

## **Zionism and Truth: The Case for the Jewish State**

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When the President of Israel visited France in February 2004, the spokeswoman of the Elysée Palace published a communiqué confirming France's attachment to the legitimacy of the state of Israel.<sup>1</sup> Four months later, former French Prime Minister Michel Rocard declared in a speech at the Library of Alexandria: 'The origin of the Palestinian problem is the promise made by the British to create a Jewish state. It was a historic error.'<sup>2</sup> These two declarations prove that the very legitimacy of the state of Israel is questioned by French leaders.<sup>3</sup> What would have been the reaction of France if the spokesperson of the Israeli presidency had published a communiqué confirming Israel's attachment to the 'legitimacy' of the French Republic? And how would France have reacted if a former Israeli Prime Minister had said that the origin of the wars between France and Germany lay in the creation of a French nation state? Why is Israel the only nation-state whose legitimacy continues to be questioned? After all, there are in the world today many recent, artificial and unstable states whose sole 'contribution' to humanity consists of an interminable series of wars and ethnic massacres. But nobody questions the legitimacy of Sudan, of the Democratic Republic of Congo, or of Rwanda. Of course this does not mean that these states are illegitimate, or that all states which are militarily violent, historically incoherent or culturally mute should be dismantled. It is simply to say that failed states, rogue states and puppet states are not questioned in the same way. On the contrary, the international community has recently elected Sudan to the United Nations' Human Rights Committee, at the very moment when the government of Khartoum is perpetrating a genocide against Sudanese Christians. By the same token, Syria is currently a member of the UN Security Council even though it supports Shiite terror and has occupied Lebanon for thirty years.

On the other hand, here is the most ancient people in the world, a people that has been persecuted, humiliated and massacred during two thousand years of exile, for which its country is the only safe haven; a people without equal in its cultural contribution to humanity; the only state founded on a 3,000-year-old tradition; the only country where weak and dispossessed refugees made the desert bloom, founded a democracy in a totalitarian region, won wars started by a coalition of six Arab countries, and developed industries, technologies and scientific research that improve every day the lives of millions of people around the world; the only state that safeguards a culture, a religion and a message which are the at the very foundation of Western civilisation and of a faith shared by three billion human beings; the only state in the world which has

given up the territorial gains it made in wars of self-defence, in the name of obtaining peace with its neighbours. This is the State of Israel, and it is the one and only state whose legitimacy is still being challenged.

#### NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY: NO ZIONIST EXCEPTION

Zionism is Jewish nationalism – and it is therefore criticized by many Jews. Some currents of ultra-orthodox Judaism oppose the existence of a Jewish state for theological reasons, but this opposition is not limited to ultra-orthodox movements. Numerous Jewish intellectuals believe that Jewish nationalism is incompatible with the Jewish ethic: the Jewish people, they say, cannot both be ‘a light among nations’ and also wield power, because power corrupts. According to this logic, the absence of an army and a state is the ultimate guarantee of Jewish spirituality and morality. One of the leading representatives of Jewish anti-Zionism is George Steiner, Professor of Comparative Literature at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and a thinker of international renown. Neither a ‘self-hating Jew’ nor a ‘Jewish anti-Semite’, Steiner is proud of his Jewish identity. But he believes that the Jewish people can play the role of witness to morality and universal justice only in a situation of exile, far removed from power. By giving power to the Jews, Zionism supposedly destroyed this state of moral purity and the historic destiny of the Jewish people. Like many other intellectuals, Steiner abhors nationalism, but his opposition to Zionism stems not only from a general rejection of nationalism. Whether or not nationalism is an incurable illness, the Jewish people is the only one which must never allow itself to succumb to it. Steiner is of course not the only Jewish thinker to decry the idea of Jewish temporal power. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the German Jewish philosophers Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig developed Hegelian theories about the ‘destiny’ of the Jewish people before the Holocaust. They sincerely believed that the same Germany which was to kill one third of the Jewish people embodied the summit of culture, and that it was, for the Jews, the Promised Land. However, we do not live in an ideal world but instead in a world in which six million Jews were massacred, in the heart of Europe and in the midst of the twentieth century. The question for the Jews is therefore whether they prefer to be morally perfect and dead, or morally imperfect and alive. This search for a delicate balance between the ideal and reality is incidentally at the heart of Jewish thought: the role of man is to improve the world, not to detach himself from it. *Halacha*, the Jewish law, aims to introduce an element of holiness and morality into the *real* world.

