

How did we get here?

The restoration of Israel



ANGLICAN
Friends of Israel

Foreword

“I am delighted to have been asked to contribute a foreword to this pamphlet, written to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Israel, the Jewish State. There is a long and honourable history of Anglican involvement in the Zionist project. From the 17th to the 20th centuries, English advocates of the Jews' restoration in the Holy Land worked tirelessly to realise Jewish dreams – often, in more practical ways than by the Jews themselves. It became their mission to restore the land to its lawful owners, and thereby assist in fulfilling Biblical prophecy. The pamphlet, in its own sober and factual way, is but the most recent instance of this centuries-long endeavour. I welcome it.”

Anthony Julius
2 April 2008

Introduction

Israel celebrates its 60th Birthday in 2008. In May 1948, the tiny piece of land, focus of Jewish prayer and aspirations for over 3,000 years, was restored to them. To many, including Jews whose communities had lived continuously in the Holy Land, Israel's rebirth was a joyous event. To some it represented a safe haven to be Jewish in a Jewish land without fear of persecution. To others, the sovereign hand of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob fulfilling promises from the Torah and the Prophets was clear to see. Much of the world rejoiced with them.

However, not everyone was pleased. Many Arabs, including those whose own nations were formed in the same period, call Israel's national rebirth 'The Naqba' or 'catastrophe'. The formation of a Jewish state in the region, they claimed, robbed Palestinians of their land; the Jews were portrayed as interlopers. The region's problems were – and are – blamed on Israel by many people. Criticism has gone beyond Israel's actions. Even the legitimacy of Israel's existence has been questioned. Anglicans are engaged in the debate for Anglican Palestinians are caught up in the conflict.

We at Anglican Friends of Israel recognize that Israel should not be immune from criticism; but we are dismayed that so much of it is rooted in error, misrepresentation and even racism. We hope this booklet will contribute to a fuller understanding of the foundation of modern Israel and dispel some of the hostile myths which have grown up around the events during and prior to May 1948.

What is Zionism?

'Zionism' is the desire of the Jewish people for self-governance in the Holy Land. The term refers to Mount Zion in Jerusalem, the 'mountain of God'. Zionists support Jewish rights to national self-determination and Statehood, just as, say, Poles or Pakistanis have.

What are Christian Zionists?

Christian Zionists insist that Jewish desire for self-determination is as legitimate as that of any other ethnic group.

They recognise the restoration of the Jews to the land of Israel as a fulfilment of an overarching prophetic theme in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

They refute Replacement Theology which suggests that God has rejected the Jewish people and replaced them with the Church, believing that it contradicts both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

They affirm God's love for Palestinians and often support projects which benefit Palestinians by addressing educational or social needs, or work to bring a greater understanding between Jew and Arab.

Is Zionism racist?

The UN defines racism as 'the belief in the genetic/inherent superiority of one group over others.' Such vile notions are utterly different to the wholly legitimate desire for national renewal.

To brand the Jewish desire for self-determination as distinctively racist – as some do – is in itself racist.

Ironically, many who smear Zionism as racist are the shrillest in their insistence that Palestinians have an absolute right to the very same self-determination which they would deny to Jews.

Why create a Jewish state in the Middle East?

- ✧ Because this territory is central to Jewish religious and national identity – the place where Jews are closest to God.
- ✧ Because this is the one piece of land historically promised to the Jewish people as recorded in Genesis.
- ✧ Because this is the only land where the Jewish nation has ever experienced self rule.

In contrast, there has never been an autonomous Palestinian state in the area. It was ruled by a succession of empires until the Ottoman Empire fell in 1917 and the League of Nations granted the British a Mandate in 1920.

Jews are indigenous to Israel

Israel's critics claim that only Palestinians are indigenous to the Near East. This is patently false, as is the claim that Jews are a religious and not an ethnic, group.

Archaeology confirms the Bible record: Jews spoke and wrote Hebrew, and worshiped Israel's God in what is now Israel at least 1,000 years before Jesus was born.

