sup> The energy crisis that ensued in the developed capitalist economies was a historic event. It had a crucial influence in driving domestic politics in those countries to the right for decades to come, ending the "Golden Age" of post-World War II economic prosperity.

<sup>8</sup> In the 'Black September' events of 1970 there had been clashes between PLO factions and the Jordanian army, as well as attempts to kill the king, all of which had resulted in the imposition of martial law.

For Israel the ‘causis belli’ for its invasion was an attempted assassination of Israel’s ambassador to London in 1981. The Israeli response was to bomb refugee camps and other Palestinian targets in Beirut and Southern Lebanon, killing 45 and wounding 150. The PLO responded by launching artillery and mortar attacks on civilian centers in Northern Israel. On June 6, 1982, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon under the leadership of Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. Israel’s goals were to drive the PLO out of Southern Lebanon and to support the Christians in the Lebanese civil war and thereby weaken Syrian influence.<sup>xxii</sup>

The Israeli military campaign in Lebanon was out of proportion to previous PLO activities against Israel. The war had been preceded by an 11-month ceasefire with relatively minor violations. In the course of the fighting major cities (including Beirut) were bombarded by the Israelis, several thousand civilians, as well as PLO members, were killed and billions of dollars in damage was done to Lebanese infrastructure.

Later in 1982 an agreement was reached and American, French & Italian peacekeepers escorted PLO survivors to surrounding Arab states. Yasser Arafat and his leadership relocated in Tunisia. The ‘Multinational Force in Lebanon’ provided U.S. President Ronald Reagan’s guarantee to the PLO that the Palestinian civilians in the refugee camps would not be harmed. In return, Israel agreed not to advance into Beirut. However, U.S. Marines left Lebanon two weeks before the expiry of their mandate. When at this time the new-elected president of Lebanon, Bachir Gemayal (pro-Christian and an Israeli ally) was assassinated, the Israeli forces broke the agreement and occupied West Beirut.<sup>9</sup>

It was in this unstable ceasefire climate that the notorious massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps occurred. The Israelis had disarmed the anti-Israeli militia groups in West Beirut, but left their Christian militia allies (the Phalange) fully armed. The day after the Gemayal assassination Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon invited a force of 150 Phalangists to enter the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps to ‘clean out’ any PLO fighters taking refuge there. The Israelis had sealed off the camp and set up observation posts from nearby tall buildings. There were numerous reports that in the evenings of September 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> the Israeli forces fired illuminating flares over the camp to assist the Phalange in their work. During the two evenings, Phalangists butchered up to 2,000 inhabitants of the camp, including many women, children and elderly. In 1987 *Time* magazine published an article suggesting that Ariel Sharon was directly responsible for the massacre. Although *Time* could not prove its allegations, Sharon lost the suit because he could not prove the magazine had “knowledge of falsity or reckless disregard for the truth.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

The Israelis achieved their objective in removing the PLO from Lebanon, but they failed to remove the Syrian forces. In 1985 Israel withdrew its forces to a Security Zone in the south of Lebanon, where they stayed until 2000. Ironically the PLO was replaced by a

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<sup>9</sup> The PLO denied any connection to the assassination of Gemayal. It was later proven to be pro-Syrian forces that were responsible.

new and completely home-grown anti-Israeli force in Lebanon – the Islamist Hezbollah militia.

### **The First Intifada**

The Palestinian revolt known as the Intifada (‘uprising’) was a grassroots phenomenon. The tenacity of the resistance in the occupied territories surprised even the PLO. While both the PLO and the new Islamist force Hamas both tried to claim credit for it and assume its leadership, the real impetus came from local communities. With the PLO in exile in Tunisia, a “Unified Intifada Leadership” sprung up. The image of stone-throwing youths confronting highly armed Israeli defense forces was a demonstration to the world that the Palestinians themselves - not surrounding Arab states with their various agendas - were the driving force in this struggle. Indeed, Egypt had previously withdrawn its claim to Gaza and Jordan was growing weary of contending for the West Bank.

When Jordan’s King Hussein, in the midst of the Palestinian uprising, abandoned his claim on the West Bank in 1988, the Palestinian National Council (the PLO’s legislative body) declared an independent State of Palestine. Later that year Yasser Arafat declared in Geneva that the PLO would recognize Israel’s right to exist within pre-1967 borders provided: a) that the Palestinians would be allowed to set up their own state in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza; b) that Israel accept the Palestinian Right of Return. These proclamations did not create an independent state, but more than 100 countries subsequently recognized the State of Palestine.<sup>xxiv</sup>

More than 1000 Palestinians died during the Intifada, including 241 children, while 160 Israelis (including 6 children) died. The sacrifices of the Palestinian people set the stage for the return of the exiled PLO leadership and new negotiations, first in Madrid and later in Oslo.

Meanwhile, the militant Islamist group Hamas was on the rise in the occupied territories. Its founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin had earlier set up a network of Islamic charities and an Islamic university in Gaza, but it was during the Intifada that Hamas was formally established as an offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In 2002 there were reports in the western media suggesting that Hamas had been initially assisted by the Mossad (Israeli intelligence) as a “counterbalance to the PLO.”<sup>xxv</sup> Be that as it may, Hamas ultimately proved to be an implacable foe of the Israelis. During the Intifada, Hamas members beat Palestinians suspected of working with the Israelis. Subsequently Hamas proclaimed that all Israeli civilians are military targets because they lived in a state with universal military conscription, and by 1994 it had begun a campaign of suicide bombings against the Israelis.

### **The Oslo Accords**

In the early 1990’s conditions were favorable for a return to the bargaining table. The Intifada had placed the Palestinians in the world spotlight, while the collapse of the USSR and heightened divisions among the Arab states after the Gulf War had increased

the PLO's political isolation. Both factors suggested that the Palestinians were ready to negotiate.<sup>10</sup> Circumstances were changing domestically in Israel as well. The Peace Now movement was particularly influential after the Lebanese war and the Sabra & Shatila massacres. A series of unprecedented, massive demonstrations were held demanding an immediate negotiated settlement with the Palestinians.