Some Israeli scholars claim that Theodor Herzl, the founding father of Israel, did not want a Jewish state but a state *of Jews*. This is supposedly why his major work is called in German *Der Judenstaat*, the state of the Jews. But the English and French translations of 1896

have the explicit titles *L'État juif* and *The Jewish State*, a choice that was in no way incidental since Herzl knew both languages.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Herzl used in his writings the prefixes *Juden-* ('of the Jews') and *jüdisch* ('Jewish') interchangeably. But, semantics aside, what did Herzl really want, a state with a Jewish character or a neutral state in which the Jews would be in the majority?

Herzl was an assimilated Jew who returned progressively to his origins after the Dreyfus affair. His correspondence and memoirs reveal his attachment to Judaism: 'God would not have preserved our people for so long if we did not have a special destiny in the history of humanity,' he wrote.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that he was in favour of theocracy. 'We will be able to keep the rabbis confined to their temples, just as we will be able to keep soldiers confined to their barracks,' he noted in *The Jewish State*. In his view, what characterized the Jews as a nation - just as the Germans are characterized by their language and the Swiss by their territory - was their *faith*: 'We recognize ourselves as a nation through our faith';<sup>6</sup> 'our faith is the only thing which has preserved us'. This is why the Jewish tradition is 'sacred'.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, 'Rabbis will be the pillars of my organization, and I will honour them. They will bring up, educate and enlighten the people.'<sup>8</sup> At the third Zionist Congress in Basel, Herzl said that the poor Jews of Russia would be 'the best Zionists, because they have not forgotten our traditions and because their religious sentiments are deeply rooted.'<sup>9</sup>

Under no circumstances did Herzl wish to dissociate the Jewish state from Judaism. The Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel, which bears the stamp of his influence, refers to the Bible and proclaims that that state shall fulfil the Biblical prophecy of ingathering the Exiles. The symbol of the State of Israel is the chandelier of the Temple of Jerusalem; the national holidays are the Jewish holidays; Hebrew is the language of the country; on the national flag and the aircraft of the air force there is the Star of David; the national anthem refers to 'the free people on our land'. Some claim that a state cannot be both Jewish and democratic. This claim is false. A state can be democratic without being completely neutral about its cultural, religious or ethnic identity. The Jewish state is the only state in the Middle East in which Arab deputies have seats in a democratically elected parliament, and where Arab judges sit on courts (including the Supreme Court) which are independent of the executive. Like many other states, Israel promotes a specific national identity without there being discrimination between its Jewish and Arab citizens. The fact that Arab Israelis do not identify with the national flag and anthem does not prevent them from being full citizens or from participating fully in the political life of their country. That they are relatively disadvantaged, ideologically and culturally, in comparison to the Jewish majority, is no different from the fate of minorities in all other democratic nation-states.

One of the foundations of the Jewish state is the Law of

Return. Some people say that this law is discriminatory and racist because it gives only to Jews the automatic right to settle in Israel and to become Israeli citizens. But there is no discrimination in this: Israeli law automatically grants citizenship to all children born in Israel of Israeli parents, whether they are Jews, Arabs, Druzes or Bedouins. Furthermore, any non-Jew may apply for the right to settle in the country and to obtain citizenship. Like all countries, Israel has the right to accept or reject such requests. There is no state in the world which automatically grants the right of residence and citizenship to whomever asks for it. The right of repatriation in a nation-state is recognized in international law. The United Nations resolution which in 1947 recommended the establishment of a *Jewish* state was intended to allow Jews to control immigration into their own country. Israel is not the only country which has special relations with a large Diaspora, or which has a right of return. No fewer than nine European states – Austria, Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Slovenia – have laws which give a special status to members of their ethnic group living abroad and with foreign citizenship. For example, Greek law grants special rights to ‘ethnic Greeks’ (Article 108 of the Greek constitution); Greece has also launched an initiative to offer Greek citizenship to the 300,000 Albanians of Greek origin who live in Albania. Russia passed a Law of Return in 2000: any ethnic Russian automatically obtains Russian citizenship when he or she takes up residence in Russia. The Council of Europe has adopted the recommendations of the ‘Venice Commission’ on the status of Hungarians living outside the borders of Hungary, which stated that legal and preferential relations between a country of origin and a Diaspora are compatible with international law as long as they do not violate the sovereignty of the host countries. In other words, Europe itself has recently legitimized the principles of national and ethnic belonging.