Jews are the only people who have ever had an autonomous state on this tiny piece of land. They governed themselves as a national entity, producing kings, visionary prophets and writers from whose pens flowed some of the most treasured writings in the history of the world.

Archaeological support for these claims includes:

- ✧ an ancient Hebrew alphabet, from 10th century BCE discovered at Tel Zayit in 2005;
- ✧ Israel is named in ancient Hebrew on the 9th Century BCE 'Moabite Stone';
- ✧ An inscription at Tel Dan dating from the time of King Ahab names the 'House of David' and 'Israel'.

Jews have inhabited the Holy Land continuously for 3000 years

Despite attempts by successive occupying powers to expel them, communities of Jews have lived in the Holy Land continuously since the time of Abraham until the present in, for example, Safed, Tiberias and Hebron.

Jews returned to the Holy Land throughout the Diaspora period, notably from Spain and other Mediterranean countries in the late 13th and 14th Century.

In Jerusalem Jews have been the largest ethnic group since the 1840s. During the Mandate many Jewish communities in Arab towns such as Nazareth and Gaza were forced out by Arab neighbours and their members joined kibbutzim or moved to predominantly Jewish towns.

Since the Babylonian exile, the Jewish diaspora has spread as far as South America, China and Australia. But Jewish ethnic identity, recognised by the countries in which they lived as minority communities, was based on Jewish affinity with the land of Israel and the Jews living there.

The League of Nations Mandate

At the 1920 San Remo conference, the League of Nations granted Britain a Mandate over Palestine. It committed Britain to the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine west of the Jordan River. Recognition of ancient Jewish links with the land was foundational to the Mandate.

A Palestinian state was to be established east of the Jordan River (present day Jordan). Jews could not settle or buy land there.

The Jewish homeland was stolen from Palestinians

This claim is false. In the early 19th century more than 10,000 Jews lived throughout what

is today Israel. In 1880 Jews made up about 6% of Palestine's population. The land was then a run-down colonial outpost of the Ottoman Empire.

Jews purchased much land from Arab owners legally during the late 19th and early 20th century and by dint of huge effort, turned it from rocky hillsides and malarial swamps into productive and profitable land.

By World War One, the Jewish population of Palestine was around 85,000 out of 700,000 (roughly 12%). It rapidly became the most dynamic economic centre in the Middle East attracting people from all over the region eager for a share in the growing prosperity of Palestine.

In contrast, no independent Palestinian entity or identity has existed until the 20th Century.

The British Mandate

In the opinion of many observers, Britain failed to honour the Mandate to facilitate the creation of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine.

In the 30 years of British colonial rule, tensions between Arabs and Jews grew inexorably. In desperation at the rising levels of inter-communal violence, Britain handed the whole issue over to the UN.

The War of Independence 1948

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations voted to create an Arab and a Jewish State alongside each other in what is now Israel and the West Bank. It was accepted that Israel would have a sizeable Arab minority.

The Jewish State was allotted 56% of Mandate Palestine, since the UN correctly predicted heavy Jewish immigration from Europe after the creation of the Jewish State. Perhaps they also guessed that large numbers of Jewish refugees from Arab nations would also need a home.

The Jewish Agency, led by David Ben Gurion, accepted the plan. Arab leaders rejected it, and Arab attacks on Jewish communities began at once. Britain announced that her troops would be withdrawn from Palestine on 15 May 1948.

Aware that Arab countries had vowed to destroy any Jewish state, David Ben Gurion declared the independence of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948, with borders as stipulated in the UN Partition Plan.

Significantly, the Declaration of Independence stated *'We appeal ... to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions..'*

Within days of the British withdrawal, 35,000 Iraqi, Lebanese, Syrian and Egyptian troops (led by British officers) invaded Israel. Despite overwhelming odds, and the loss of 1% of the population of Israel, Israeli forces decisively defeated the Arab armies.

Israel took territory beyond the UN allocated borders because their territory could not be defended against further Arab attacks.

Jews were preparing to attack Arabs prior to 1948

False. Jewish communities were routinely attacked by raiding parties from Arab villages. The Haganah – defence units of Jewish farmers – was formed to warn Jewish communities about planned Arab assaults and to afford some protection against them.