Economic issues, as well as the longing for peace among Israelis, helped to elect a Labor Party-dominated coalition in 1992 led by Yitzak Rabin. While in its early days Israel had functioned as a regulated and more or less social democratic national economy, the Likud Party's policies of privatization, social cutbacks & deregulation had devastated much of Israel's traditional economy and opened it up to the international market. Substantial sectors of Israel's elite – including Yitzak Rabin and the Labor Party - now sought a greater role in the economy of the Middle East. The price would be a “deal” with Arafat.

In August 1993 the Oslo Accords were signed. The Accords granted the Palestinians partial control over parts of Gaza and the West Bank through the creation of the Palestinian Authority. Israel recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The PLO in turn recognized the right of Israel to exist and renounced terrorism. Arafat was appointed head of the Palestinian Authority and a timetable for elections was laid out. On September 9, 1993, Arafat issued a press release stating that “the PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

The Oslo Accords were flawed and controversial from the start. The PLO's abandonment of the 1947 U.N. Partition Plan was an enormous concession. Permanent issues such as Jerusalem, refugees, Israeli settlements, security and borders were deliberately excluded from the Accords and left to be decided at a later date. However U.N. Resolution 194 on the Right of Return was not abandoned.

The agreement stipulated that interim self-government was to be granted to the Palestinians in phases. Furthermore, the West Bank and Gaza Strip were to be divided up into three zones: Zone A would be under the full control of the Palestinian Authority; Zone B would be under Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control; Zone C would be under full Israeli control, except over Palestinian civilians (these were mostly Israeli settlement areas).

The economic annex of the Oslo Accords (the “Paris Protocol”) declared the Palestinian economy to be a part of the Israeli customs system. It meant that Israel would collect duties for all the goods that pass through Israel to the Palestinian territories and turn over the money (after deducting a commission) to the Palestinian Authority. In 2006 Israel would refuse to hand this money over the Authority.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Yasser Arafat had supported Iraq during the Gulf War and consequently lost the support of the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia.

<sup>11</sup> Israeli control of Palestinian customs revenues must be viewed in the context of an economy in the occupied territories that had been bereft of any meaningful industrial development since 1967. The occupied territories had become a captive market for Israeli

While the Accords were received with hope by some, not everyone shared in the optimism. In Israel the Knesset ratification was only by a vote of 61 to 50 with 8 abstentions. The right in Israeli was opposed to the deal. Encouraged by opposition leaders Ariel Sharon, Benjamin Netanyahu and the rest of the Likud Party, settlements continued to expand in the occupied territories. Among the Palestinians, Fatah accepted the Accords but Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine all rejected them.

In 1994 Hamas began a wave of suicide bombings, the result of which was to undermine Israeli support for the Accords. In November 1995 a right-wing Jewish militant assassinated Labour Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. His successor Shimon Peres hoped to form a coalition government after the 1996 elections but was defeated by Likud candidate Benjamin Netanyahu, who was opposed to the idea of Palestinian statehood.

Although one condition was met when Yasser Arafat was duly elected President of the Palestinian Authority in January of 1996, little progress was made in advancing beyond the initial stages of the Oslo agreements. One late attempt came at the July 2000 Camp David Summit, where Netanyahu's successor, Labor Party leader Ehud Barak, offered to form the Palestinian State initially on 73% of the West Bank and 100% of the Gaza Strip. In 10 to 25 years, Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank would expand to 90%. Barak's offer was unacceptable to the Palestinians because: a) it did not offer them sovereignty in East Jerusalem; b) the areas retained by Israel in the West Bank were those with the best water resources; c) it did not address the Palestinians' right of return.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The Barak-Arafat talks were scheduled to continue in early 2001, but they were interrupted by Israeli elections and a new wave of Palestinian resistance. On September 28, 2000 right-wing opposition leader Ariel Sharon made a provocative trip to East Jerusalem where he visited the Temple Mount, also the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, two of the holiest Moslem sites. The visit inflamed public opinion among Palestinians because of its messianic importance to fundamentalists on the Israeli right. Inspired by this challenge a new Palestinian uprising commenced, known as the "Al-Aqsa Intifada." With the renewal of the Intifada the Israeli peace movement was soon out-manuevered by its opponents and Barak's government was defeated. Ariel Sharon and his Likud Party formed the next government.<sup>12</sup>

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industry and the military government there prevented the establishment of competing enterprises. Super-exploited Palestinian workers were consequently compelled to work in Israel for sub-standard wages or else become part of the vast network of Palestinians dependent upon the largess of the Palestinian Authority.

<sup>12</sup> The Al-Aqsa Intifada claimed the lives of more than 3200 Palestinians and 900 Israelis from 2000-2004.



## **Post-Oslo: Israeli Unilateralism & the “Apartheid” Wall**

The landslide victory of Ariel Sharon in the 2000 elections marked the end of the peace talks. With the Intifada raging again Sharon initiated a controversial plan to unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip. Amid much protest the withdrawal of 8,500 Israeli settlers was carried out in 2005. The Israeli action was deceptive because it did not transfer to the Palestinian Authority sovereignty over Gaza’s borders and airspace and seaports. The withdrawal from Gaza provided Israel with favorable international publicity at first, but as the months went by Gaza began to look more and more like a vast open-air prison for the Palestinians. Meanwhile, there were still more than 450,000 settlers residing in illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, along with another 20,000 settlers in the occupied Golan Heights.

The other half of Sharon’s strategy, now that Israel had abandoned direct negotiations with the PLO, was the construction, beginning in June 2002, of the “West Bank Barrier.” Its rationale was to defend the country from attacks by armed Palestinian groups. However, critics saw the “Apartheid Wall” as another land grab and an attempt to permanently annex 9.5% of the West Bank.<sup>xxviii</sup> Across the 1949 Green Line border, mostly on prime real estate, a complex network of off-limits settlements and roads cut off Palestinian communities from one another. Demolitions of Palestinian homes, destruction of wells and olive groves and seizure of water resources for the exclusive use of the illegal settlements proceeded apace, as did new settlements. The program of Sharon’s government looked increasingly like the Bantustan strategy of apartheid South Africa.