Democratic nation-states, including Israel, therefore promote the interests of their majority without denying the rights of their minorities. Whoever calls for the dismantling of the Jewish state because the Arabs are relatively disadvantaged should, according to logic, honesty and common sense, make the same demand of all nation-states in which there are national minorities, and insist on replacing them with bi- or multi-national federations, or by states which are strictly neutral, both ideologically and culturally. Those Europeans who claim that the concept of a Jewish state is out of date, and who apply the same reasoning to their own countries, are at least being consistent. For them it is the very concept of the nation-state which is anachronistic, and which should give way to a supra- and post-national European federation. According to them, Europe has already reached this post-national phrase, in which the nation, like the nation-state, belongs to history. Obviously, this opinion does not seem to be shared by Basques, Catalans, Corsicans, Scots, Walloons and Flemings.

Other critics of the Jewish state seem to be unaware of their own contradictions. For example, Member of Knesset Azmi Bishara uses Benedict Anderson's 'critical theories' of nationalism, according to which nationalism is an artificial fabrication, in order to make his case against the Jewish state,<sup>10</sup> but then admits that 'ideology and national identity are an integral part of social modernisation ... Indeed, I am myself an Arab nationalist.'<sup>11</sup> The authenticity and legitimacy of nationalism are only challenged as far as Jewish nationalism is concerned. All nationalisms are equal, but some are more equal than others.

#### THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE JEWISH STATE

Unlike the English in America or the French in Algeria, the Jews were not colonists. They had no mother country, lived as foreigners in a minority community in all countries of the world, did not represent the interests of any colonial power, had only ever been sovereign in the land of Israel, and had never ceased to regard that land as theirs. The colonial powers, furthermore, were opposed to the Zionist project. Although the British published the Balfour declaration in 1917, it was only the prelude to the betrayal of their promises from 1922 onwards.

The real question is whether the emergence of a new ideology or new nation justifies the creation of a state, when such a state may violate the rights of another nation. The most widely held opinion in this regard is obviously, yes: nobody would question the United States' right to exist because its founders killed native Americans. As far as the newness of a state is concerned, there is no country which does not support the creation of a Palestinian state, even though the very existence and national awareness of the Arab Palestinian people is recent, and even though, as Edward Said candidly admitted, 'the whole of Palestinian nationalism was based on driving all Israelis out.'<sup>12</sup>

So why question the legitimacy of the Jewish state alone? The most common reply is that the Jews cannot be allowed to make a historic comeback at the expense of the Arabs. If they want a state, they should set one up on some patch of land in Australia or Canada, which would spare us an endless conflict in the Middle East. True, after the Holocaust, the Jews may need a foothold somewhere in the world, but they must also understand that one demand rights over a property which was abandoned so long ago, and which has been occupied in the meantime by other tenants. If we have to tolerate this 'fossil', as British historian Arnold Toynbee described the Jewish people, then let it be in a museum of natural history! Interestingly, this argument is advanced by those who simultaneously demand a 'right of return' for the Palestinians, and who demand that whoever was expelled from his or her house must have the right to go back, however long the period of exile. So this reasoning is supposed to be valid for the Palestinians but not for the Jews – in addition to which, those who declare the Jews to be foreigners in the Holy Land do not say that they are 'really

