

### ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS IN A "FATAL EMBRACE"

At the heart of the conflict over Palestine is land. The quarrel between Jews and Arabs living in Palestine has evolved into a nationalist battle for territory with military power playing a central though not decisive role. By the 1940s Jews with a Zionist faith had gained a foothold, mobilized international support, and created a nation in arms. The success of those arms was repeatedly demonstrated, with great consequences in the late 1940s and again in 1967. In the first instance Jews asserted their right to a state, fought off Arab armies, and drove out a substantial part of the Arab population living within Israel's borders. In the second, Israeli forces once more repelled Arab armies and then occupied the remaining Palestinian territories. In reaction, the Arabs, first dispossessed and then subjected to occupation, developed their own nationalism. The contest over Palestine was now between two nationalist movements strongly tinged with religious ideology. Palestinians employed both passive resistance and surprise attacks on civilians as well as soldiers, frustrating Israeli

Source : M. Hunt, The World Transformed

claims to full control and winning international legitimacy. Perhaps the Palestinians' greatest hope — and expansionist Israelis' greatest nightmare — was demographic: the prospect that Palestinian population growth in Israel and the occupied territory would outstrip that of the Jews and leave the Jews a minority in an Israel that had annexed those territories.

The following documents trace the claims that both sides have made to the land and the way each has imagined national community. They allow us to follow an often violent debate between two deeply entrenched, seemingly intractable positions and to consider the historical, legal, moral, cultural, and geographical elements in the case that each makes.

## 9.7

### The Arab Case against a Jewish State

Between the two world wars, Jewish settlers in Palestine were energetically acquiring land and organizing politically and militarily to stake a claim for a Jewish state. The Holocaust during World War II added a moral dimension to their claim to statehood. Finally, after the war's end, Britain's withdrawal from Palestine opened the way for the settlers to make good on that claim.

Against these developments Arab representatives protested vigorously before an Anglo-American team sent in 1946 to survey the situation in Palestine and report to the United Nations, into whose lap Britain was dropping the problem. What was the Arab vision of Palestine's future? On what grounds did the Arabs rest their claim to self-determination and support of the West? How much did the Arab case at this point arise from a nationalist (or some other) point of view?

#### *Statement of Arab Views to the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry*

Jerusalem, March 1946

1. The whole Arab people is unalterably opposed to the attempt to impose Jewish immigration and settlement upon it, and ultimately to establish a Jewish State in Palestine. Its opposition is based primarily upon right. The Arabs of Palestine are descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the country, who have been in occupation of it since the beginning of history; they cannot agree that it is right to subject an indigenous population against its will to alien immigrants, whose claim is based upon a historical connection which ceased effectively many centuries ago. Moreover they form the major-

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Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, 5th ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 80-83, 86-88. A partial copy of this document can be found at <<http://www.mideastweb.org/araboffice.htm>> (August 12, 2002).

ity of the population; as such they cannot submit to a policy of immigration which if pursued for long will turn them from a majority into a minority in an alien state; and they claim the democratic right of a majority to make its own decisions in matters of urgent national concern. . . .

2. . . . Geographically Palestine is part of Syria; its indigenous inhabitants belong to the Syrian branch of the Arab family of nations; all their culture and tradition link them to the other Arab peoples; and until 1917 Palestine formed part of the Ottoman Empire which included also several of the other Arab countries. The presence and claims of the Zionists, and the support given them by certain Western Powers have resulted in Palestine being cut off from the other Arab countries and subjected to a regime, administrative, legal, fiscal and educational, different from that of the sister-countries. . . .

. . . Zionism is essentially a political movement, aiming at the creation of a state: immigration, land-purchase and economic expansion are only aspects of a general political strategy. If Zionism succeeds in its aim, the Arabs will become a minority in their own country; a minority which can hope for no more than a minor share in the government, for the state is to be a Jewish state. . . .

4. . . . Zionism has become in Arab eyes a test of Western intentions towards them. So long as the attempt of the Zionists to impose a Jewish state upon the inhabitants of Palestine is supported by some or all of the Western Governments, so long will it be difficult if not impossible for the Arabs to establish a satisfactory relationship with the Western world and its civilization, and they will tend to turn away from the West in political hostility and spiritual isolation; this will be disastrous both for the Arabs themselves and for those Western nations which have dealings with them. . . .

9. . . . [T]he Arabs urge the establishment in Palestine of a democratic government representative of all sections of the population on a level of absolute equality; the termination of the Mandate once the Government has been established; and the entry of Palestine into the United Nations Organization as a full member of the working community. . . .