With the PLO still committed to implementing the hopelessly compromised Oslo Accords, Palestinian resistance erupted in a Hamas-led campaign of suicide bombings in Israeli dance clubs, restaurants, banquet halls & coffee shops. The suicide bombings, along with the split between Hamas and the PLO, seemed to justify the Sharon government’s claim that Israel did not have a reliable negotiating partner. They provided a rationale for the Israeli campaign of targeted assassinations (with the inevitable “collateral damage”) and the detention of some 10,000 Palestinians.

Yasser Arafat himself was detained by Israeli forces in his Ramallah headquarters in the West Bank for the last 3 years of his life. However controversial his leadership, he remained until his death on November 11, 2004 the most popular Palestinian leader and indeed, the most popular leader among the Arab masses in the Middle East. His successor as Chair of the PLO was Mahmoud Abbas (who was duly elected in 2005). The split between the Palestinians – especially between Hamas and Fatah – continues today. It was made even more tangible with the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestine Legislative Council elections, leaving the Palestinians with a Fatah-led executive and a Hamas-led legislature.

## **The Hamas Electoral Victory**

International reaction to the Hamas victory in the Palestinian legislature was swift, punishing and hypocritical. The Bush Administration’s “Road Map for Peace” came to an

abrupt halt. Initiated in 2002, with Yasser Arafat under virtual house arrest, the Road Map called for democratic elections in the occupied territories. But the “international community” could not abide the democratic decision of the Palestinian people. Canada, the USA and the EU cut off all funds to the Palestinian Authority. The USA imposed a financial blockade on the Authority’s bank accounts, impeding the transfer of funds from the Arab League. The Bush Administration was conducting a “pro-democracy” campaign in the Middle East, but in the case of Palestine it seemed that the people had chosen the “wrong” government.

In electing Hamas to be the governing party, the Palestinian people were punishing the PLO (and especially its Fatah leadership) for its corruption, for its misuse of customs revenues and international financial aid, and ultimately for its role in defending Israeli settlers against Palestinian violence while doing nothing to defend Palestinians against Israeli violence. The lesson for Hamas was clear. The conditions accepted by Fatah at Oslo were a trap that led to collaboration and corruption.

The U.S., the EU and other nations, including Canada, demanded that Hamas renounce violence, recognize Israel’s right to exist and express support for the Oslo Accords. Hamas rejected these terms calling them unfair. The French daily *Le Monde* reported on May 9, 2006 that Hamas would be likely to accept the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (from an Arab League summit meeting in Beirut) which called for full normalization of relations with Israel in exchange for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders (implying evacuation from the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem & the Golan Heights) and the return of all Palestinian refugees and their descendents.<sup>xxix</sup>

Splits also occurred at this time in Israeli right-wing sectors, caused largely by the reaction to the dismantling of the settlements in Gaza. Ariel Sharon’s prestige among the rest of the right as well as among disillusioned centrist forces allowed him to leave the Likud to form a new party called “Kadima” in 2005 and claim the “middle ground.” However, Sharon suffered a severe stroke soon afterwards and his powers passed to Ehud Olmert.

During the spring of 2006 there were attempts to heal the split in the Palestinian camp. Among the most notable was a document agreed upon by five prominent prisoners in Israeli jails, one each from Hamas, Fatah, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The “Prisoners’ Document” was released in June 2006.<sup>xxx</sup> It called for unity around an 18 point statement. However, amid the deteriorating social conditions of Gaza and the West Bank, sporadic in-fighting and mutual recrimination continues to this day and unity has not been achieved.

### **The Siege of Gaza & Lebanon II**

On June 28, 2006, Hamas militants dug a tunnel under the Gaza border and attacked an IDF post, capturing an Israeli soldier and killing two others. It was Hamas’ first military engagement since it had declared a truce with Israel in February 2005 (during which time

the IDF had not suspended its policy of targeted assassinations). The Hamas raid was in immediate retaliation to two incidents: the June 10 slaying of a Palestinian family holidaying on a Gaza beach by an IDF artillery shell (which Israel refused to investigate) and the IDF kidnapping of two civilians in Gaza on June 24. In what has become a characteristic disproportionate response Israel began “Operation Summer Rains”, which consisted of heavy bombardment of Hamas targets as well as bridges and roads. Gaza’s only power station was destroyed and the pipeline that supplied Gaza with fuel was cut off. Israeli ground troops also invaded the territory.

Today the Gaza Strip is effectively sealed off by Israeli forces. No products can be exported. No Palestinians can leave and no medicine can arrive. Fishermen cannot venture into the water. Israeli jets constantly break the sound barrier over Gaza to terrify the people. Elected Hamas representatives have been detained. Critics have accused Israel of disproportionate use of force, collective punishment of civilians and not giving diplomacy a chance. According to the U.N. World Food Program 70% of the population lacks the food to meet its daily needs.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon exploded on July 12, 2006 when Hezbollah conducted a cross-border raid, killed three Israeli soldiers and captured two others. Israel held the Lebanese government responsible for the attack and retaliated with an air and naval blockade, massive air attacks across much of the country and ground incursions into southern Lebanon. Hezbollah responded with rocket attacks into northern Israel and engaged in guerilla warfare with the Israeli army. By the time a ceasefire came into effect on August 14, 2006 more than 1,500 Lebanese (mostly civilians) and more than 150 Israelis (mostly soldiers) had been killed, billions of dollars worth of damage had been done to Lebanon’s infrastructure and ecosystem, more than 250,000 Lebanese had been made internal refugees, and more than 100,000 unexploded (and illegal) cluster bombs had been left behind to kill & maim for years to come.<sup>xxxii</sup>

As the Second Lebanon War progressed it became apparent that Israel had been preparing for it for a long time. Little was heard about the two Israeli prisoners. While Israel carried out its bombing campaign against Lebanese civilians, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice played for time before using American influence to bring about a ceasefire. The Bush Administration’s plan, it seems, called for the destruction of Hezbollah as a prelude to further desired regime changes in Syria and Iran. U.S. support for Israel had never been shown in such a one-sided manner before. Lebanon is a democratic country. Only a year before it had been celebrated in the Western world for its “Cedar Revolution,” when large demonstrations led to the peaceful exit of Syrian troops, stationed there since the civil war in the early 1980’s. Now, like the Palestinians, Lebanon faced the double standard of the United States and its allies. While the former were being punished for democratically electing Hamas, the Lebanese people were being abandoned at their hour of need, despite having successfully challenged the Syrian military presence in Lebanon in 2005.

