

Where we came from, **what** we have been doing, **where** we are going and **what's** next.

Reflecting in his 1950 Chicago lectures on American diplomacy on the fears felt by many Americans, America's then preeminent strategist George Kennan remarked that "A half-century ago people in this country had a sense of security vis-à-vis their world environment such as I suppose no people had ever had since the days of the Roman Empire. Today that pattern is almost reversed... We have before us a situation which, I am frank to admit, seems to me dangerous and problematical in the extreme... How did a country so secure become a country so insecure?"

Today, as we find ourselves caught in a tornado of events almost everywhere around the Globe, I believe most of us feel somewhat nostalgic about the Kennan's fears: what was then just fear is today reality. Everywhere we look, people are being slaughtered, societies collapsed, cities reduced to rubble, refugees swarming out of their homelands, voices filled with hatred. Not since the horrors of the European "Wars of Religion," the seventeenth century "Thirty Years War," – at least until our own times -- have so many, so often and for so long killed or maimed so many of their fellow human beings.

In the seventeenth century, one did not hear about the atrocities daily, almost hourly, as we do today. Massacre, catastrophe, destruction, epidemic, expulsion and terror have become so common as to seem almost banal. Those of us who are only tangentially affected have grown insensitive to them. Human beings have become just numbers. Almost worse than insensitivity, we have converted real pain into sensate entertainment furnished on television as we drink our morning coffee. Weirdly, some vicarious violence even takes the form of flashy electronic games where we can bomb, slash and obliterate imagined enemies in the safety of arcades far from the danger, tension and filth of real killing fields.

What we rarely do is to rise above the daily patter of events to ask such archaic questions as Whence? What? Whither? and What's next?

Please bear with me for posing such questions. I do so because I believe that without at least being aware of them, we can make little sense of what is happening now. To keep my account from getting too long, I will focus on the area I know best, the Middle East, but, where necessary or useful, I put Middle Eastern events into a larger context. And, from my experience in dealing with many of those events, I put the dangers of today in the sequence from which they evolved and became trends.

In short, what I am trying to do in this essay is to portray the *matrix* in which the events are embedded rather than simply recounting them. Thus, I will skip over much of the detail in order to bring out the framework or scaffolding in which they occurred. If I succeed, the payoff will be my concluding analysis of the chances for peace.

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Where we came from: Up to about the time of the First World War, the Middle East seemed to outsiders a tranquil, even a boring, part of the world. For important action, one turned to Europe. What "The Powers" did was consequential; what happened in Delhi, Damascus, Cairo, Constantinople (aka Istanbul) or Algiers was quaint, sometimes amusing, but overall of minor consequence. Europeans were the actors; Asians and Africans were the props that decorated the stage.

This was the view of nearly everyone, both colonists and colonizers, both statesmen and historians, both actors and acted upon, but, as we now realize, below the surface, scattered events were coalescing into trends, vague feelings were turning into ideas, privations were becoming frustrations.

This transformation was a selective process, affecting the component populations of villages, towns, cities, tribes, ethnic groups, religious denominations, social classes and degree of literacy, the rich and the poor on different schedules and to varying degrees. But, around the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, change was in the air.

Reluctantly and also on different schedules and to varying degrees, the imperialists who had long wielded real power were beginning to realize that, while acquiring colonies had been cheap, keeping them was becoming expensive. The transformation was so slow and so hidden by the gaudy façade of imperialism and by the supine collaboration of favored natives that few, even the “experts,” perceived trends in the scattered rumblings. However, noticed or not, the façade was cracking, and the native proxies were developing a taste for real power.

Meanwhile in Europe itself, latent forces coalesced into a virulent xenophobia. While hatred of Jews had been manifest for centuries, it had been channeled: Christians and Jews generally accommodated to one another by creating islands within the general society. This had seemed normal to both communities: in medieval Europe, Christians regarded one another with suspicion. Beyond the walls of most villages and towns was an alien world whose inhabitants differed in custom, ritual, language and degree of sophistication. They were not only foreign but were actual or potential enemies. Except in carefully identified locations (such as pilgrimage sites) and at specified times (periodic trade fairs), movement among them was dangerous. Instead, most people took shelter in walled towns. So, it seemed normal to them to segregate the more obvious of the outsiders, the Jews, in restricted quarters within their towns. From the practice in Venice came the word for these quarters, *ghetto*.

While the general purpose of the *ghetto* was segregation, that is excluding the Jews from Christian society, it also had the effect of protecting them from Christians. Thus, *ghettos* were usually “gated communities” within the parameters of Christian communities. Each ghetto was a self-governing collective, running its own schools, levying its own taxes and providing such social welfare as it chose. Accommodation was accomplished by segregation and autonomy.

We naturally focus on the breakdowns of this system – such as the expulsion of Jews (and Muslims) from fifteenth and sixteenth century Spain and the expulsion of Jews from Tsarist Russia in the nineteenth and twentieth century pogroms. Apart from these sometimes horrific but only sporadic events, the *ghetto* system was considered acceptable by Christians, Jews and Muslims for centuries. Under it, Jewish theology and culture were preserved.

Then in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Jews divided over their definitions of themselves. The vast majority continued to live segregated lives, but a smaller, relatively more wealthy and better educated part of the Jewish community decided to cast off their Jewish tradition. Several thousands of them converted to Christianity each year. Emerging from centuries of pent-up concentration on their religious heritage, a number of these “assimilationists” adopted a broader European culture. Some literally burst into song. Felix Mendelssohn, Giacomo Meyerbeer and dozens of others led a remarkable effusion of culture that enriched and invigorated Western society.

The Western society into which they were assimilating was itself changing. Spurred by the French Revolution and by Napoleon's disruption of the old order, inhabitants of Marseilles, Bordeaux and Paris began to think of themselves as French; their opposite numbers in the German-speaking principalities discovered from Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Address to the German Nation* that they were German. When Tsarist army officers occupied Paris, they discovered that they were Russians and took that revolutionary idea back with them to form the Decembrist movement. Italians joined Giuseppe Mazzini's *Giovine Italia* and began to work toward the unification of the Italian city-states and to spread their nationalist doctrine to "Young" movements in eastern Europe. In their turn, the Young Turks were inspired by Greeks and Bulgarians to take up *Türkçülük* (Turkism). By the First World War, the idea of nationalism had spread throughout Europe and Asia.

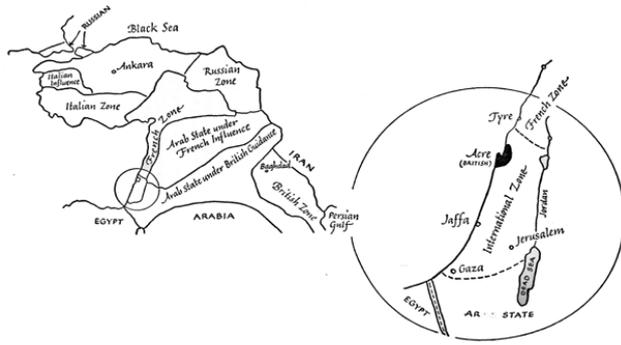
The idea of nationalism was naturally picked up by some of the leaders of the Jewish "assimilationists." In part, they were driven to the concept of a separate nationalism by the European nationalists' rejection of them. No longer protected by *ghetto* walls, both physical and cultural, they were exposed to old hatreds in new guises. As segregation weakened, autonomy became suspect. But, if they could not be accommodated, neither could they find any other sanctuary. They followed the thoughts and actions of European communities in beginning to think of themselves also as a *nation*.¹ But, unlike the other European communities, they could not focus their new sense of identity on a given piece of territory: for them, there was no France, Germany, Italy or Greece. They saw themselves as a nationality without a nation. This disparity became the driving force behind *Zionism*.