French' or 'really Russian'. But if the Jews are foreigners in 'Palestine' and in the Diaspora, then where are they at home? Many illustrious Frenchmen knew that the return of the Jews to their land was only a matter of justice. Jean Racine wrote, 'Rejoice, Zion, and emerge from the dust. Abandon the clothes of your captivity and regain your first splendour. The ways of Zion are finally open. Break your chains, oh captive tribes! Fugitive troops, cross again the mountains and the seas. Gather yourselves from the ends of the universe' (*Esther*, Act III, Scene IX). Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote, 'I do not believe I have ever properly heard the reasons why the Jews do not have a free state, schools and universities where they can speak and debate without risk. Only then would we know what they have to say' (*Profession of faith of a Savoyard vicar*). Forty kilometres from Jerusalem in 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte said, 'Awaken, Israelites. The hour has come to realise your political independence as a nation among nations!' These great Frenchmen knew the history of Israel. They knew that the word 'Palestine' comes from 'Philistines', a people on the Aegean Sea who settled in the twelfth century BCE on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. When the Romans crushed the Jewish revolt in the second century CE, they tried to erase all Jewish memory by renaming Judea 'Palestina' after the Jews' enemies. This is where the Arab word 'Filastin' comes from. But the Hebrews had conquered the land of Canaan, which they named 'Eretz Israel', three thousand years before Christ. They lived there in a tribal confederation until their unification under the first kingship of Saul. David, son of Saul, established the capital of Israel at Jerusalem one thousand years before Christ. David's successor, Solomon, built the Temple of Jerusalem and he left behind a centralized and firmly established kingdom. After the death of Solomon, the country was divided between one kingdom in the north, Israel, and one in the south, Judea. The kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, while Judea was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE. Half a century later, Cyrus, the King of Persia, allowed the Jews to return to Israel and to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. Alexander the Great drove out the Persians and conquered Judea in 322 BCE. The Jews rebelled in 167 BCE against the Greek dynasty, re-establishing an autonomous state in 142 BCE. Rome conquered Judea in 63 BCE and set up a vassal Jewish regime. Herod's kingdom was directly subject to Rome, and the Jews rose up in 66 CE. The 'war of the Jews', whose story was told by Flavius Josephus, culminated in the destruction by the Romans of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Bar Kokhba organized a second revolt in 132 CE and it was crushed by the Romans in 135 CE. After the division of the Roman Empire two centuries later, Constantinople ruled over the Jews until the Arab invasions of 634–40. The Crusaders 'liberated' the Holy Land from the Muslims in 1099 but the Frankish kingdom collapsed with the victory of the Marmelukes in 1291. The Ottomans took over the region in 1517 and dominated it until the

British conquest in 1917. The British then left Palestine in 1947 and the Jews established their state in that year. In other words, of all the peoples who have passed through Judea since the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans, only the Jews are still there. After the conquest of Canaan, they were often deprived of their independence, but their presence was never eradicated and they have never abandoned their visceral attachment to this country, expressed daily in their prayers. Even after the revolt of Bar Kokhba and the violent repression that followed, the Jews continued to be a majority in their country and they enjoyed a certain autonomy. This is shown by the fact that when the Emperor Caracalla decided in 212 CE to give Roman citizenship to subjects of the Empire who had a country, the Jews obtained it. There was no doubt in Rome at the time that Palestine was the country of the Jews. It was during the Roman period, and later under Constantinople, that the *Mishna* and the Talmud of Jerusalem were composed. Jews did not cease fighting for their independence since a Jewish force was set up in 614 to fight the Byzantines alongside the Persians.<sup>13</sup>

It was the Arab invasion which really uprooted the Jews. Unlike their predecessors, the Arabs practised a policy of intensive colonisation, including confiscation of land and demolition of houses. It was this ethnic cleansing which made the Jews a minority in Judea, for the first time in history. The received wisdom today is that the Jews chased the Arabs off their own land. But historically and chronologically, it is the Arabs who chased away the Jews. The Arabs became a majority in the seventh century and remained so until the Jewish re-conquest started in the nineteenth century. The *Reconquista* of Spain by Christians took eight hundred years to complete. So why should the re-conquest of Judea by Jews have less legitimacy because it took four centuries longer? To argue this would be to agree with Osama bin Laden who claims that Spain belongs to the Arabs. It is not that the civil law of certain countries, including Jewish law, does not recognize the concept of property by default. A robber can become the owner of stolen property if the victim has lost all hope of retrieving it. But the Jews never ceased hoping that they would return to their country. This is why they rejected a state in Argentina, Uganda, Birobidjan and Manchuria. However, despite the best efforts of the Romans, the Arabs and the Crusaders, the Jews remained in Judea/Palestine. Their main communities in Judea in the nineteenth century were Safed, Tiberias, Hebron, Gaza, Rafah, Askelon, Caesarea, Jaffa, Acre and Jericho. Among the Jewish inhabitants of Jericho in the seventh century, there were refugees from the massacres committed by Mohammed against the Jewish tribes of Arabia. In the eleventh century, the Crusaders massacred thousands. Numerous Jews from France, England, Spain, Lithuania, Poland, Sicily, Sardinia, Rhodes, and Naples went to live in Judea. At the time of the Ottoman conquest, some 10,000 Jews lived in Safed: the population of this town was about 15,000 and it included a Rabbinical school