In the end Hezbollah was not defeated. Its missiles continued to rain down on northern Israel and IDF troops on the ground were unsuccessful in their encounters with the

Hezbollah guerillas. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah became a hero for many throughout the Middle East. The Israeli armed forces seemed less invincible than before.

While an uneasy ceasefire took hold in Lebanon, the Israeli offensive in Gaza and the West Bank continued. For the besieged Palestinians, struggling to form a national unity government, the initiative seemed increasingly to reside at the grassroots level, as their civil society groups in Israel, the occupied territories & the diaspora reached out to the world, calling for an international campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

## **Part Two: The Israeli State and Israeli-Palestine Society**

### **The Question of Racism**

In 1975 the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution equating Zionism with racism. The motion was based upon the 1965 U.N. definition of racism. According to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, racial discrimination is “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> If we accept this definition, it seems obvious that the Israeli state discriminates against its Arab citizens and subjects in a manner that justifies calling it racist.

However, the controversy at the U.N. was not put to rest with the 1975 vote. In the wake of the world-wide hegemony of the U.S.A. after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in an atmosphere of optimism for a two-state solution after the PLO recognition of Israel in 1988, the “Zionism-is-racism” resolution was rescinded at the United Nations in 1991. In 2001 the issue flared up again at the Third World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa. Once again a resolution equating Zionism with racism was passed by the U.N. delegates, though with notable opposition from the U.S.A., Israel, and other Western countries including Canada. In protest, the U.S. and Israel delegates walked out of the conference. At its closing session a resolution was adopted that recognized the Palestinian Right of Return but omitted language critical of Israel. It was passed by a vote of 51 to 37 with 54 countries absenting themselves from the vote and 10 abstaining.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Looking back, it is apparent that the founders of Israel shared in the racist, Eurocentric assumptions of their era. Theodore Herzl himself described the future Jewish homeland (in *The State of Israel*) as “a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism.”<sup>xxxv</sup> The popular recruiting slogan of Zionism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century was “a land without a people for a people without a land.” This extraordinary claim was taken at face value not only by Zionist advocates but also by millions of people throughout the western world.

Not all of the Zionist leadership actually believed that Palestine was a land without a people. Some early leaders like Vladimir Jabotinsky recognized that Zionist colonization must ultimately be carried out against the will of the native inhabitants. He called openly for suppression of the Arab population backed by the armed force of the state.<sup>xxxvi</sup> It was Jabotinsky who founded the Haganah (see above) and it was his Revisionist Zionism movement that founded the paramilitary group Irgun and the notorious Stern Gang. His memory is revered today and even celebrated by politicians of the right like Benjamin Netanyahu. More recently, Ariel Sharon stated the same position with characteristic bluntness: “It is the duty of Israeli leaders to explain to public opinion, clearly and courageously, a certain number of facts that are forgotten with time. The first of these is that there is no Zionism, colonization, or Jewish state without the eviction of the Arabs and the expropriation of their lands.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

One of the founding principles of the Israeli state is the Law of Return, which was passed by the Knesset in 1950. It gives automatic citizenship to Jews from anywhere in the world, but to no other people.<sup>13</sup> Discrimination also applies to the ownership of land. In 1952 the Knesset passed the World Zionist Organization–Jewish Agency (Status) Law, which gave exclusive rights to Israelis of “Jewish nationality” including the right to purchase land. Some 92% of the land of Israel is state land, held by the Jewish National Fund “in trust” for the Jewish people. Palestinians may not purchase this land.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Today, the Jewish National Fund administers this land, the vast majority of which was Palestinian property confiscated in the years since 1948. The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions states that Israel razed over 418 Palestinian villages in the first six years of its existence. The practice of confiscation continues today within the pre-1967 borders of Israel as well as in the occupied territories. More than 4,000 Palestinian homes have been destroyed in the last two years alone.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The Israeli state pursues policies against its own Bedouin Arab minority similar to its actions in the occupied territories. Bedouins have been forcibly relocated to the Negev area. Half of the 140,000 Israeli Bedouins live in villages that the Israeli government does not recognize and for whom it will not provide basic municipal services.<sup>xl</sup>

Israel discriminates against its Arab citizens in other ways as well. Although Arab Israelis have the right to vote, they can only contest in elections if they accept the “character of the Jewish state.” In a nation where all Jewish citizens must perform compulsory military service, Arab Israelis may not serve in the Israeli Defense Force. Israeli marriage laws also discriminate against Arab citizens. A law passed by the Knesset in 2003 prohibits marriage between Israeli Arabs (who make up 20% of the Israeli population) and Palestinians from the occupied territories.<sup>xli</sup> Behind this lies the so-called “demographic” problem.

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<sup>13</sup> The definition of a Jew is not agreed upon universally. Many accept as fellow Jews only those with a Jewish mother, whereas the Law of Return includes those whose Jewish descent is more remote.

One must conclude that the evidence is sufficient to declare that the Israeli state discriminates in a severe and systemic manner against its internal Arab minority to a point that can justifiably be called racist. Occasionally, high-ranking elected officials are quite blatant. For example in 2005 Israel's education minister Limor Livnat stated that Israel is "not just another state like all other states," and went on to say "we are not just a state of all its citizens."<sup>xliii</sup> In the occupied territories, of course, the situation is simply one of colonial oppression and racism is much more overt.

### **Socio-Economic Indicators**

Recent Israeli studies clearly demonstrate that its Arab citizens are much worse off than their Jewish counterparts. At the same time they reveal deteriorating social conditions among large sectors of the Jewish population. The National Insurance Institute published a report on social conditions in 2005.<sup>xliii</sup> Among its findings:

- more than 1.5 million Israelis (25% of the population) live below the poverty line
- 42% of Arab families live below the poverty line
- average wages for Arab Israelis are less than half those of Jews of European origin
- child poverty has increased 50% since 1988
- 714,000 children go hungry every day (in a country of 6.5 million)

As Israel has pursued a policy of economic liberalism, the gap between the rich and the poor has grown, affecting the Arab population most severely, but also hitting hard at the living standards of Jewish Israelis.