Unlike Zionists, European nationalists found at hand at least the physical components of nationalism and quickly forged themselves into nation-states. But, almost immediately, they found the nation-states insufficient for the aspirational thrust of their new doctrine. The model of imperialism was at already hand. Britain, which already had long since achieved national coalescence, had become the world leader in imperialism in the eighteenth. Then, as the practical society which Adam Smith proudly called (and Napoleon excoriated as) "a nation of shopkeepers," England had seized a major slice of Asia in a series of trading ventures.

When nationalism was wedded to imperialism and given meaning in commerce, it acquired new force. Britain and France used this new power first to ransack existing societies' treasuries, then to destroy their industries and finally to embezzle their finances.

Other Europeans found such activities attractive and followed their lead. But, the ambitions of the new European nation states occasionally conflicted. So, to avoid European war, they tried to agree on how to divide the Afro-Asian world among themselves. Bringing order to the "scramble for Africa" was the task German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck took on in 1884. With occasional violations like the trivial but emotional clash between Britain and France in 1898 over the remote Nile village of Fashoda, the European "gentlemen's agreement" parceling out the world worked for nearly half a century until overtaken by the First World War. In 1916 it was extended to Western Asia by the Anglo-French (later expanded to include Tsarist Russia and other powers) deal known for the two principal negotiators as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Had the Sykes-Picot Agreement been fully implemented, the three imperial powers, Britain, France and Russia, would have controlled almost half of earth's total land area. Sykes-Picot was the apex of the imperial system.

¹ See Shlomo Sand's ground-breaking *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London:Verso, 2009).



Both Europeans and Americans regarded “natives” as hardly more than advanced animals; often, indeed, they put numbers of them into zoos to be gawked at by curious crowds. While no longer treated as commodities, as they had been under slavery, natives were seen by Europeans as drays to exploit natural resources. The British enrolled and shipped to other colonies as “indentured laborers” hundreds of

thousands of starving Indian peasants while King Leopold of the Belgians worked to death or murdered between 10 and 15 million Congolese. South Africans and Australians on horseback even hunted natives for sport. *Genocide* was practiced long before the word was coined. Even when they did not massacre the people, which they often did, the French and the Russians adopted practices designed to obliterate the cultural heritages of those they conquered. That is, they practiced *ethnocide*.

Like their fellow Europeans, the Zionists denied the very existence of the inhabitants of the land they sought to possess. For them, Palestine was a “land without a people.” Natives were not “people.” That view shaped the British offer to the Zionists of Africans’ lands. Had the Zionists accepted, attitudes toward the Arabs today would have been very different. Creation of a Jewish homeland, colony or state in East Africa would almost certainly have led to black “anti-Semitism.” And the Middle East would have continued to be a relatively boring area rather than an arena of conflict. The Zionist fixation on Palestine changed all of that.

In the context of the time, the Zionist push to take the land of an Asian or African people and turn it into a colony was not regarded as reprehensible. Britain, France and Russia had been taking the lands of Africans and Asians for generations, just as the United States had been taking the lands of the native Americans.

Regardless of Zionist desires, Britain had strategic reasons to adopt the policies it actually carried out in the Middle East. Under Tsar Ivan the Terrible the Russians had begun their push southward in Central Asia and Peter the Great focused it on India. So, as Britain began to conquer India, it came to regard the Russian “threat” as its major strategic challenge. That challenge would dominate British thinking until the end of the Second World War. They set out a “forward” policy to preëempt the Russians’ push to the south. To block the Russians, the British were determined to control the Turkish Straits (the passage from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean), the Suez Canal (the passage from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea) and the Bab al-Mandeb (the passage from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean). On the land mass of Asia, the British and the Russians dueled in “the Great Game.” More seriously if less dramatically, Britain created a band of client states as a notional wall – the ancestor of the “Baghdad Pact” (CENTO). For bases, it occupied much of Iran, three times invaded Afghanistan, set up outposts in Central Asia, established a covert military assistance program for China, neutralized Tibet and conquered Burma before reaching the anchorage of Singapore.

Then, from just before the First World War, a new dimension was added to the policy to protect the Indian empire as oil came into production in Iran. The Middle East was transformed from a barrier to a treasure house. Not only to protect the Indian empire but also to control the flow of oil, the British felt compelled to dominate the Middle East.

Understanding this, Zionist leaders realized that they had to reassure Britain that their objective did not clash with imperial policy. Indeed, as they argued, a British-sponsored Israel would serve as “a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarians.” (This was the first statement of what the neoconservative Samuel Huntington later called *The Clash of Civilizations*.) But, realizing that the British would be apprehensive about the establishment of a truly independent state, the then General Secretary of the Zionist Organization proclaimed (in *Die Welt* on January 22, 1909) that “there was no truth whatever in the allegation that Zionism aimed at the establishment of an independent Jewish State.”

The Zionist aim, as David Wolffsohn told his followers at the Tenth Zionist Congress in 1911, was “not a Jewish state but a homeland.” Homeland was a translation of the word *heimstatt*. For a while, the adopted designation was *kolonisten-gemeinwese* for which the English equivalent was “colonist community.” Later and more openly, the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann applied to his proposal for a Jewish Palestine, Herzl’s *Judenstaat*, the Hebrew word used traditionally by Jewish pilgrims for their community, *Yishuv*. Thus was born the concept set out in the November 2, 1917 Balfour Declaration of a “national home for the Jewish people in [British-controlled] Palestine.” Under whatever name, it was to be Jewish.

The essential aim of both Zionists and the Europeans was to get the Jews out of Europe. The Zionists had to lure Jews to Palestine if they were to make it a *Judenstaat* or even a workable *heimstatt* while many Europeans, not just the Russians and the Poles but also the British, were increasingly hostile to the presence of Jews in their nations.

As the 1903 Royal Commission report on alien immigration makes clear, anti-Jewish-refugee feeling was strong in England. It offered politicians a popular issue. Catering to public opinion, the British parliamentarian Joseph Chamberlain, in words that might have been said almost anywhere in Britain or Europe about Muslim refugees today, warned against “unrestricted immigration...how is their [the Jews’] salvation to be accomplished without the ruin of our own people at home?” The “best solution,” he suggested, was to find some place far from England “where they could find subsistence without in any way interfering with the subsistence of others.” In short, anywhere but here.

Chamberlain thought the best place would be what became Uganda. Many in the Jewish camp agreed, but their leaders recognized that emotional ties to at least the concept of a Jewish Palestine were too strong to be set aside even if the highlands of East Africa were far better than the rocky soil of Palestine. Zionists would not accept Uganda, much less Manchuria, Argentina or other offers. Whatever it was called, the Jewish destination had to be Palestine if European Jews were to be recruited.