in the sixteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Large Jewish communities also lived in Jerusalem, Hebron and Acre at this time. When the Ottomans conducted the first census in Jerusalem in 1858, it turned out that Jews constituted the majority of the population, and the Muslims about one quarter. Long before the first wave of immigration (*aliyah*) of European Jews in 1882, Jerusalem, Safed and Tiberias were towns (or rather villages) with a Jewish majorities.

During the Ottoman occupation, life was intolerable for Jews in Judea. William Tanner Young, the British consul in Jerusalem, reported to the Foreign Office on 25 May 1839 that Jews were massacred in Hebron, beaten and expropriated in Jerusalem, and forbidden to pray at the holy sites. If their co-religionists in Europe, Yemen, Iraq, Turkey and Northern Africa were able to rejoin them at the end of the nineteenth century, it was because the conditions of life in the Diaspora were even more terrible, and because these Jews had never lost hope of returning to their country.

The Arabs claim that the Jews took over a well-established, populated and fertile country. But all the accounts of travellers to Palestine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attest that this was an empty region of the Ottoman Empire. Henry Maundrell wrote in 1697 that Nazareth was 'a small village of no importance'; Jericho was 'a filthy miserable little town'; Acre was 'deserted'.<sup>15</sup> The British archaeologist, Thomas Shaw, wrote in 1738 that the Holy Land was 'desolate, empty and lacking in everything.'<sup>16</sup> Count Volney wrote in 1785, 'We had difficulty recognising Jerusalem: there are about 12,000 inhabitants.'<sup>17</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine who visited the region in 1832 wrote in his *Travels to the Orient* (1835), that apart from when in Jerusalem, he did not meet a soul and that Palestine was 'a people's grave.' Alexandre Keith wrote in 1844, 'In Volney's time, the Holy Land had not yet reached the state of total desolation described by the Prophets.'<sup>18</sup> The British consul in Ottoman Palestine, James Pinn, wrote in 1857 in a report sent to London, 'The country is more or less uninhabited.'<sup>19</sup> The most famous account of the situation in Ottoman Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century before the first *aliyah* is the journal of Mark Twain, who in 1867 was an eye witness to this:

Stirring scenes ... occur in the valley [Jezreel] no more. There is not a solitary village throughout its whole extent – not for thirty miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation. One may ride ten miles hereabouts and not see ten human beings ... Come to Galilee for that ... these peoples deserts, these rusty mounds of bareness, that never, never, never do shake the glare from their harsh outlines, and fade and faint into vague perspective; that melancholy ruin of Capernaum: this stupid village of Tiberias, slumbering under its six funeral palms ... We reached Tabor safely ... We never saw a human being on the whole route. Nazareth is forlorn ... Jericho the accused lies in a mouldering ruin today, even as Joshua's miracle left it more than three thousand years



ago; Bethlehem and Bethany, in their poverty and their humiliation, have nothing about them now to remind one that they once knew the high honour of the Saviour's presence, the hallowed spot where the shepherds watched their flocks by night, and where the angels sang, 'Peace on earth, good will to men', is untenanted by any living creature ... Bethsaida and Chorazin have vanished from the earth, and the 'desert places' round about them, where thousands of men once listened to the Saviour's voice and ate the miraculous bread, sleep in the hush of a solitude that is inhabited only by birds of prey and skulking foxes.<sup>20</sup>

One could also quote the British cartographer, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley: 'There are no signs of life or habitation for very long distances', in a work published in 1862.<sup>21</sup>

