

THE CONSEQUENCES OF WORLD WAR TWO ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PALESTINE PROBLEM

On the eve of World War Two the great majority of the Third World peoples remained firmly under the control of western colonialism. In the ensuing war against the fascist alliance, the resources and energies of the major European colonial powers were sorely depleted and their ability and will to maintain their oversea possessions was seriously weakened. In the immediate post-war years, as the new international political and economic order emerged, numerous Third World peoples struggled successfully to unseat their foreign rulers, who in many cases departed unwillingly and only after long and bloody conflict.

Yet even in 1939, before the World War, it was clear that the heyday of colonialism was passing. For the Palestine Arab people, 1939 brought the first faint hopes of full independence, after more than two decades of colonial rule. Between 1936 and 1938 they had fought valiantly against what was then one of the world's foremost military powers, Great Britain. Their aim was to bring an end to the League of Nations Mandate, by virtue of which Britain had, in 1917, undertaken to actively assist the world Zionist movement in furthering its plans for what was still euphemistically termed «a Jewish National Home» in Palestine.

The Palestinian Arab people had always correctly appraised the Zionist enterprise as a thinly-veiled attempt to dispossess them of their rightful patrimony and to inject an alien, western colonial presence into the strategic Middle East. Though British support for the Zionists was indeed founded on such cynical geo-political considerations, by 1939 the resolute determination of the Palestinian people in opposing the Mandate and its Zionist corollary had seriously undermined Britain's determination to carry on.

In May, 1939, the so-called MacDonalld White Paper announced Britain's view that the «Jewish National Home» *had been established*, and that in the coming five years further Zionist immigration would be brought to an end after the fulfillment of a strictly limited quota of 75,000 new immigrants. Moreover, Britain promised to place restrictions on Zionist land purchase and to move towards complete independence for Palestine in a State in which »the two peo-

ples of Palestine, Arabs and Jews, share authority in government in such a way that the essential interests of each are secured.«

While this White Paper failed to meet the just demands of the Palestinian Arabs, who saw no legitimate reason to wait another indefinite period for full independence, to the Zionists it was an anathema. The end of Jewish immigration, and independence for Palestine, would mean the end of the Zionist dream of a Jewish State with a large Jewish majority, since the Jewish population of Palestine in 1939 numbered only 30% of the total. Accordingly, they rejected its terms and plunged Palestine into a period of violence and terrorism which lasted until the outbreak of the World War.

It was against this background that the Second World War began. Britain's new policy for Palestine was forgotten in the monumental struggle against the fascist threat. Meanwhile, as the Jewish population of Europe was suffering unspeakable atrocities and near genocide under the Nazis, the leaders of the Zionist movement busied themselves by re-evaluating their previous strategy of alliance with British imperial interests. In a remarkably short time they shifted their main metropolitan base to that rising world power, the United States.

Capitalizing on the continuing reports of Jewish persecution by the Nazis, but carefully avoiding mention of their pre-war policy of discouraging Jewish immigration from Europe to anywhere other than Palestine, the Zionists successfully mobilized the American Jewish community and began to wield it as a powerful pressure group against the U.S. administration. As we shall see, the Zionist program was explicitly tailored to exploit the issue of Nazi persecutions as a means of securing American support for the abrogation of the 1939 White Paper, with its restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine.

The so-called Biltmore Program, adopted by the Zionists at the Biltmore Hotel in New York, called for the transfer of authority over immigration and »development« from the British to the Jewish Agency, and the transformation of Palestine into »a Jewish Commonwealth integrated into the structure of the new democratic world.« No longer was the call for »a Jewish National home in Palestine«, but rather for »a Jewish Commonwealth«, a flimsy euphemism for a Jewish state, *in place of Palestine*. And this the Zionists were demanding at a time when the population of Palestine was only 31% Jewish, and Jewish land ownership comprised only 5,9% of the total land area of the country.

