



BRIEFING No.1

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THE HISTORIC WRONG AGAINST THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

By Dr. David Morrison

The state of Israel came into existence on 14 May 1948. In the months before and after this declaration, around 750,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes. Over 500 Palestinian villages were emptied of their population and most of them were destroyed so that the Palestinians who were expelled had no homes to return to.

Anybody who doubts that ethnic cleansing took place on this scale should read *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* by Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé. In it, he describes Plan Dalet (D in Hebrew), prepared long in advance of the declaration of the state of Israel, which set out the areas to be cleansed and the methods to be employed by Zionist forces in carrying out the cleansing. Here is a sample of the latter:

“ 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 their debris) and especially of those population centres which are difficult to control continuously; or by mounting combing and control operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the villages, conducting a search inside them. In case of resistance, the armed forces must be wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state.” (p 39)

The plan was approved by the Zionist leadership on 10 March 1948, and put into operation immediately.

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The Zionist movement to establish a homeland for Jews in Palestine began in Europe in the late 19th century, when Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire. A crucial event in realising this Zionist project was the Balfour Declaration in 1917 during World War I. In this, Britain declared its support for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” and undertook to use its “best endeavours” to bring it about.

The Declaration also made the incompatible commitment that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”. At that time, around 90% of the population of Palestine was Arab; only 10% or so was Jewish.

Shortly afterwards in 1919, in a memorandum to the British cabinet, Balfour himself made it clear that Britain had no intention of taking account of Arab opinion. He wrote:

“ .. in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country The four Great Powers are committed to Zionism and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder importance than the desire and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.”

THE HISTORIC WRONG AGAINST THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

During World War I, Britain sought and obtained Arab assistance in overthrowing Ottoman rule in the Arab lands stretching from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, including Syria and Mesopotamia (now Iraq). In exchange for this assistance, Britain promised the Arab leadership that it would recognise an Arab state in the Middle East. However, Britain made a conflicting agreement with France – the Sykes-Picot Agreement – for joint control of the Middle East. So, instead of the promised Arab state, Britain and France broke up the Middle East into a series of states under their control. Britain was granted a mandate to administer Palestine by the newly formed League of Nations. The mandate incorporated the Balfour Declaration 's commitment to a homeland for the Jews in Palestine.

Under British rule, the Jewish colonisation of Palestine gathered pace and by the mid 1930s Jews made up nearly 30% of the population compared with around 10% twenty years earlier. As the unlimited extent of the colonisation became evident, Arab opposition rose and led to the Arab Revolt from 1936-39, in which around 5,000 Arabs, and 400 Jews, were killed.

In 1937, the Peel Commission set up by Britain proposed for the first time the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state. Arab opposition led to the proposal being dropped and to Britain severely restricting further Jewish immigration into Palestine in 1939. This restriction continued throughout World War II at a time when Jews were desperate to escape Nazi persecution in Europe.



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In 1947, Britain announced its intention to give up the mandate and to withdraw from Palestine on 15 May 1948. The newly formed UN set up a commission which recommended another partition scheme. This was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in resolution 181 passed on 29 November 1947 by 33 votes to 10, despite the opposition of the Palestinians and all Arab states. It is worth noting that, unlike UN Security Council resolutions, General Assembly resolutions are not binding on UN member states.

The partition plan divided Palestine into three parts. It was extraordinarily generous to the Jews, who at the time made up about a third of the population and owned less than 6% of the total land. Despite this, the partition plan allocated almost 56% of the land to a Jewish state, in an area in which there were about 500,000 Jews but also 440,000 Arabs. On 42% of the land, 800,000+ Arabs were to have a state with a small Jewish minority (10,000) and a small area around Jerusalem was to be under international control.

THE HISTORIC WRONG AGAINST THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

The Zionist leadership accepted the partition plan publicly, but with the clear intention of working against it, understandably so, since it was impossible to establish a Jewish state in an area where nearly 50% of the population was Arab. "Transfer" of Arabs was necessary in order to establish a viable Jewish state. That's what happened in the months before and after the declaration of the state of Israel in May 1948. The territory allocated to the Jewish state was expanded by force to include more than 78% of mandate Palestine and around 750,000 Palestinians were expelled into the rest of Palestine and the surrounding Arab states, where they and their descendants live today. That is how a viable Jewish state was established in Palestine in 1948.

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The transfer of the Arab population out of Palestine was on the agenda of the Zionist movement from an early stage - since its presence got in the way of the establishment of a Jewish state. One of the movement's liberal thinkers, Leo Motzkin, put it this way in 1917:

"Our thought is that the colonization of Palestine has to go in two directions: Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel and the resettlement of the Arabs of Eretz Israel outside the country. The transfer of so many Arabs may seem at first unacceptable economically, but is nonetheless practical. It does not require too much money to resettle a Palestinian village on another land." (The Motzkin Book, p 164)

David Ben-Gurion was the leader of the Zionist movement from the mid 1920s and the first Prime Minister of Israel. He told a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive on 12 June 1938:

"I am for compulsory transfer. I see nothing immoral in it."

It should be said that Zionist leaders were not alone in denying the Palestinians' right to live in the land of Palestine. Here is an extract from evidence by a famous Briton to the Peel Commission in 1937:

"I do not agree that the dog in a manger [the Palestinians] has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race, has come in and taken their place."

The author was Winston Churchill. In his eyes, the native peoples of America and Australia, and Palestine, were lesser breeds, whose "place" could be taken over by superior breeds.

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The Zionist project did not stop at the 1949 armistice line, the so-called Green Line. Since the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel has occupied the rest of mandate Palestine – the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem – and continued its colonising mission in these areas. Today, there are around 500,000 Jewish settlers on confiscated Arab land in the Occupied Territories.

Israel has ignored Security Council resolutions demanding that it cease colonising the Occupied Territories. Colonising occupied territory is contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 49, paragraph 6 of which states:

THE HISTORIC WRONG AGAINST THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

“ The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies. ”
Shamefully, the Security Council has not taken any enforcement action – economic sanctions, for example – to compel Israel to implement these resolutions. This is in stark contrast to the Security Council ’ s action in respect of, for example, Iraq and Iran.

(Israel is in violation of over 30 Security Council resolutions that require action by it alone, for example, resolutions 252, 267, 271 and 298 that require it to reverse its annexation of East Jerusalem, resolution 487 that calls upon it to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA supervision, resolution 497 demands that Israel reverse its annexation of the Golan Heights that belong to Syria, as well as resolutions 446, 452 and 465 that demand it cease settlement building. The Security Council has taken no enforcement action in respect of any of these.)

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The Zionist colonisation of Palestine, undertaken with the support of the West, has brought endless suffering to the Arab people of Palestine and deprived them of the enjoyment of their land. Had it not been for the Zionist colonisation, there would be no conflict in Palestine. Yet, remarkably, the colonisers are constantly portrayed in the Western media as the victims of Palestinian aggression.

A settlement in Palestine requires a recognition that an historic wrong has been done to the Arab people of Palestine and that appropriate redress has to be made.



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