10. The Arabs are irrevocably opposed to political Zionism, but in no way hostile to the Jews as such nor to their Jewish fellow-citizens of Palestine. Those Jews who have already entered Palestine, and who have obtained or shall obtain Palestinian citizenship by due legal process will be full citizens of the Palestinian state, enjoying full civil and political rights and a fair share in government and administration. . . .

It is to be hoped that in course of time the exclusiveness of the Jews will be neutralized by the development of loyalty to the state and the emergence of new groupings which cut across communal divisions. This however will take time; and during the transitional period the Arabs recognize the need for giving special consideration to the peculiar position and the needs of the Jews. No attempt would be made to interfere with their communal organization, their personal status or their religious observances. Their schools and cultural institutions would be left to operate unchecked except for that general control which all governments exercise over education. In the districts in

which they are most closely settled they would possess municipal autonomy and Hebrew would be an official language of administration, justice, and education.

11. The Palestinian State would be an Arab state not (as should be clear from the preceding paragraph) in any narrow racial sense, nor in the sense that non-Arabs should be placed in a position of inferiority, but because the form and policy of its government would be based on a recognition of two facts: first that the majority of the citizens are Arabs, and secondly that Palestine is part of the Arab world and has no future except through close co-operation with the other Arab states. . . .

14. . . . (1) The idea of partition and the establishment of a Jewish state in a part of Palestine is inadmissible . . . . Zionism is a political movement aimed at the domination at least of the whole of Palestine; to give it a foothold in part of Palestine would be to encourage it to press for more and to provide it with a base for its activities. Because of this, because of the pressure of population and in order to escape from its isolation it would inevitably be thrown into enmity with the surrounding Arab states and this enmity would disturb the stability of the whole Middle East.

## 9.8

### The Zionist Claim to Land and Political Identity

While the Arabs of Palestine made no significant preparation to create a state of their own, the British withdrawal found the executive committee of the Jewish community ready to move despite threats from the neighboring states to invade and crush any statehood initiative. The Jews did, however, have the support of U.S. president Harry Truman. In May 1948 the state of Israel came into existence when David Ben Gurion, the leading Jewish political figure and the first prime minister, read the declaration of independence. In the fighting that followed in 1948 and 1949, Israeli forces secured not only the land promised under a UN partition plan but also additional territories, while driving out roughly 700,000 Palestinians. Some 150,000 were left behind, now a minority in a state containing some 700,000 Jews.

On what basis does the declaration of independence ground its claim to creating a Jewish state? What are the key points of conflict with the 1946 Arab statement above? Are there any points of compatibility between the two documents?

### Israel's Provisional State Council

#### *Declaration of Independence*

Tel Aviv, May 14, 1948

The land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world.

Exiled from Palestine, the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return and the restoration of their national freedom.

Impelled by this historic association, Jews strove throughout the centuries to go back to the land of their fathers and regain their statehood. In recent decades they returned in masses. They reclaimed the wilderness, revived their language, built cities and villages and established a vigorous and ever-growing community with its own economic and cultural life. They sought peace, but were always prepared to defend themselves. They brought the blessing of progress to all inhabitants of the country. . . .

. . . It is . . . the self-evident right of the Jewish people to be a nation, as all other nations, in its own sovereign State.

ACCORDINGLY, WE, the members of the National Council, representing the Jewish people in Palestine and the Zionist movement of the world, met together in solemn assembly today, the day of the termination of the British mandate for Palestine, by virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish and of the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations,

HEREBY PROCLAIM the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called ISRAEL. . . .

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open to the immigration of Jews from all countries of their dispersion; will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on the precepts of liberty, justice and peace taught by the Hebrew Prophets; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed or sex; will guarantee full freedom of conscience, worship, education and culture; will safeguard the sanctity and inviolability of the shrines and Holy Places of all religions; and will dedicate itself to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. . . .

We offer peace and unity to all the neighboring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all.

Our call goes out [to] the Jewish people all over the world to rally to our side in the task of immigration and development and to stand by us in the great struggle for the fulfillment of the dream of generations — the redemption of Israel.

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From the Mideast Web website: <<http://www.mideastweb.org/israeldeclaration.htm>> (August 12, 2002). Also available on the Avalon website: <<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/israel.htm>> (July 17, 2003). A variant version appears in Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*, 4th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001), 219–22.