As mentioned above, the Zionist line as put forward during this time was carefully attuned to the war-time situation. With heightened international (and especially American) concern over the plight of Europe's Jews, how better to gain western support for Zionist demands than by tying them to the humanitarian issues being raised? In the words of the Biltmore statement: »The policy

of the (1939) White Paper is cruel and indefensible in its denial of sanctuary to Jews fleeing from Nazi persecution.« When Roosevelt, who at times had displayed less than unquestioning support for Zionist aims, died in 1945, the Zionist strategy began to bear fruit. President Truman was promptly subjected to immense Zionist pressure through the small but disproportionately powerful Zionist-led American Jewish community. Simultaneously, the full extent of the Jewish tragedy was revealed, and the collective conscience of the West began to feel the weight of the burden of guilt which it carries to this day.

But how did the West, and especially the United States, react to the plight of the pitiful 300,000 survivors of the Holocaust? By offering to throw open its doors to this battered remnant, which was surely an international responsibility? No, instead it allowed itself to be led docilely into using the tragedy to further narrow Zionist interests at the expense of the people of Palestine.

Only days after his inauguration President Truman made good his commitments to the Zionists by sending a strong letter to the British Prime Minister on the subject of his government's Palestine policy. The American people, Truman wrote, »ferverly urge the lifting of the (immigration) restrictions which deny to Jews who have been so cruelly oppressed by ruthless Nazi persecutions entrance into the land which represents for so many of these their only hope for survival.« But why their »only hope«? The Arab people of Palestine, unlike the Western countries, bore no responsibility for the mass murder of Jews in Europe. Even ignoring for the moment Zionists designs on their homeland, why should they have been expected to undertake this new burden. At least partly because America herself had no desire to assume it. From 1945—1947 the U.S. Congress displayed a hostile attitude towards the admission of these survivors of Nazi barbarism, to some extent because of Zionist pressure. Thus President Truman, as the Zionists intended, could kill two birds with one stone. He was placating his powerful Zionist constituency, by championing a cause which seemed morally impeachable, and he was placating an even larger American constituency which wanted no part of massive Jewish emigration at a time of economic dislocation. Better to pack them all off to Palestine.

That the Truman administration was brought around to this and other Zionist positions proved to be the major Zionist success of the time on the international scene. For America could and did exert great pressure on the new British Labor government. This government was itself partial to Zionism. In 1944 its National Executive had advocated: »Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out (of Palestine) as the Jews move in.« Yet it had no desire to aliente the newly-independent Arab states, and (whatever its misguided idealism concerning Zionism) it appreciated the threat to

imperial interests if such an event were to occur. Britain had reached the stage where she only wanted to wash her hands of the whole Palestine muddle.

American leverage, which was based primarily on Britain's almost total dependence on the continued flow of American credits, had a decisive effect in supporting Zionist actions in Palestine. With the end of the War these included not only stepping up illegal Jewish immigration, under the guise of »saving the Jewish people«, but as importantly, forcing the British to depart as soon as possible by executing large-scale terrorism against the Mandatory regime in a phony »war of liberation«. In 1945 British forces in Palestine numbered 100,000 crack troops, one soldier for every six Jews in the country. Yet somehow, miraculously, the British forces took a beating at the hands of the Zionists. The ratio of casualties in the period 1945—1947 was greatly in favor of the Zionist terrorists. The reason is clear: the immunity which the Zionist terrorists enjoyed, thanks mainly to their American connection. Never throughout the Anglo-Zionist confrontation did the British forces in Palestine undertake an offensive against the Zionists anywhere near the level of their brutally repressive actions against the Palestinian Arabs during the Arab Revolt of 1936—38. Not only were their opponents white Europeans, against whom the mailed fist reserved for »natives« would never be employed — the Zionists also had a powerful ally in the U.S. government.

World War Two provided unprecedented opportunities for the execution of Zionist designs. During the War years a total of 27,028 Palestinian Jews were recruited by the British Army. Towards the end of the war, after continuous Zionist demands, there was formed a Palestine Jewish Brigade comprised of 5,258 men. These men, plus an estimated 3,600 Polish deserters (with equipment), formed the backbone of the Zionist military forces in Palestine. Meanwhile the Jewish military industry in Palestine, whose main task was to supply the British Army, underwent rapid expansion and evolved into its place in the Zionist military establishment.