So much for the flourishing country 'invaded' by the Jews in 1882. When Mark Twain visited Palestine, the total population was about 40,000, Jews and Arabs included. The first wave of Jewish immigration, in 1882, caused Arabs to arrive from the Ottoman Empire, attracted by the employment prospects provided by the Jewish infrastructure in Palestine. It is an established fact that 'Arab immigration into Palestine has been considerably higher than Jewish immigration since 1921,' as President Roosevelt recognized in 1939.<sup>22</sup> The 'Jewish community of Palestine' launched a dynamic economy. In 1947, the salary of an Arab worker in Jaffa was twice that of an Arab in Nablus. From 1922 to 1947, the Arab population grew in those towns and regions where the Jews were in a majority: by 290 per cent in Haifa, 158 per cent in Jaffa and 131 per cent in Jerusalem. This compares to a growth of around 50 per cent on average in the regions where Jews did not settle.<sup>23</sup> According to the historian Ernst Frankenstein, at least 25 per cent of the Arabs living in Palestine in 1882 were new arrivals, or the descendants of the Egyptians who conquered the region in 1831.<sup>24</sup>

When in 1920 the British received from the League of Nations a mandate over the whole of the territory which corresponds today to that of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan, the population was 900,000 (600,000 in Palestine to the west of the River Jordan). From the beginning of the eighteenth century, villages, in particular the port of Jaffa, were inhabited not only by Jews and Arabs but also by Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Bosnians, Druze, Kurds, Persians, Egyptians and German Templars. The Arabs were essentially nomads and were just one ethnic group among others. At the time of partition by the United Nations in 1947, the Jews were in a majority in what was supposed to become a Jewish state: 538,000 Jews and 397,000 Arabs. Palestine was never a country, and the very concept of Palestine did not exist in the Ottoman Empire. As Middle-East expert Bernard Lewis explains, 'Since the destruction of the Jewish Kingdom, and until the British mandate, the territory known by the name "Palestine" had no borders. This region was composed of

changing administrative districts.’<sup>25</sup> In 1887, Syria was divided into two *vilayets*, Beirut and Damascus; the *sandjaks* of Acre and Nablus were attached to Beirut and the *sandjak* of Jerusalem was independent. So there was no Palestine in the Ottoman Empire in any physical, administrative or linguistic sense. Even the word ‘Palestine’ was not common among Turks and Arabs. It was the British who resuscitated the Roman *Palestina*. There was neither a Palestinian state nor people. As the Peel Report, which is by no means favourable to the Jews, recognised in 1937, ‘In the twelve centuries since the Arab invasion, the country has more or less disappeared from the historical landscape. It has remained outside history both economically and politically. Even from the cultural and scientific point of view, its contribution to civilisation is null.’<sup>26</sup> As the Swiss historian, Felix Bovet, noted in 1858, the reason why the Arabs built nothing is that they were not indigenous.<sup>27</sup> A single Arab village was built on the land of Israel: Ramle. All the others are Jewish towns renamed in Arabic. The resolution of the first Islamic–Christian Congress which was held in Jerusalem in January/February 1919, and whose purpose was to appoint local representatives for the Versailles Peace Conference, is revealing: ‘We believe that Palestine is part of Arab Syria, from which it has never been separated. We are bound to Syria by national, religious, linguistic, natural, economic and geographical links.’<sup>28</sup> The Arab leader Awni Abdul Haadi told the Peel Commission in 1937, ‘There is no Palestine. It is a term invented by the Zionists. Our country has been part of Syria for centuries.’<sup>29</sup>

The Arabs were aware of these facts and not all of them considered the return of the Jews to be an ‘invasion’, despite what many say today. Nobody raised the question of a Palestinian state at the Versailles Peace Conference, because the Arabs did not demand a state for a people which did not exist. Prince Feisal, the leader of the Arab delegation at Versailles, wanted an Arab kingdom that would have included Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Palestine and even Iraq. Some of Feisal’s declarations were supportive of the Zionist cause, such as the official agreement of cooperation signed on 13 January 1919 with Chaim Weizmann, according to which the Zionists would support the Emir in his attempt to build a state, in return for his encouragement for ‘adequate measures’ for ‘a mass immigration of Jews into Palestine’. There is also a letter from Feisal dated March 1919 to Felix Frankfurter, which is indicative of Arab support for the Zionist movement: ‘Our delegation here in Paris is perfectly well aware of the proposition submitted yesterday by the Zionist delegation to the Peace Conference, and we consider it to be moderate and amenable. We will do our best to see that it succeeds. We extend the most cordial welcome to the Jews in their home. He (Dr. Weizmann) has been of great help to our cause and I hope that the Arabs will soon be in a position to return to the Jews a part of their goodwill.’<sup>30</sup>