The Jewish labor movement has long been one of the most powerful social forces in the country, but it is now in decline. Histadrut (the general federation of workers) reached a peak of more than a million members in the 1980's and insured a relatively high standard of living and social welfare for Jewish Israelis, but its current membership is now listed at only 650,000.<sup>xliv</sup> In addition to being a trade union, Histadrut is the owner of a number of businesses and factories. For years it has been one of Israel's leading employers. In 1989 it still employed 280,000 workers at its various enterprises, including banks and industrial conglomerates. Openly discriminatory for years, it forbade the hiring of Arabs until 1959. Today about 10% of its members are Arab Israelis. Despite this opening, the wages of Arab Israelis, as has been noted, continue to lag far behind those of their Jewish comrades.

Today, after years of capitalist restructuring, the Israeli elite is firmly planted in the neoliberal and pro-globalization camp. Its Labor Party competes with the right-wing parties to show how willing it is to promote "competitiveness" in the Israeli economy. Israeli capitalists seek to be players in the high-tech digital sector. To that end they employ super-exploited Jewish settlers, especially Orthodox women, in the West Bank at a fraction of the wages unionized workers in Israel earn. Non-Arab "guest workers" who are paid even less than Arabs are another feature of the new Israeli economy.<sup>xlv</sup>

The “Greater Israel” policy (i.e. expansion, occupation & colonization) is a drain on Israeli resources and a further incentive for the ruling political class to pursue cutbacks and austerity at home. The Sharon and Olmert governments have continued to privatize the Israeli economy and have made further cuts to unemployment insurance and other social benefits. They have also raised the pension age, introduced severe restrictions on the right to strike and cut corporate taxes and income taxes for the rich. Meanwhile, expenditure on the armed forces, the settlements (including roads and infrastructure) and the security wall have increased.

The Israeli economy has a chronic balance of payments deficit. It imports far more goods and services than it exports. Throughout its history the Israeli state has been faced with an economic dilemma: it needs to trade with its neighbors, but at the same time it needs to maintain a Jewish majority in the Palestinian lands it occupies. With few natural resources, little water, and separated from the wider regional economy, Israel requires a massive influx of cash to stay afloat.<sup>xlvi</sup> In the early years it was supported by the Diaspora which contributed \$200 million a year before 1967. German reparation money in the 1950’s & 1960’s was also a significant early source of revenue. Today Israel receives \$1.5 billion a year from private donors in the United States. However, the greatest source of economic aid today is the U.S. Government.

### **Israel’s Alliance with the U.S.A.**

Israel is the highest per-capita recipient of U.S. aid in the world.<sup>xlvii</sup> Direct U.S. aid to Israel is more than six times the total U.S. aid to all of sub-Saharan Africa. At present U.S. aid to Israel stands at \$3.5 billion per annum. Of this assistance about 60% is military aid and the rest economic. Unlike most U.S. aid to other countries the aid to Israel is not tied to the purchase of U.S. goods and services. The military part of this aid comes with no repayment provisions. It is simply a grant. While the economic aid from the U.S. must be paid back with interest, the U.S. also offers other financial assistance. In the 1990’s it gave \$10 billion worth of loan guarantees and in 2002 it provided a similar amount. Without these guarantees Israel, with an external debt greater than its gross domestic product, would face bankruptcy. One might very well ask if such a dependence on the support of a great power half a world away is in the long-term interest of the people of Israel. The U.S. has its interests and they evolve with changing world conditions. Can the U.S. government always be counted on to support the State of Israel as it is presently constituted?

Zionism has claimed to be a national liberation movement. If so, it is a highly unusual one, since it has always sought alliances with the great powers. Since the U.S. alliance with Israel was firmly established after the 1967 war, the U.S. has used its veto on the U.N. Security Council 39 times to block resolutions condemning the latter’s policies and actions in the occupied territories.<sup>xlviii</sup> Moreover, the threat of the U.S. veto has resulted in countless similar resolutions being watered down or withdrawn altogether. Given the conditions applied to Israel (and accepted by it) for admission to the United Nations, Israel would have had been expelled or sanctions applied to it (like South Africa) were it

not for the protection of the U.S. Thanks to the United States, no action has ever been taken against Israel for its defiance of U.N. resolutions or its development more than 100 nuclear weapons.<sup>14</sup>

Israel in turn provides a valuable service to the U.S., and not only for its obvious role as a powerful U.S. ally in the Middle East. It has served as a frequent conduit for arms shipments to regimes that the U.S. could not be seen to be assisting such as military dictatorships and right-wing death squads in Latin America, and the apartheid regime in South Africa in the 1980's. Since the 9/11 attacks provided them with the opportunity to go on the offensive, the U.S.-Israel alliance has moved into high gear.

The far-right administration of George W. Bush is backed by powerful fundamentalist and ardently pro-Zionist Christian groups. The U.S. alliance with Israel is powerfully advocated by the America Israel Public Affairs Committee, one of the most influential lobby groups in Washington. Zealots in the Bush Administration, the Pentagon and the State Department see a special role for Israel in their plan (the "Project for a New American Century") to remake the Middle East in their image. The racist doctrine of the "Clash of Civilizations" serves as a smokescreen for the real oil and gas-driven economic motives behind this latest phase of imperialism.

### **Israeli Politics: Turn to the Right**

While the Labor Party dominated Israeli politics for the first 30 years, the changing world order and the exigencies of being an occupying power have resulted in a long period of right-wing dominance. The Likud Party, the offshoot of Vladimir Jabotinsky's hard-line Revisionist Zionist movement, has been the dominant force in Israeli politics ever since. Under Likud there appeared a succession of prime ministers with violent, criminal pasts. Menachem Begin was leader of Irgun, which blew up the British Headquarters at the King David Hotel in 1946. Yitzak Shamir was leader of the terrorist Stern Gang, which assassinated the British military governor in 1944. Ariel Sharon's criminal responsibility for the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon in 1982 is widely recognized. Likud continues to pursue a policy of gradual annexation of most of the West Bank and Golan Heights, but not outright annexation because that would raise the problem of Israeli citizenship for the Arab population newly incorporated into the State of Israel.