Other than strategy, economic considerations or “memory,” some Christians – not just the “born again” Christians we see today but even rather “liberal” Christians – also favored Palestine as the destination for departing Jews. They had a different objective. If the Jews returned to the Biblical land, some Christians believed, they would “discover” Jesus and would become Christians. This hope gave rise among Christians of that curious combination of anti-Jewish and pro-Zionist sentiment we see in our own times.

This is my broad-brush answer to *whence* arose the Palestine problem that has dominated attitudes, activities and fears up to the First World War. I now pick up the story of how these events, trends, attitudes, hopes and fears coalesced into the actions and policies of the British, the Zionists, the Arabs and the Americans.

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The First World War changed the game. Fighting for its life, suffering appalling casualties in the trenches of the Western Front, nearly bankrupt and exhausted, Britain suddenly came to believe that it needed Jewish help. Jews, unwelcome a few years earlier, were beginning to be regarded as a national asset. We now know that although some of British reasoning on what they could get from the Jews was based on intelligence that was exaggerated or even wrong, it formed the basis of British decision-making. Consider these points:

First, the British believed that Jews controlled the Bolshevik leadership, that Lenin had a Jewish mother and that Leon Trotsky was a crypto-Zionist. As minister of war, the British thought, Trotsky would determine whether or not the Russian army continued to fight the Germans. If it did not, the British feared, the German troops on the Russian front could be shifted to the Western Front and might overwhelm the already hard-pressed French and British armies before American help arrived. So, they thought, if Trotsky were assured of British support for the creation of Israel, he would keep Russia in the war. The British intelligence appreciation was wrong. Russia was even more exhausted than Britain. Its army disintegrated as the soldiers just walked home. Trotsky, who detested Zionism, would also have had to have been a fool and suicidal to try to keep it in the war. At Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918 after months of negotiation, he accepted German terms and pulled Russia out of the war.

Second, the British knew that many of the German officer corps were Jewish. Some, like the ace fighter pilot Wilhelm Frankl had been awarded Germany's highest decoration, but like virtually all of German and Austrian Jewish officers Frankl had converted to Christianity. Assimilated Jews were generally opposed to Zionism. They were unlikely to be swayed by a pro-Zionist British policy; indeed, the German government sought to use its own flirtation with Zionism to try to win support among French and British Jews. But, of course, the Zionists had their own aims and generally found the Allied side more compatible than the German.

And, third and most important, since Britain was nearly bankrupt and feared that it would collapse, the British tried every device – even espionage and “false flags” as well as revealing the intercepted “Zimmerman telegram” – to frighten America into the war on their side. If America did not send troops, British diplomats constantly argued to American officials and businessmen, it could at least send money. Only if money became available in large amounts and quickly, the British told the Americans, could Britain survive. To get it, they also believed, support from the American Jewish community was essential. To win that support, they were willing to promise almost anything. They did. As Lord Balfour told his Cabinet colleagues on August 11, 1919 that “as far as Palestine is concerned, the Powers [that is, Britain and France] have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which at least by letter, they have not always intended to violate.”

The British knew that what they intended to do in the Middle East would not be accepted by its population. As the British statesman Lord Kitchener commented in the privacy of the Cabinet, it was unrealistic to think that the half a million Palestinians would be content to play the role Jews had assigned to the Palestinians' ancestors, the Canaanites, as “hewers of wood and drawers of water.” To try to meet this objection, the British specified in the Balfour Declaration that the “establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people” was to be effected without actions “which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine...”

The impossibility of squaring those two aims was evident, but in public neither Kitchener nor Balfour, nor other British statesmen, issued any sort of warning. For the next thirty years, the British moved ahead in fits and starts both to support the Zionist enterprise and also to protect the natives. This impossible task lay at the heart of the “Palestine problem.”

Nor did British statesmen point out that Britain had made conflicting promises to the Sharif Hussein in the Hussein-McMahon correspondence of July 1915-March 1916. While this arms-length exchange remained secret for years, its terms were affirmed in a series of British proclamations in Egypt, Syria and Iraq but were never implemented. When Russia dropped out of the war, Britain officially disowned the Sykes-Picot agreement but its terms were implemented: they shaped the postwar division of the Middle East.

The United States knew little about these agreements and even less about what was afoot in the Middle East. President Wilson had established a sort of in-house intelligence panel, but it was necessarily amateurish (America had no “experts” on the Middle East) and for information the panel had to rely on what the British told them. To try to get better information, Wilson sent a mission of inquiry (the King-Crane Commission) to find out what the people of the Levant, Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians, actually wanted. The British asked that the Palestinians be excluded “because the Powers had committed themselves to the Zionist programme, which inevitably excluded numerical self-determination.”² Wilson, already ill and having left the Peace Conference, apparently did not read the mission’s report.

Wilson’s position balanced on a dilemma. The dilemma was the conflict between his two objectives. On the one hand, he had staked his political life on the proposition that peoples everywhere had an inherent and inviolable right to self-determination, but, on the other hand, Zionism, to which he had also committed himself, had somehow to avoid or negate Palestinian self-determination. We don’t know how he thought he accomplished it, but we know how the Zionists told him he could reconcile his two aims.

The clearest statement of how Wilson was told to reconcile the two aims was laid out during the peace negotiations in Paris. On June 24, 1919, Balfour, as British Foreign Secretary, met privately with the leading American Zionist, Justice Louis Brandeis, who was said to be Wilson’s principal adviser on the Middle East. In the course of their talk, Balfour remarked that “We are not dealing with the wishes of an existing community, but are consciously seeking to re-constitute a new community {sic} and definitely building for a numerical majority in the future.” Balfour continued, however, that “He has great difficulty in seeing how the President can possibly reconcile his adherence to Zionism with any doctrine of self-determination...” Presumably on Wilson’s behalf, Brandeis replied that “self-determination” would not be applied to the “existing community.” It was to be applied only to Jews who might later come to Palestine.³

Thus was set in motion a series of riots, murders, terrorist attacks, and other devastating events that marked the “Palestine Problem” during the 1920s and 1930s. They not only affected Palestine, but also Egypt, Syria and Iraq, each of which experienced insurrection, insurgency and “pacification,” interspersed with periods of calm brought about by the cooption and cooperation of native proxies.

² A verbatim account prepared by Felix Frankfurter was published in E.L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, (London:HMSO, 1952), *First Series Vol. IV, 1919*, page 1277-1278.

³ Ibid.

Native proxies were later, and often rightly, excoriated by later nationalists for corruption, tyranny and even treason, but earlier in their careers, many played essential roles in the conversion of their societies into nations. This conversion was a slow process. In the Biblical myth, Moses is said to have needed 40 years to accomplish it with Hebrews.

In modern times, depending on what area is being described, the growth of a sense of nationhood was the major theme of Arab transformation in the 40 years between about the end of the First World War, say 1919, and the aftermath of the Second World War, say 1960. It was a ragged process. Nation-building has rarely worked as anyone thought, or at least hoped, it would. Since it has shaped events in our times, we should try to understand it.