It was on the basis of this powerful military force (dwarfing the military resources of the Palestinian Arabs which had been depleted in the 1936—38 Revolt), coupled with continued American support that Zionists planned to proceed with their aim to set up a Jewish State in all of Palestine. In 1946, however, an Anglo-American team of experts recommended that Palestine become a unitary Arab-Jewish State with provincial autonomy for each community. Faced with the prospect that Truman might approve such a plan in preference to their maximalist demands for a Jewish State in *all* of Palestine, the Zionists countered with their own partition plan for »a Jewish State in a viable area of Palestine.« The Zionist partition plan won almost immediate private support from Truman, who made his endorsement public on October 4, 1946, the Jewish holiday

of Yom Kippur. Like the marginally less outrageous U.N. partition plan, which won approval in November, 1947, the Zionist plan which Truman endorsed was a travesty of justice. It gave the Zionists control of 75% of the total area of Palestine, at a time when their total land ownership constituted 7% of that area; it placed only 1/4 of 1% of the Jewish population under Arab rule, but 58% of the Arab population under Jewish rule. It put the whole Negev desert, with 100,000 Arab inhabitants cultivating more than 2 million dunams, under Jewish control, although its Jewish population at the time was 475 souls with landholdings of 21,000 dunams.

In view of steadfast American support for the Zionist plan, and the concomitant pressure on the British, the latter declared on February 18, 1947, that His Majesty's Government had decided that it »had no power under the terms of the Mandate to award the country to either the Arabs or to the Jews or even to partition it between them.« Thus, Britain, announced, »the only course open to us now is to submit the problem to the judgement of United Nations.« It was there, by means of procedural abuse and naked power play by the United States, that Israel received its dubious stamp of international approval. The tragedy which followed falls outside the scope of this essay.

Thus the legacy of World War Two is clear. Britain, enfeebled by six years of unremitting struggle against fascism, had lost the power and will to implement the modicum of partiality she had attained just prior to the war, when she had finally appreciated the depth of the Palestinian and other Arab peoples opposition to Zionism. America, untouched by the ravages of war and now the foremost western power, submitted almost passively to domestic minority pressure and used her enormous influence to further the narrow political aims of a small group of Zionist neo-colonialists, all in the name of humanitarian ideals. Europe stood by and applauded reflexively because »something« was being done to ease her conscience over the wartime crimes committed against her own Jewish population. The Zionists quickly realized the enormous political dividends which could accrue through the manipulation of Western guilt. The people of Palestine were, ultimately, the losers. They were made to pay for the failures of western liberalism, not simply by providing a home for Jewish refugees of Europe — something which might have been tolerable in the context of true Palestinian independence — but by being forcibly robbed of their inalienable rights to self-determination in their homeland.

It is questionable whether Britain could have carried out her 1939 pledge to end Jewish immigration and set Palestine on the road to independence even if the horrors of the Holocaust and its consequences had not occurred. Nevertheless, it should be clear that the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, which reached a new stage with the proclamation of the State of Israel on May 15, 1948, and which cul-

minated in the conquests of the June, 1967 War, benefitted immeasurably from the events of World War Two. There is no irony in the positive correlation between the rise of Nazism and the success of the Zionist enterprise. Then, as now, Anti-Semitism is Zionism's best friend.

Today, 30 years after World War Two, the people of Palestine remain deprived of their elemental human rights. Despite illusory progress toward peace, in the imperialist-inspired »interim settlement« just concluded between Egypt and Israel, the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict remains. The national rights of the Palestinian people, which have been criminally ignored in the latest and all previous maneuvers to freeze the *status quo* in the Middle East, must be fully realized in all Palestine. Until that time the Palestinian Revolution will continue its military and political struggle against the Zionists, their local agents, and their international allies, confident in the support of the Arab masses and of all peace-loving and fraternal peoples.