The international community’s first de facto recognition of the

right of the Jews to self-determination in their historic homeland does not date from the partition plan approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1947. It came instead at the San Remo Conference in April 1920, when Great Britain was mandated to work towards the establishment of a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine. The Jews obtained their right to self-determination by the sweat of their brow and after having drained marshes, planted trees and built roads, schools and hospitals. In June 1922, Churchill's White Paper officially separated Transjordan from Palestine and excluded it from the territory open to Jewish immigration. The Arabs, of whom many fought on the Turkish side during the First World War – unlike the British units of the Jewish Legion – therefore received 80 per cent of original Palestine. The Arabs of western Palestine wanted to be part of Syria and rejected the establishment of a Jewish state.

This is the ethnic group that launched violent attacks against the Jews in the 1920s. The British tried to appease Arab anger by appointing Hadj Amin al-Husseini as Mufti of Jerusalem in the middle of May 1921. This was a fatal error: the Mufti made rejection of Jewish self-determination into a religious duty, and the murder of Jews a legitimate and praiseworthy act. Before al-Husseini, the division of western Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state was still feasible; after him, it became impossible. His incitements to murder bore extreme fruit in the Hebron massacre of 1929, when sixty Jews were murdered by Arabs following his encouragement and instructions, even though the Jewish Sephardic community had lived there for generations. It was the first time that the town was emptied of Jews. Indeed, the Mufti accused the victims of provoking the attacks in order to attract the sympathy of the British. Instead of fighting this racial terrorism, the British acceded to al-Husseini's demands and reduced the quota of Jewish immigration to Palestine at the end of 1936. This was to have consequences later.

Hadj Amin al-Husseini vigorously rejected the Partition Plan proposed by the Peel Commission in July 1937, even though it recommended awarding only one fifth of the territory to the Jews. Al-Husseini's refusal buried the partition plan and, with it, the creation of a refuge for Jews at a time when Hitler had been in power in Europe for four years. Shortly after Hitler's arrival to power, the Mufti wrote to the German consul in Jerusalem, 'The Muslims inside and outside Palestine welcome the new regime of Germany and hope for the extension of the fascist anti-democratic, governmental system to other countries.'<sup>31</sup> He organized 'Nazi scouts' modelled on the Hitler Youth. The swastika became a popular symbol among Palestinians, as did the song, 'No more Monsieur, no more Mister. In Heaven Allah and on earth Hitler!' Arab terrorism, supported by Germany, systematically attacked Jewish civilians in hospitals, theatres, shops and houses. Al-Husseini, who met Hitler in 1941, cooperated with the Nazi regime. He promised to foment a new pan-Arab revolt in

exchange for independence after the war and the abrogation of the Jewish national homeland. He suggested for example that Jewish children from Hungary be sent to Poland.<sup>32</sup> The Mufti visited Auschwitz and wrote in his memoirs, 'Our fundamental condition for cooperating with Germany was a free hand to eradicate every last Jew from Palestine and the Arab world. I asked Hitler for an explicit undertaking to allow us to solve the Jewish problem in a manner befitting our national and racial aspirations and according to the scientific methods innovated by Germany in the handling of its Jews. The answer I got was: "The Jews are yours"'.<sup>33</sup> Al-Husseini invented the expressions *Itbah al Yahud* (Kill the Jews) and *Nashrab dam al Yahud* (We will drink the Jews' blood). His close collaboration with the Nazis increased his standing in the Arab world: Egypt gave him political asylum, while the National Palestinian Council elected him its leader in 1948. He continues to be considered a great figure by Palestinian Arabs, and Arafat never ceased to refer to him as a 'hero' (see his interview in *Al-Quds*, 2 August 2002).