The Labor Party ('Mapai') remains a significant force in Israeli politics, although it is no longer dominant. For a time in the 1990's under Yitzak Rabin, Labor seemed to be staging a comeback. The strength of the "Peace Now" movement and high hopes among the electorate after the signing of the Oslo Accords increased its popular support. In the end Labor handed over power to Sharon and his Likud Party and helped his government to implement its policy of annexing much of the West Bank. Labor's current leader, Amir Peretz, who came to the leadership promising a negotiated settlement with the

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<sup>14</sup> Israel's atomic arsenal was a poorly-kept secret until officially revealed to the world by the dissident scientist, whistleblower and prisoner of conscience Mordechai Vanunu in 1986.



Palestinians and to look after the less fortunate in Israeli society, has drifted to the right. Today he denies the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel as part of any settlement, wants Israel to hold on to a considerable part of the West Bank, and insists that Jerusalem be the undivided capital of Israel.<sup>xlix</sup> Recently Labor's financial spokesperson reassured leaders of the world's financial community that a Labor government in Israel would not raise taxes or increase government debt.

The current governing party, Kadima, was founded by Sharon when his Likud-led coalition became unworkable due to settler and religious opposition to his unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. Kadima is made up of a block of ex-Likud members and several leading Labour MP's. It portrays itself as "centrist", but its purpose is to curb the influence of the settler and ultra-religious groups in the Likud coalition, further the right-wing social and economic agenda of the previous Likud government and neutralize the domestic opposition to the annexation of much of the West Bank and East Jerusalem by sowing confusion with the "withdrawal" from Gaza.<sup>1</sup>

Of crucial significance today in Israeli politics are three parties that make up the "Religious Block." Together they have pulled Israeli politics to the far right. The Oriental Religious Party ('Shas') articulates the grievances of the Oriental Jewish lower classes within a conservative religious discourse. The National Religious Party has become increasingly messianic and calls for the occupation of the whole of Palestine as part of a divine plan. The Ultra-Orthodox Occidentals (traditionally non-Zionist and non-political) have become more activist and now are moving into the occupied territories as settlers and speaking out against equality for non-Jews in Israel. The increased influence of these three religious parties has profoundly altered Israeli politics in the past twenty years. The governing parties - Labour, Likud and now Kadima - have all been unable to form a government without the support of the Religious Block.

Another important factor in contemporary Israeli politics is the Russian-Israeli population. Immigrants from the former USSR represent more than a million of Israel's 6.5 million inhabitants. They have a network of Russian language schools, radio stations, newspapers and journals. They also have two small parties which are represented in the Knesset. Although the Russian-Israelis are largely secular, they tend to be right wing, nationalistic, and support discriminatory policies against Arab-Israelis.<sup>li</sup> One of the parties, Yisrael Beiteinu, has grown dramatically in influence. In October 2006 it was invited into the coalition government by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The party's leader, extremist Russian immigrant Avigdor Lieberman, was appointed Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Strategic Threats (in charge of the Iran portfolio). Lieberman openly advocates stripping Palestinian Israelis of their citizenship and shipping them to a future Bantustan-like Palestinian entity. The inclusion of such blatant extremists in the Israeli government is cause for concern, yet Labor Party leader Amir Peretz, also a minister in the governing coalition, accepted Lieberman's appointment.<sup>lii</sup>

Several smaller political parties also compete within Israel's proportional representation electoral system. There are Arab-Israeli parties, but they are small and the majority of Israeli Arabs have not cast their ballot in recent Israeli elections. There is also the

Communist Party of Israel which calls for equality and the unity of the Jewish and Palestinian working class, but it continues to be a marginal force. The main Israeli opposition at this time is not in the Knesset but among a relatively small number of grassroots organizations.<sup>15</sup>

### **The “Apartheid” Wall**

When in 2002 the Sharon government started to build a separation wall around Palestinian communities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the analogy with the former South African apartheid state became clearer than ever. It was immediately dubbed the “Apartheid” Wall by the Palestinian people. As a complicated system of separation walls, Israeli-only roads, and checkpoints for Palestinian travelers was imposed by the Israeli state, and as the map of the West Bank showed the growth of new settler communities on Palestinian land, it became increasingly obvious that Israel was constructing a Bantustan system. Indeed, Ariel Sharon had expressed great interest in the Bantustans during his visit to South Africa in the 1980’s, declaring that they were the solution for Israel.<sup>liii</sup>

In 2004 the International Court of Justice in The Hague, despite pressure from the United States and Israel, declared that the entire wall project was illegal. It acknowledged that the wall had created a de-facto annexed area. It declared that it should be torn down immediately and that all lands and property be returned to their Palestinian owners with compensation. It also declared that governments should not recognize the illegal situation and should not render aid or assistance to Israel in maintaining it. However well intended, the ICJ decision was an advisory opinion only and was non-binding. Nevertheless it was a victory of sorts for the Palestinians and their supporters. It helped to build a qualitatively new level of solidarity around the world for Palestinians, encouraging the Stop the Wall movement and the international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.<sup>liv</sup>

### **The Israeli Peace Camp & the Palestinian Right of Return**

Among contemporary peace groups in Israel and elsewhere, there are many who feel that Zionism is a legitimate movement and that the State of Israel must be defended. Peace Now is an Israeli organization that has consistently opposed the extension of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Founded in 1978, it called for the recognition of the PLO and negotiations based upon the principle of “land for peace.” In the early 1980’s after the First Lebanese War it organized large peace demonstrations and in 1993 it eagerly embraced the Oslo Accords. Its support has waned in recent years as the Oslo Accords unraveled. In 2005 it eagerly endorsed Sharon’s unilateral disengagement from the Gaza

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<sup>15</sup> A typical example, taken from the sponsors of a recent Israeli protest against the siege in Gaza would include the Coalition of Women for Peace, Gush Shalom, Rabbis for Human Rights, Anarchists Against the Wall, the University Student Coalition & High School Seniors Draft Refusers.

Strip. In 2006 Peace Now supported Israel's aerial bombardment and ground invasion of Lebanon.<sup>lv</sup>

As the Wall project proceeds in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the Oslo Accords fade into history, many left-Zionist activists are confronted with a dilemma. During the years of the peace process (i.e. since the PLO recognized Israel in 1988), the Israeli left could promote an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, while ignoring a fundamental contradiction at the heart of the Zionist project.. For if enough Palestinians were to return to their pre-1948 homes, the "Jewish character" of Israel would be ended and the Zionist phase of Jewish life in Israel would essentially be over. On the other hand, if there is no settlement of the refugee problem there will be nothing but perpetual conflict in the future. While prospects for peace have faded once again and Palestinian political forces are in internal crisis, the refugee issue has moved to centre stage.