The 1920s began with what became its principal characteristic, a burst of oratory and applause by the leaders of the Great Powers for their generosity and goodwill. Gone, they proclaimed, were the bad old days of imperialism and colonial exploitation. In their place, the League of Nations would become a grand school of self-government. Instead of colonies, those areas of Africa and Asia that were under the control of the victorious allies would be “mandates.” President Woodrow Wilson had vaguely promised this in the Fifth of his Fourteen Points in 1918. True, the old imperial powers would administer the mandates, but they would be accountable to the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission and would be charged with the task of “uplifting” and preparing for independence those whom the European statesmen regarded and officially termed “derelict” or “backward” peoples.

As Professor Susan Pedersen summed up the positions of the “Big Four” European powers, Britain found the basic idea of the mandate system easy to accept because “British statesmen had always hunted diligently for ‘native rulers’ with whom they could ally and trade.”⁴ That is, proxies. The French found the British system repugnant and from the start sought to subvert it. They wanted colonies not mandates. And they were already engaged in policies to turn the colonial peoples under their rule into dark-skinned Frenchmen or at least Francophones. Britain did not care much about French cultural policies but, remembering the abortive French attempt 20 years earlier to push into the Sudan, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George “breezily assured [French Prime Minister Georges] Clemenceau that provided they did not ‘train nigger armies for the purposes of aggression’ they could recruit at will.”⁵ Italy, which had joined the Allies in the war against Germany and agreed to give up claims on Anglo-French territories in the Middle East in the 1915 secret Treaty of London in return for parts of Anatolia and Africa. When they did not get all they wanted, they walked out of the Allied Council. Effectively, the United States did the same. The main issues, actions and trends of Middle Eastern affairs for the next generation were thus set out. That is, of course, with one major exception, the Zionist movement.

Zionist policy focused on four central issues: first, acquisition of land (which was the essence of colonialism as practiced by the Americans on Native Americans and the French on Algerians and Indo-Chinese); second, increasing the Jewish population -- between 1919 and 1933, 150,000 Jewish men, women and children came to Palestine. In the next four years, the Jewish population quadrupled. To this influx the Palestinians had the same reaction as the English 30 years before and the Europeans today have to Muslim immigrants; third, creating a shadow government (the Jewish Agency) to manage the formation of a viable nation-state; and, fourth, to win American financial and political support.

⁴ Susan Pederson, *The Guardians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17 ff treats these questions in detail from the perspective of the European statesmen and the officials of the emerging League.

⁵ Pederson, 29.

No longer was the aim merely, as indeed it had never actually ever been, a homeland (*heimstatt*) or a subservient colony (a *kolonisten-gemeinwesen*), but was proudly proclaimed to be a Jewish nation-state a *Judenstaat*. Within the emerging nation-state, there was a mainline position which the Jewish population as a whole supported. But there were two factions that adopted positions with significant differences.

First, the ultra-orthodox Jewish community (the *Haredim*) continued to proclaim that “Israel” was a theological enclave for pilgrims rather than a state. They charged that the European-influenced Zionist nation-building policies were a violation of Jewish tradition. Pilgrims should live at peace. When a leader of the Orthodox community, Jacob Israel de Haan, publically denounced Zionist policy, the Zionists reacted violently. In June 1924, on the order of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who 28 years later became the president of Israel, an agent of the *Haganah* murdered Haan. The *Haredim* were outraged, but they stopped seeking accommodation or peace.

The second Jewish group was newer in coalescence and became far more militant. The “Revisionist” movement was staked out by Vladimir (aka Ze’ev) Jabotinsky. Born into a family that had thoroughly assimilated itself into Russian culture, he represented the opposite wing of the Jewish movement that was blending into Austrian and German society. Like Herzl, he was a journalist and like him was deeply affected by a demonstration of anti-Jewish feeling. Whereas for Herzl, it was the 1894 Dreyfus case in France, for Jabotinsky it was the explosion of hatred in the vicious pogrom of 1903.

Deeply shocked by the actions of his fellow Russians, Jabotinsky cast off his Russian orientation, joined the Zionist movement, began to learn Hebrew and urged fellow Jews to take up arms to defend themselves. It was this espousal of militancy for which he is best known. During the First World War, after a flirtation with the Young Turk movement in the Ottoman empire, as editor of the French-language newspaper *Jeune Turc*, he made his way to British-controlled Egypt. There he gathered fellow Russian Jews to form a supply troop and later helped to found the “Jewish Legion” as subsidiary units of the British army. He found the British less objectionable than the Turks. Then, after the war ended, Jabotinsky turned the arms of his group on the Arabs who had rioted against the imposition of Zionism. Convicted of possession of arms, he was sentenced to 15 years in prison but was released after two months. His arrest made him a hero in the Jewish community, and he was elected to what later became the community’s parliament. Politically to the far right, he broke with the socialist-influenced movement under Chaim Weizmann. With the support of mainly Russian and Polish immigrants, he founded the Revisionist movement and its youth corps, *Bitar* which aimed to create “Greater Israel,” including “the West Bank” and parts of Lebanon and Syria.

Jabotinsky was one of the main “rejectionists” of the 1936 British Royal Commission plan to partition Mandate Palestine into Jewish, Arab and “international” zones. As he warned the Commissioners, “even the whole of Palestine may prove too small...A corner of Palestine, a ‘canton,’ how can we promise to be satisfied with it. We cannot. We never can. Should we swear to you we would be satisfied, it would be a lie.”

The 1936 partition plan, the first of many attempts to accommodate the need for a refuge for Jews escaping persecution in Europe while preserving the native community, was rejected by the Zionist Congress and boycotted by the Palestinians. Enormously important as a seed-bed of events to come, the Royal Commission report was barely noticed above the cacophony of the times.

Events and movements of the 1930s, the cacophony of the times, have faded from the memories of most of us. What we today think of as a violent form of populism was then regarded, proudly, by its adherents, as Fascism. Democracy, already in retreat during the bitter and tragic Spanish Civil War, seemed by 1939 a failed cause. Whole populations were mesmerized by torch-lit, choreographed parades of massed uniformed men; Hitler's favorite movie-maker, Leni Riefenstahl, caught the spectacle in her "Triumph of the Will." The future seemed to belong to them. Attacks on "liberals," Jews and Roma (Gypsies) spread from country to country. To plunge into the mass and lose one's individuality became the aim of many who in later years would like to forget their participation. The English aristocracy then regarded Franco's Spanish Fascists as "our allies," the Duke of Windsor, the former King Edward VIII, cozied up to Hitler while Winston Churchill praised Mussolini as "the greatest man of our time." Violent gangs, sometimes calling themselves storm troopers, formed in a number of countries. It was customary for them to adopt uniforms, noted particularly by the color of the shirts they wore.

Like the Black shirts (Nazis), Brown shirts (Italian Fascists), Black sweaters (British Fascists) Silver Shirts (Americans) and caught up in the same push for strength, unity and pride, the Jewish youth movement founded by Jabotinsky, *Betar*, adopted brown shirts. (*Betar* was the ancestor of the Israeli *Likud*, founded by Menachem Begin and now led by Benjamin Netanyahu.) From *Betar*'s ranks came the two major Zionist terrorist organizations, the *Irgun Zva'I Leumi* and *Lohamei Herut Yisrael* (known as *Lehi*, aka the "Stern Gang").