The attacks became more frequent after the UN Partition plan of November 1947: intelligence about proposed raids upon Jewish people and property had to become much more efficient – and it did.

Myth: Jews had a plan 'D' to expel all Arabs from Israel in 1948

This claim is false. As Professor Benny Morris wrote: *'Plan Dalet (Plan D), of March 10th, 1948 ... was the master plan of the Haganah – the Jewish military force that became the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) – to counter the expected pan-Arab assault on the emergent Jewish state.'*

The presence of 147,000 Arabs in the new State of Israel after hostilities ceased shows that claims of a planned 'ethnic cleansing' of Arabs are absurd. In contrast no Jew was permitted to remain in territory occupied by Jordan after the 1948 war.

Jews drove Palestinians out of Israel in 1948.

Some 6-800,000 Palestinian Arabs were displaced as a result of the Arab war on Israel in 1948. Some were compelled to leave their homes by IDF forces. But many left voluntarily before the 1948 war because local and national leaders advised or compelled them to do so. Prof. Morris comments *'... in dozens of localities around Palestine, Arab leaders advised or ordered the evacuation of women and children or whole communities, as occurred in Haifa in late April, 1948.'*

Palestinians, who heeded this advice, could not return to their homes after the Arabs lost the war. Unsurprisingly, given repeated Arab threats to annihilate Israel, Israeli leaders feared an Arab 'fifth column'. However, most Arabs who had remained in Israel became Israeli citizens.

Jews were also expelled from their homes by Arab forces, for example from Gush Etzion and K'far Darom in Gaza, all built on land purchased legally. And of course Jews were expelled from the Old City of Jerusalem. In addition, 800,000 Jews were forced to abandon homes and businesses in Arab countries. They arrived in Israel with nothing.

These are the forgotten refugees of 1948.

Both sides committed atrocities. Women and children were murdered by Jewish fighters of the Stern gang and Irgun in the peaceful Arab village of Deir Yassin. Arab fighters took revenge by murdering Jewish women and children in K'far Etzion and members of a convoy taking medical supplies to Jerusalem's Hadassah hospital.

Is modern Israel is a western colonial project?

With 3000 years of continuous presence in the Holy Land, how can Jews be characterised as interlopers in the region?

After World War II, Palestine was the only place that many European Jews, robbed of their homes and families, could go. A further 800,000 Jews from Arab countries fled or were expelled in pogroms and were absorbed into the Jewish state in the years following Israel's Independence. Later, Jews from all over the world – Africa, India, China, the old USSR, as well as the USA and Europe, made aliyah to Israel.

Modern Israel combines the best ideals of the west – democracy, openness to debate and criticism as well as new ideas in technology and the arts. Such ideals are much needed in the region.

Given the ferocity of comment in the Israeli press and the intensity of debate and moral self-criticism which so characterises discussion in Israel – so rare in public life today – the attacks on Israel are profoundly depressing and disturbing.

Conclusion

This May, while Israel and her friends celebrate her 60th anniversary, others will mourn the Palestinian 'Naqba'. As they do so, they might reflect on the crucial contribution of Palestinian and Arab actions to the absence of their longed for state. Had they accepted the UN Partition plan and welcomed their Jewish neighbours into the tiny piece of land allotted to them, 60 years of bloodshed and misery could have been averted. As Prof. Benny Morris wrote recently

'In defiance of the will of the international community, as embodied in the UN General Assembly Resolution of November 29th, 1947 (No. 181), (Palestinian Arabs) launched hostilities against the Jewish community in Palestine in the hope of aborting the emergence of the Jewish state and perhaps destroying that community. But they lost; and one of the results was the displacement of 700,000 of them from their homes.'

God promised Abraham that his descendents would have a land, and would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. We at Anglican Friends of Israel believe that modern Israel is a fulfillment of that promise: we rejoice unashamedly at this, Israel's 60th birthday, thanking the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for the restoration of the Jewish people to their land.

And we pray for a just peace for all the people of the region, Jew and Arab – a peace which we believe that ultimately, only God himself can bring.

Acknowledgements

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