Resolution 194 was passed by the United Nations General Assembly on 11 December 1948. It called for the return of Palestinian refugees who wish to do so and financial compensation for those who do not. As a condition of gaining admission to the U.N., Resolution 194 and Resolution 181 (acceptance of the Partition Plan as a basis of negotiations) were formally agreed to by Israel. Paragraph 11 of Resolution 194 states that "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible..."<sup>lvi</sup>

Over the years there have been many similar resolutions at the United Nations. One of particular significance is General Assembly Resolution 3236. It acknowledges that all of those made refugees since 1947 have an inalienable right to return. Experts in international law describe the term "inalienable" as meaning that this right cannot be surrendered or otherwise terminated. They go on to say that the rights referred to are *individual* Palestinian rights, as distinguished from Palestinian *national* rights.<sup>lvii</sup>

Many progressive-minded peace activists in Israel and their sympathizers around the world continue to be Zionists insofar as they believe in a Jewish state in Israel. For example, the Peace Now group in Israel and the American activist rabbi and *Tikkun* magazine editor Michael Lerner campaign vigorously against the occupation. Currently both call for a negotiated solution on the basis of the 2003 Geneva "Accord."

Also called the "Draft Permanent Status Agreement", the "Geneva Initiative" or the "Geneva Understanding", this is an unofficial peace proposal that was launched in December of 2003 by Israeli politician Yossi Beilin, one of the architects of the Oslo Accords, and former Palestinian Authority minister Yasser Abed Rabbo. This proposal would give the Palestinians almost all of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and part of Jerusalem. In return for the removal of most of the Israeli settlements in these areas, the

Palestinians would limit their right of return to Israel to a number *specified by Israel* and would drop all other claims and demands.<sup>lviii</sup>

While qualifying words such as “all” and “most” with regard to the occupied lands are highly problematic, the sharpest disagreement is over the last clause in this proposal. The text of the draft accord states that the option of Israel as a permanent place of residence for Palestinian refugees “shall be at the sovereign discretion of Israel and will be in accordance with a number that Israel will submit to the International Commission.” The fact that many Israeli peace and anti-occupation activists cling to language which ultimately denies Palestinians their inalienable right to return shows the tenacity of the demographic contradiction at the heart of the Zionist project.

### **Crisis of the Two-State Solution**

The Road Map for Peace initiative, launched by the Bush Administration in 2002, assembled the “Quartet” (the USA, European Union, Russia & United Nations) as sponsors of a settlement that would ultimately compel the Palestinians to submit to further annexations in the West Bank, as well as effectively jettison the Right of Return. Ostensibly the Quartet is supposed to represent the “international community” but it does not function in an equitable manner. Decisions of the Quartet are made by consensus, a process that gives the U.S. a veto. Time and again, with Israeli contrivance, the dominant role of the U.S. in the Quartet has been confirmed. The European Union and Russia simply will not challenge the U.S. when it comes to the Palestinian question. Meanwhile the United Nations, which should be providing world leadership in defense of international law, has been reduced to the status of a handmaiden.<sup>lix</sup> In 2004 Bush stated in a letter to Ariel Sharon that “it is unrealistic that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949.” The phrase “armistice lines of 1949” is, of course, another way of saying the pre-1967 borders. Bush went on to say “it seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state and the settling of the Palestinian refugees there rather than in Israel.” Clearly, President Bush, the unchallenged leader of the “Quartet”, is colluding with Israel in the denial of Security Council Resolution 242 and the Right of Return.<sup>lx</sup>

Today the Palestinians are subjected to an international economic embargo because they had the temerity to punish the PLO in elections to the Legislative Council. The United States, Israel and the “international community” have made history. As John Dugard, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights reported on September 26, 2006, “the Palestinian people have been subjected to economic sanctions – the first time an occupied people has been so treated.”<sup>lxi</sup>

Nevertheless the two-state solution is being questioned as never before. Many observers believe that Israel has absorbed so much of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza that the Jewish and Palestinian people cannot ever be separated fairly. Furthermore, even if Palestinians can be temporarily starved into submission by Israel and the embargo of the

“international community,” and even if Hamas is forced to accept the same kind of accommodation that the PLO has accepted in the Oslo Accords and the Roadmap for Peace, frustrated Palestinian national aspirations will likely find another outlet – especially if all they are left with is a Bantustan state. To this must be added a third reason for questioning the possibility of a two-state solution: the political deadlock in contemporary Israeli politics and the pivotal role now held by the religious right. The present deadlock is apparently a long-term development, based upon profound demographic changes among the Jewish population of Israel. The continued existence of a Jewish state that discriminates against its Arab citizens and co-exists beside a fragmented Bantustan Palestinian sub-state is a recipe for endless violence. It follows from this that a solution to the conflict can only be obtained by a just resolution of the question of the Right of Return.

If a viable two-state solution is not feasible, the other options are a unitary or a binational state. Both options would be secular. The main difference would be that a unitary state would be a state “of all its citizens” whereas under a binational state Jews and Arabs would be guaranteed some type of autonomy. Some prominent Jewish intellectuals past and present, such as Martin Buber and Noam Chomsky as well as the celebrated Palestinian intellectual Edward Said are identified with the binational option.<sup>lxii</sup> Both of these options now seem more feasible given the deep and possibly fatal contradictions in the two-state solution.

However, it is probable that under the present circumstances there will be continuing efforts to bring about a two-state solution. In those circumstances Palestinians are justified in insisting upon their Right to Return (as defined in the U.N. resolutions), the complete return of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza and full sovereignty therein, including the right to seaports and airspace, complete control over the economy and the right to maintain a standing army. Israel would have to declare to the world that its borders have been finalized, and it would have to live up to its promise to guarantee the equal rights of the Palestinians within its borders.