Striving also for strength, unity and pride, a would-be Iraqi Fascist, Sami Shawkat, set up a pale version of the German, Italian and Greek youth movements called the *Futuwah*, but it faded before even selecting a shirt. Up to that time, no Arab group, even the Palestinians, was motivated by nationalism enough to create mass parties or youth movements. The Palestinians rebelled, but they were still a colonial people without effective means to articulate their goals or to defend themselves. Their weakness can be attributed in part to their experience under the Ottoman empire. It had two significant causes:

First, under the Ottoman and earlier Islamic governments, land was regarded as a possession of the state (*miri*). This was the formal legal system, but the actual tillers of the land had from time immemorial regarded the lands they plowed as theirs. To them government was an alien, exploitive system to be avoided as much as possible. That was essentially the traditional relationship of agricultural peoples, peasants, to governments all over the world, even in Europe. "Government," in the sense we think of it today, was a village system. Neighbors knew who "owned" land, plowed it, harvested its produce and were able to dispose of it among themselves by sale, marriage or inheritance regardless of what distant, unknown and virtually never-seen princes, merchants and judges thought or decreed.

Traditionally, in the Ottoman, Iranian and Mughal empires rulers had long engaged grandees and city merchants to "farm" the collection of taxes. For a guaranteed fee, an appointee would be accorded the right to squeeze as much as he could from the inhabitants of a given area for a certain period. If the peasants refused to pay, the tax farmer would send troops or hired thugs to punish them. So vicious could this punishment be that often the villagers would run away. Otherwise they would throw themselves on his mercy. Thus, he became a sort of "godfather" through whom they bought protection.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century in much of Asia, including the Punjab in British India and Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Egypt in the Ottoman empire, as the demand for revenue increased to pay for modernization or Europeanization, a new system of assessing and collecting taxes began to be imposed. The rise of the state in Europe after the French revolution reverberated across Asia. It required a mobilization of finances. That led both the imperial powers and the remaining native governments to try to “rationalize” land ownership to increase revenue. What had been a temporary relationship between villagers and tax farmers turned into a more permanent arrangement between the tax farmer and the government. Disregarding custom, the tax farmer paid the government for *title* to the land. As seen by the peasant farmer there was no change, but as viewed by government the customary owner became just a laborer without rights to the land while the tax farmer became its owner. The British were familiar with this transformation because it had been played out for centuries in the “enclosures” of English common lands. And, advised by their lawyers, they regarded it as the law of the lands they took over as mandatory. They decided to enforce it.



Enforcing it also fit with their plan to enable Jewish settlement of Palestine. The land was up for sale by absentee owners and the only likely buyers were Jewish immigrants. The Zionist organization seized the opportunity: it did elaborate studies to find out which lands were the best and put together funds to buy them. It also designated the lands it purchased as mortmain to be worked only by Jewish labor. The socialist-inspired program specified the creation of collective farms (*kibbutzim*) that excluded exploiting Palestinian peasant farmers and evicted them. In this way, the Jewish National Fund acquired substantial areas from which thousands of Palestinian villagers were expelled. (Map shows Jewish holdings in 1947.)

The second cause of weakness of the Palestinians was their lack of experience in management of their own affairs. Whereas both in Europe and in Asia Jews had lived in self-governing *ghettos*, Palestinians had no *ghettos*. Christian “nations” (Turkish: *millets*) were partially self-governing under their religious leaders, but the 8 in 10 Palestinians who were Muslims were ruled directly. Their legal code and their educational system were Ottoman. They had no separate military force and no mechanism for dealing with foreigners. That is, ironically, they had none of the benefits of the *ghetto* system.

But, despite these weaknesses, although virtually leaderless and deeply divided, they set up a “National Committee” which demanded that the British allow the formation of a democratic government (in which, of course, the Arab majority would have prevailed), that the sale of land to the Zionists be stopped until the “economic absorptive capacity” could be established and they offered an alternative to partition: essentially what today we call a “one state solution.” Palestine would not be divided, but the current ratio of Jewish and Palestinian inhabitants would be maintained. Under intense Zionist pressure, the British refused.

Rebuffed, the Palestinians then took to the streets and the hills. While posing no “existential threat,” they threatened the British where they were most vulnerable, in their pocketbook. To the extent they could, they made the colonial administration expensive to maintain. In the late 1930s, after the failure of the plans to divide the mandate, they carried out nearly 6,000 “incidents of violence” against which the British felt obliged to bring in 20,000 troops. So, having failed to work out a geographical solution as the Royal Commission and successor planners had proposed and under pressure by the Home government to cut expenses, the British tried repression. They killed over a thousand Palestinian protesters, hanging those they identified as agitators, blowing up the houses of their supporters, imprisoning in concentration camps all community leaders. They also enlisted and armed a Jewish force of 5,000 men to fight the Palestinians. Palestine was plunged into civil war.

Ironically, in 1939 a brief peace came to Palestine because of the outbreak of the Second World War. During the war, on the whole, both the Arabs and the Jews worked for, supported or at least did not oppose the Allied cause. The Jews, of course, had more reason than the Arabs to do so. Some Arabs did not. The most publicized Palestinian exception was the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husaini (also spelled Husseini). Like the Indian leader, Subhas Chandra Bose who as a former president of the Indian National Congress was a comparable public figure, Husaini feared and hated Britain, and was prepared to fight it with any means, including the help of the Axis powers. Bose led a Japanese-supported Indian army against the British. Husaini had no army, but he engaged in a pro-German propaganda campaign. He was not alone in seeking a deal with the Nazis. As Jews, Zionists had limited access to Nazis, but Zionist agents negotiated even with the Gestapo and the SS the creation of training camps in Nazi-held areas for selected Jews destined for emigration to Palestine.

Whether or not outsiders may regard any or all of these attempts at some sort of accommodation with *our* enemy to be justified, we must understand that for the Zionists, as for many Indian, Irish and Arab nationalists, the British were the “near enemy” – the real, ultimate and most dangerous enemy -- to be fought whenever possible. Fighting them became possible in Palestine when after 1943 the mortal danger of a German military thrust into Palestine faded. Then the Zionists turned against the British.

Jewish terrorists attempted on August 8, 1944 to murder the British High Commissioner of the Palestine Mandate and on November 6 of that year they murdered the senior official of the British government in the Middle East, Lord Moyne (Walter Guinness). Moyne, who was a member of the House of Lords and a close friend of Winston Churchill, had argued “that Arabs should be subjugated by force to a Jewish régime is inconsistent with the [Atlantic Charter](#), and that...no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned should be made.” He was killed by *Lehi* on the order of the later Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir. An infuriated Churchill denounced the assassins in Parliament as “a new set of gangsters worthy of Nazi Germany...[who] must be destroyed root and branch.” On behalf of *Haganah*, the Zionist equivalent of prime minister, David Ben Gurion, apologized while denying responsibility.

But, as the British knew from intercepted communications of the Jewish shadow government, *Irgun* and *Lehi* were secretly authorized to carry out actions the regular Zionists did not want to admit and to do so under a coordinating committee known as the “Jewish Rebellion Movement.” The committee, which included representatives of the Jewish Agency’s secret army, the *Haganah*, and its “Special Forces,” *Palmach*, as well as *Irgun* and *Lehi*, operated under the chairmanship of another later prime minister, Levi Eshkol.

The British had armed *Palmach* to fight Palestinian insurgents. They managed to disarm the Palestinians, but they did not disarm *Irgun* or *Lehi*. They soon paid for this oversight. On July 22, 1946, *Irgun* and *Lehi*, with the agreement of the *Haganah*, blew up the King David Hotel, which housed the British administration, tried to kill the British military commander in Jerusalem and shortly thereafter attempted to blow up a British government building in the center of London. (Later, on September 17, 1948 *Lehi* would murder the United Nations representative, Count Folke Bernadotte, who was best known for having saved thousands of Jews from the Nazis.) The British and the United Nations were not the only targets. The Palestinians were already marked for expulsion or murder.

Under the guidance of the head of the Jewish Agency and later prime minister, David Ben Gurion, the combined forces of the Agency, its military wing and the terrorist organizations planned a program to drive virtually the entire Arabic-speaking, Muslim and Christian, native population out of Palestine.⁶ Later code-named “Plan D” (*Tochnit Dalet*), the Plan began in Ben Gurion’s mind already in 1937, just after the Royal Commission had proposed partition of Palestine. In a letter to his son he wrote “We must expel Arabs and take their places...” Indeed, already the Jewish Agency had begun a few years earlier drawing up a detailed map of the Palestinian villages and quarters of towns showing their vulnerabilities. And in 1944, it established a school to train intelligence agents in Arabic language and Palestinian culture. This was the origin of the famed Israeli intelligence force, *Mossad*.

Meanwhile, the Jewish Agency recruited volunteers from the Jewish members of the Allied armies and trained resident Jews so that, by May 1948, the Haganah numbered 35,700 standing troops of whom 2,200 were the Special Forces of Palmach. That is, as the Israeli journalist Benny Morris pointed out, the Jewish army numbered some 5,500 *more* soldiers than the combined strength of the regular Arab armies and paramilitary Palestinian forces. In addition, Haganah could draw on 9,500 members of the paramilitary youth corps. By July 1948, when the Haganah was renamed the Israel Defense Force, it had 63,000 men under arms. Perhaps more important than numbers, it had a command and control capability that allowed it to conduct division-size operations. No Arab force even remotely approached its power.

The 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli war was a fiasco for the surrounding Arab states. The corruption, weakness and pomposity of their governments, which had served as proxies for British imperialism, would later give birth to a series of revolts, coups and revolutions and to the rise of Arab terrorist groups, but the immediate impact was upon the Palestinian community. For them it was a disaster, a *nakbah*. The Palestinian community was vulnerable and Jewish strategists regarded it as their “near enemy.” Already in 1946, two years before the proclamation of the State, a previous version of Plan D, known as Plan C (*Tachnit Gimel*), had laid out the strategy for war on the Palestinians. It called for “killing the Palestinian political leadership, killing Palestinian “inciters” and financial supporters, killing those Palestinians acting against the Jews, killing senior Palestinian officers and officials in the Mandate regime, damaging Palestinian transportation, damaging sources of Palestine economy (water wells, mills), attacking Palestinian villages and clubs, coffee house, meeting places, etc...”

⁶ Israeli archives were used by the Israeli journalist Benny Morris in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and by the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2006) to give the first detailed account of the expulsion.

When Plan D went into operation, as the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé wrote “it sealed the fate of the Palestinians within the territory the Zionist leaders had set their eyes on for their future Jewish state...[it] called for their systematic and total expulsion from their homeland...Each brigade commander received a list [based on the intelligence “map”] of the



villages or neighbourhoods that had to be occupied, destroyed and their inhabitants expelled, with exact dates. The orders specified that “These operations can be carried out in the following manner: either by destroying villages (by setting fire to them, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in the rubble) [to prevent the villagers from returning]...in case of resistance, the armed forces must be wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state.

“Judging by the end result,” as Pappé found in the archives, the order to “capture, cleanse [Hebrew: *tihur*] or destroy...did not except any village for any reason.” Eventually, of the roughly 700 villages in what became Israel (see map on left), 561 were destroyed, and even before the British withdrawal had been completed about 250,000 villagers had been uprooted. As the commander of the Special Forces (*Palmach*) wrote, “There is a need now for strong and brutal reaction... If we accuse a family -- we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included. Otherwise, this is not an effective reaction. During the operation there is no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty.” As General Yigal Allon of *Palmach* said, “The tactic reached its goal completely...wide areas were cleaned.” At least 5,000 Palestinians were killed before May 1948.

The best-known attack was by the *Irgun* and *Lehi* operating under the orders of (and in conjunction with) the *Haganah*, on the Palestinian village of Deir Yasin on April 9. Women were raped, most of the villagers including children were killed and bodies were defiled. Already before the attack, Yosef Sepir, a member of the supervising committee, warned his colleagues that the non-Jewish world might see such action as an echo of the German destruction of the little Czech village of Lidice on June 10, 1942 in retaliation for the murder of SS Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich. At Lidice, all the adult males and most of women were murdered and the site was plowed under to be “forever blotted from memory.” The comparison of the two may be odious, but as Mr. Sepir had warned, it is hard to avoid.

Terror is of little use if it is not known; so the *Irgun* called a press conference to announce the slaughter at Deir Yasin. What happened there became a part of the “Whispering campaign” that was employed to stimulate Palestinian flight. In the Western media and among public affairs groups, the event was strongly denied and even blamed on “the Arab war leaders.” Western journalists and historians who questioned the official account were attacked in Western media as anti-Semites.

Deir Yasin was key to the expulsion of the Palestinians, but it was also important in bringing to the fore two already existing characteristics of thinking and writing on Middle Eastern affairs: the one was the utter disregard of the native peoples on the already established colonial model and the second was the campaign to attack those who reported Israeli atrocities.

Israel was given, in effect, immunity from standards set for other nation-states. Since Jews had themselves been the victims of the (European) Holocaust, both governments and the public tacitly agreed, they could not be held accountable for any (Middle Eastern) action they took. To apply to Israel standards demanded of other nations was, and to this day still is, to be charged with anti-Semitism.

This, as is becoming increasingly clear, does not do Israel any favor; it serves to bring out the worst tendencies of the Israelis. These, after all, exist in any group of people of any religion or area of the world. Sadly, it also demonstrates another lesson of history: that we are more likely to learn from our enemies than from our friends.⁷ Finally, these attitudes coalesce in a “pro-Semitism” that is as intellectually ridiculous as “anti-Semitism.” Both Semites, the Jews and the Arabs, like all human populations, contain saints and sinners, the generous and the greedy, the benevolent and the odious. To believe otherwise is to be ignorant or naïve.

In the events from the end of the war to the proclamation of the State of Israel in May 1948, the United States played neither a beneficial nor a peace-seeking role. It demanded actions which were bound to inflame passions, undercut British attempts, weak and late as they were, to limit the damage of war and, despite demands that Jewish immigrants be admitted to Palestine, it hypocritically restricted Jewish immigration to the United States. During this period America admitted only 4,767 under President Harry Truman’s December 1945 order whereas he demanded Britain admit 100,000. And, despite highly publicized actions to force Britain and the United Nations to implement Zionist policy, Truman ducked. He suggested suspending partition and continuing the trusteeship. Britain refused. The fat was in the fire.