### **The Boycott, Divestment & Sanctions Campaign (BDS)**

Ultimately the solution to the problem will be decided by the Arab and Jewish people of Israel-Palestine. Our speculation on what a final settlement will look like will obviously be less decisive than our actions in solidarity with the oppressed Palestinians and their Israeli allies and sympathizers. What can individual Canadians do to help bring about peace, justice & reconciliation in the region?

In 2005 the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions and 170 other civil society groups called for a world-wide campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against the State of Israel in protest against the illegal occupation and against the discriminatory treatment of non-Jews in Israel.<sup>lxiii</sup> The launching of this campaign represents a historic milestone in the Palestinian struggle.

The political and military leadership of the Palestinians has alternated between negotiation with Israel and violent confrontation. The first tactic has led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority, an accommodation that borders on collaboration. The second tactic, while justifiable under international law as a liberation struggle, has made targets of Israeli civilians as well as military personnel and has been accompanied by often unrealizable political demands. Neither approach has changed things for the better. Israeli attitudes have remained intransigent for the most part and, despite the justice of their cause, the Palestinians have failed to sway opinion in the Western world sufficiently to force Israel to change.

The call from Palestinian civil society for a BDS campaign is therefore one that should be welcomed and supported by all who seek a just and lasting peace. It is a non-violent campaign that can educate and win public opinion throughout the world. As its effects on Israeli and world public opinion become apparent, a new political terrain could open up and a more effective Palestinian political leadership could emerge. Ultimately the BDS campaign points to a more grassroots, progressive and working-class approach as opposed to the essentially middle-class nationalism that has dominated within Fatah and Hamas.

Canadians should therefore support boycott and divestment campaigns, such as those that have been launched by the Centrale des syndicats du Québec, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario) and the United Church of Canada. While differing somewhat in their approach, these campaigns call for a boycott of Israeli goods (such as fruit, wine and household products) and a boycott of certain international companies operating in Israel (such as Starbucks, Burger King, Home Depot, Marks & Spencer, Disney, Volkswagen, Sara Lee and Estée Lauder). They call upon individuals and institutions (including universities, unions, churches and governments) to divest from companies that directly benefit from the illegal occupation like CATerpillar, General Electric, Lockheed Martin, Boeing and Canadian Aviation Electronics. Canadians should also petition their elected representatives for the imposition of sanctions against Israel, including a ban on military exports, the abrogation of the 1998 Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, and an end to charitable status and tax-exempt fundraising for Israel in Canada.<sup>16</sup>

Before a BDS campaign can be truly effective, Canadians will need to penetrate the silences, distortions and biases of the corporate media and the CBC. To do so will mean standing up to deeply-entrenched attitudes in the Jewish-Canadian community and confronting powerful new pro-Israel lobby groups such as the United Israel Appeals Federation of Canada (UIAFC), the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA), and the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee (CJPAC).

UIAFC is a corporate-dominated umbrella group founded in 1998 out of the merger of the United Jewish Appeal and the Council of Jewish Federations. UIAFC is the Canadian

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<sup>16</sup> Canadian supporters of Israel can take advantage of the charitable status enjoyed by the Jewish National Fund, an organization that holds 92% of the land “in Trust” for Jewish Israelis and is prohibited to sell or lease land to non-Jews.

branch of a North America-wide organization. In 2002 it convened a meeting of leading Jewish-Canadian business people, including CanWest-Global CEO Israel Asper, Onex CEO and former Paul Martin adviser Gerry Schwartz, and Indigo/Chapters CEO Heather Reisman. The result was the dramatic restructuring of Jewish advocacy in Canada with the formation of the CIJA in early 2004. The CIJA, in turn, organized a powerful political action group (CIJA-PAC) with close ties to the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). By 2005 CIJA-PAC was dissolved and replaced by CJPAC, which has rightly been called ‘AIPAC North’.<sup>lxiv</sup>

This bewildering round of institutional restructuring has resulted in the effective merger of Jewish advocacy in Canada with AIPAC and the U.S –Israel strategic alliance. It won a significant political victory in the 2006 federal election and the immediate aftermath, as Canada’s dominant political parties abandoned any pretense of neutrality in the conflict and became blatantly pro-Israel.

UIAFC, CIJA & CJPAC have come to exercise decisive control over familiar Jewish advocacy groups such as B’Nai Brith, the Canadian Jewish Congress, the United Jewish Appeal and the United Israel Appeal. While these organizations may be pro-Israel, they have sometimes demonstrated their discontent over the high level of centralization and secrecy under the new regime.

As they seek to stop the growth of solidarity with the Palestinian cause, those who claim to speak for Israel stifle free expression and debate in Canada’s legislatures, media, universities and even in secondary and elementary schools. Critics of Israel are labeled as “anti-Israel” and even “anti-Semitic.”<sup>lxv</sup> Consider, for example, the recent furor over the remarks of Liberal Party leadership candidate Michael Ignatieff, who dared to suggest that Israelis may have committed war crimes by indiscriminately bombing civilians in the recent war in Lebanon. Consider also the Canadian Jewish Congress and B’Nai Brith’s successful campaign against author Deborah Ellis’ liberal children’s book *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*. The book was censored to a greater or lesser extent at school boards across Ontario.<sup>lxvi</sup> While there is no doubt that anti-Semitism still exists and that Canadians need to confront it, it is also essential to confront the deliberate misuse and abuse of the term by some of Israel’s defenders.

Although it might not be apparent in the coverage of the North American media, Israel is one of the mightiest powers on earth. This of course has a great deal to do with its alliance with the United States. Palestinians, on the other hand, are an oppressed people who have been subjected to the longest military occupation in modern history. In the West Bank and Gaza they face the expropriation of their land, the destruction of their infrastructure, house demolitions, desperate levels of unemployment, arbitrary arrests, daily checkpoint humiliations, sudden death at the hands of the IDF, and now even starvation - thanks to Canada and other members of the “international community.” Meanwhile in Israel itself, even the second-class status of Palestinians is not enough for powerful sectors in the present governing coalition. Cabinet ministers now talk openly of outright expulsion of Israeli Arabs. Clearly, Palestinians have been facing, in the words of Tel Aviv University professor Tanya Reinhardt, “a slow, steady genocide.”<sup>lxvii</sup> One

might add that the tempo has picked up considerably in recent years. At the moment it is not the existence of Israel that is in peril, it is the existence of the Palestinians.

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