After reviewing the reports, listening to emotional appeals by various delegates, individuals and groups and following orders transmitted by their home governments, the delegates to the UN General Assembly voted (Resolution 181) on November 29, 1947, 33 to 13 with 10 abstentions to recommend partition of Palestine and awarded the incipient Jewish state, whose citizens-to-be owned or controlled less than 6% of the land, 55% of the Mandate.

Meanwhile, the Zionists organized a remarkable program to gather the displaced Jews (usually referred to as DPs) in Europe and send them to Palestine. The operation was done clandestinely, literally under the noses of the British, American and Russian armies with equipment stolen from them and working out of buildings supposedly under their control. When it was found out, those who reported on it were furiously attacked as anti-Semites. As the horrors of the Nazi regime became better known, all actions were regarded as legitimate and anger ran deep. As Jon and David Kimche have written,⁸

the European Jews hated the Germans who had destroyed their corporate life; they hated the Poles and Czechs, the Hungarians and Rumanians, the Austrians and the Balts who had helped the Germans; they hated the British and the Americans, the Russians and the Christians who had left

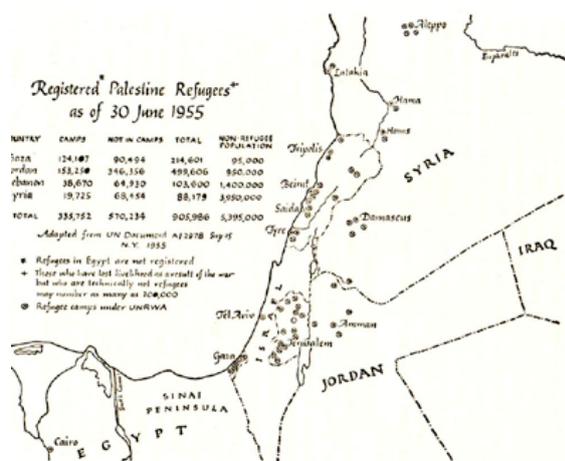
⁷ The same process of learning from enemies was exhibited at about the same time by the French in Algeria. Having been humiliated and maltreated by the Nazis, Frenchmen, even humane and decent men like Albert Camus, saw no inconsistency in treating Algerians as the Germans had treated them. Not only the French terrorists, the *Organisation armée secrete*, but also the French government was culpable. As head of the U.S. Government Task Force on Algeria, I visited a French-run concentration camp that, except for the lack of gas ovens, resembled Auschwitz. Americans in Vietnam and later wars showed the same propensity to crimes against humanity. So, when a government or a people asserts or is given immunity, the worst in human nature can be expected. No race, creed or color is immune.

⁸ *The Secret Roads* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), 68.

them, so it seemed to them, to their fate. They hated Europe, they held its precious laws in contempt, they owed nothing to its peoples. They wanted to get out...Thus, anti-goyism, that malignant growth in Jewish Palestine life, received a new lease of life. Linked with Zionism, it now galvanised the Jewish camps in Europe.

The events of 1947-1948 had four major and long-term effects: they dramatically increased the population of the Jewish community in Palestine while displacing almost entirely the native Palestinian population; they plunged the Middle East into a turmoil from which natives, Israelis, Europeans and we still and indeed increasingly suffer; they created or inflamed hostilities that have proven impossible to quell; and they have fastened on the American public the assumption of emotional responsibility for the Holocaust in which it had played no part.

Shortly after the expulsion of the Palestinian community from what became Israel, American relief organizations rushed to save the lives and provide what shelter it could. Gradually, the stopping places, where refugees had literally collapsed, turned into camps. Then church and voluntary aid was taken over by a newly created United Nations organization (UNRA, later UNRWA).⁹ UNRWA functioned more or less as soup kitchens had in the American Great Depression. Total aid, including food, clothing, medicine and where available tents, was valued at \$27 a year per person.



If the physical diet was meager, the emotional diet was noxious. It consisted of a blend of exaggerated memories and unrealistic hopes. Few refugees could find jobs. Idleness was a dry rot in adults. And a new generation was born that knew little beyond camp life. Within a few years over half the refugees were less than 15 years of age. They were becoming the modern version of Moses's followers' time in the "Wilderness." The camps were emotional cesspools. The inmates' conditions, both emotional and physical were far worse than those of the European DPs. They had no place to go and no outside supporters to help them.

Most were displaced farmers who had no marketable skills, and where they found jobs they had to compete with the already poor and underemployed citizens of the countries in which they found themselves. So, they were exploited and were hated as refugees nearly always are.

Such public opinion as there was (and such press as was free to express it) turned bitterly against the rulers of the states. Since these rulers had been installed by the imperial powers, they were regarded as representatives of what I have called "post-imperial malaise" and were generally, and rightly, opposed by their increasingly informed fellow countrymen. They were seen to have morphed from patriots to apologists, nationalists to puppets and freedom fighters to warlords.

⁹ As a young student in 1950 I visited a few of them and later in 1963 as an American official I was offered the post of Deputy Commissioner General of UNRWA. I was not allowed to take the post, but I did brief the incoming Commissioner General on his assignment.

All over the Middle East, demonstrations broke out, government officials including the prime minister and chief of police of Egypt were assassinated while riots, attempted bombings and threats were almost daily occurrences. In Syria, the government was overthrown in an army coup d'état in 1949, and its leader was quickly ousted by another group. In Jordan on July 1951, the newly proclaimed king was murdered by a Palestinian. Then, on January 26, 1952, "Black Friday," mobs raced through Cairo, burning, pillaging and killing. It became obvious that no Arab government could cope.

Recognition that more was wrong with Arab society than government was spreading. Explicit was the conviction that corruption, poverty and backwardness were both the inheritance of decades of imperialism and also that they were the results of structural defects in Arab society. These defects were not caused by events in Palestine, but they were intensified by the shock of the Arab defeat there. Arabs everywhere agitated for change. Each state cracked down on its critics, but each ruler sought to popularize himself by criticizing others. As the kings turned against one another, the people followed.

What turned out to be formative was that, for all their failings, the colonial and mandate systems had resulted in the spread of literacy. Then, the advent of first the radio and then television created even among the semi-literate an awareness of events and conditions. As one long-time colonial administrator commented, "poverty and ignorance can lie down more or less happily together but not poverty and education. That nowadays is likely to be an explosive mixture." It was. It was first set off in Egypt when on July 23, 1952 when the "Free Officers," under the leadership of Gamal Abdul Nasser, who as a young army officer had experienced humiliation in Egypt's campaign in Gaza, ousted the King.¹⁰

Nasser was not an uncritical supporter of the Palestinians. He was, however, a dedicated believer in Arab nationalism. For him the Palestinian and Egyptian emphasis on the village "nation," the *watan*, was a part of the Arab problem; what was needed, he thought, was to move beyond that narrow concept toward "pan-Arabism" (*qawmiyah*). Only if the Arabs could rise above parochialism, as the Jews had done by forming their national ideology, Zionism, could they achieve a minimum degree of security, overcome the humiliation of Palestine or play a significant role in world affairs. So, while Nasser tried to deal with a variety of domestic Egyptian and Arab World issues as well as with stormy relations with Britain, France and the United States, Palestine was never far from his mind. Nor was the issue of colonialism.

As Nasser and particularly the Palestinians learned about the Algerian struggle against French colonialism, they became fascinated. They saw that the Algerians had used guerrilla warfare and had defeated the mighty French army. So, they thought if they copied the Algerians, they could defeat Israel. But the analogy failed. The French could afford to leave Algeria -- indeed they could not afford to stay -- but the Israelis had nowhere to go and were determined to stay. In Algeria, there was a native population; in what had become Israel, there were effectively no longer any Palestinians. And, whereas the French government and its brutal tactics were excoriated by Frenchmen, the Israelis were given a sort of immunity by having suffered the Holocaust. Not taking these differences into account, dozens of Palestinian groups engaged in fruitless bouts of violence. They not only failed to defeat the Israelis but they also drove the Arab governments, including Nasser's, to distrust, dislike and fear that they would precipitate a war with Israel which the Arabs had no hope of winning.

¹⁰ In "Toward a policy for the Middle East" in *Foreign Affairs* that appeared two weeks before the coup, Richard Nolte and I predicted the coup and argued for a new post-coup American policy. President Kennedy appointed me as a member of the Policy Planning Council to carry it into effect.

Oblivious to these Middle Eastern worries and hostilities, the United States sought to enroll the Arabs in their struggle against the Soviet Union. When US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles visited the Middle East in 1953, he was shocked to find them turning aside from what *he* saw as the threat of the USSR to what *they* thought of as the threat of Israel. Like most contemporary cold warriors, he regarded the Palestine problem as a minor, annoying but “containable” issue. What really counted was more or less what British had faced in the nineteenth century, the outward thrust of the Russia, now become the Soviet Union.

Ironically, American cold warriors from Truman’s time had found themselves trapped by a remarkable deal Churchill had made with Stalin that he intended to use to stop Soviet moves southward. Churchill wanted Greece to become another “choke point.”

To get Greece to do his bidding, Churchill thought he had to reestablish the Greek monarchy and the Fascist pre-war regime. But having successfully fought the Nazis and Fascists and created a powerful resistance movement, the Greeks did not want the discredited monarchy and the prewar dictatorship back. So Churchill had to impose them by force. But he could not do so if the Russians intervened. To keep them at bay, he got Stalin to give him a free hand in Greece in return for his supporting a Soviet free hand in eastern Europe. Churchill thought he had pulled off a very clever move and had outsmarted the Russians. But, that was the move, Churchill’s move, beginning in Greece that implanted the “iron curtain” and so shaped much of the Cold War for the next twenty years.

Even with Soviet acquiescence, the British invasion of Greece was more expensive than Britain could afford; so, Britain again turned to the United States for help. It encouraged the promulgation of what became the Truman Doctrine to underwrite its traditional policy toward Asia. For America, the purpose of the policy was somewhat different; it was the protection of Asia and Africa from Communism. But, as Mr. Dulles found, Middle Easterners were less concerned with the grand strategy of the Cold War than the small-scale but constant hostilities in their neighborhood.

What shifted in the 1950s was that the Palestine problem *merged* with the Cold War to create a new pattern that dominated Middle Eastern affairs in the Eisenhower administration. Everything, including the refugee problem, was treated as an aspect of the Cold War. Thus, attempts were made to solve the refugee problem not so much as a humanitarian goal or even as an aid to Arab-Israeli peace but as a means to prevent the Soviet Union from adopting it as a wedge to penetrate the area. Faulty in conception, the policy did not work. Several schemes were broached to resettle the refugees outside of Israel without significant results. Hostilities continued. Indeed, they grew more vicious.

Despite the armistice of 1949, the borders of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt were constantly being breached by raids and counter-raids, intelligence probes, commando attacks and massive retaliations. “Incidents” numbered in the thousands. All along the frontiers of Israel was a “no man’s land.” The UN established a “Mixed Armistice Commission” to assess blame and to try to stop acts of aggression, it was not effective. Worse, it chronicled abduction, torture, rape and murder of men, women and children. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of these events in shaping the attitudes toward one another of the Palestinians and the Israelis. Starkly put, the Israelis regarded the Palestinians as *untermenschen* while the Palestinians regarded the Israelis as imperialist monsters. Wounds were constantly opened and rubbed raw by thousands of incidents year after year.

Much – and certainly the beginning -- of such action as Palestinians tried to undertake was in “blowback” to Israeli action. In 1949, the Israelis forced the Jordanians to give up a three-kilometer-deep band along their frontier. This had the effect of separating a number of Jordan-controlled Palestinian villages from their farmlands. Angry and hungry villagers began slipping across the new dividing line to harvest the crops they had planted, and, as they did, the Israelis, naturally, began to defend their new possessions. Soon the Israeli army was called in and as infiltrators were caught, they were immediately executed. As “counterinsurgency” was applied, violence escalated. That was the first of what became a pattern of Palestinian guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Event by event, would-be leader by leader, Palestinians began an insurgency against Israel and Israeli “pacification” was set in motion.

Since there was no forum in which they could seek redress of their grievances, those Palestinians whose names we remember turned to the weapon of the weak, terrorism. On terrorism, the Jews had led the way, and the Palestinians eagerly followed in their footsteps. Terrorism is undoubtedly an ugly policy, but when other means of action are not available it has been adopted by people of every race, creed and ideology. Some of the former Israeli terrorists became the Israeli government, and the former Algerian terrorists similarly became the Algerian government. Both were to become role models for at least some Palestinians.

Palestinian terrorist attacks were occasionally dramatic and caught media attention, but they were ineffective both politically and militarily. The Palestinians and even the small terrorist groups, unlike the *Lehi* and *Irgun* on whom they were partly modeled, were divided, penetrated by Israeli intelligence, unable to agree on either programs or personalities of the leadership. Manipulated by the other Arab governments, they were pawns in the game.

At the time, most astute observers regarded them as distractions and the Palestinians as a whole as bystanders. They were not thought of as having any serious capacity to make either war or peace. I think this assessment was *then* correct. Living in miserable refugee camps, having no means of communication, no recognized leaders and stunned by misery, the Palestinian were locked in their own “Wilderness.” It could only be leaders of the Arab states who could make peace or war.

The Israeli government came to that conclusion and sought to shatter the feeble and then secret moves the US government made in the 1950s to reach an understanding with President Nasser’s Egypt. This was the plan behind the Lavon affair – code named “operation Susannah” -- an Israeli false flag attack on a US government building (a library) in Alexandria in 1954. It failed when the agents were caught. Israeli frustration over this and other events, French anger over Nasser’s support of the Algerian struggle for independence and British opposition to the loss of its check point at Suez eventuated in the Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt 1956. This event forced, for the first time, American intervention against the attackers. But then, the American effort lapsed and the attention of the Eisenhower administration was diverted to other issues. It was not until the advent of the Kennedy administration that attempts, limited though they were, were made to reengage in seeking peace in the Middle East.

This, then, in my interpretation of the major trends up to about 1961. I turn in Part 2 to discuss the diverse, complex and destructive events that illustrate where we are going.

William R. Polk
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