After the Second World War, the peoples who supported the Nazis were punished for their crimes. For instance, the Sudeten Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia by the Allies and sent to Germany. The Arabs of Palestine, by contrast, were given better treatment. Despite having supported the Nazis, the United Nations recognized their right to a state with the partition plan of 1947, in addition to the state established on 80 per cent of mandate Palestine by Great Britain in 1922. After the Holocaust in which six million Jews perished, the Jews' right to a state was selfevident, not only for the Jews of Europe who escaped from the camps, but also for Jews from Arab countries who were treated as second-class citizens (*dhimmis*) in the Arab apartheid regimes. It is often said that the victims of the Holocaust had the right to a state, but that it was up to the Germans to pay territorial reparation, not the Palestinian Arabs. This argument is specious for two reasons. First, as I showed earlier, Palestine was not more Arab than Jewish; the right of Arabs to a state was recognized by the Partition Plan (which they rejected), and there had never been an Arab Palestinian state. The last sovereign state was the Jewish state destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Secondly, to say that the Palestinian Arabs had nothing to do with the Holocaust is completely false: their leader, al-Husseini, was a Nazi war criminal, the Palestinian Arabs supported Nazi Germany, and they bear a overwhelming responsibility for the genocide of the Jewish people.

The Arabs rejected the UN Partition Plan in 1947, just as they had done ten years previously. They launched themselves into a war of extermination against the Jews. This conflict unleashed a wave of Jewish and Arab refugees. Nine hundred thousand Jews were expelled from the Arab world and Iran and 600,000 Arabs fled Palestine while waiting for victory, and as their brother Arab countries called on them to do. Certainly, the *Haganah* (Israel's main pre-statehood defence force) encouraged in certain cases

the departure of the enemy population, but the hostilities provoked by the Arabs and their calls to leave the country were the principal cause of the process.<sup>34</sup>

After their defeat in 1949, the Arabs could have established a state in the West Bank and Gaza, but this was not their goal. They wanted to liquidate the sovereign Jewish state, hence the wars they started in 1967 and 1973. After the Six Day War, Israel accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242 and the Arab countries rejected it outright at the Khartoum Conference. As former Foreign Minister Abba Eban put it, the Six Day War was the first conflict in human history in which the victor sued for peace and the vanquished demanded unconditional surrender. Anwar Sadat, who had the courage to accept Resolution 242, regained the whole of the Sinai peninsula, that is 90 per cent of the territory which Israel had seized in 1967.

Yasser Arafat, the successor of al-Husseini, refused to follow this path. His 'recognition' of Israel in Geneva in December 1988, and the ratification of the Oslo agreement in a letter dated 9 September 1993, were mere stratagems. Abu Iyad, his right-hand man, declared on 11 February 1989 to the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Watan* that there had been no recognition of Israel by the PLO at Geneva. On 13 September 1993, on the day when the Oslo accord was signed, Arafat himself said on Jordanian television that his objective remained to execute the PLO's 1974 plan in stages, that is, to accept a provisional compromise in order to destroy Israel later. On 10 March 1994, it was again Arafat who explained in Johannesburg that Oslo was but a modern version of the Al-Hudaybiya convention, concluded between Mohammed and his enemies in 628 CE, in other words a temporary ruse meant to be breached and to defeat the enemy later.

Arafat's war was an unjustified war. His goal was not to liberate but to destroy. The Palestinian media and school textbooks promote death as the supreme value and reject the Jews' right to a state. For example, in a sermon delivered on 3 August 2001, and broadcast on the Palestinian Authority's television channel, Mohammed Ibrahim Madi said,

I was delighted when a child said to me, 'Oh sheikh, I am fourteen years old. In four years, I will blow myself up among the enemies of Allah.' I said to him, 'O young child, may Allah make you and I deserve *shahada* (martyrdom) ... All weapons must be deployed against the Jews, a nation cursed in the Koran, which Allah calls monkeys and pigs, the worshippers of cattle and idols. Nothing will stop them but the colour of the blood of their dirty nation, and our will to blow ourselves up in their midst. May Allah make the Muslims reign over the Jews. We will blow them up in Hadera, in Tel Aviv, in Netaniya, until Allah makes us master of these filthy people. We will enter Jerusalem as conqueror, as well as Jaffa, Haifa and Ashkelon. Blessed are those who educate their children in the ways of *jihad* and *shahada*!<sup>35</sup>

It is no coincidence that the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the PLO and Hamas *tripled* after the signature of the Oslo II agreement in September 1995, involving Israeli withdrawal from 98 per cent of the Palestinian population, and the establishment of a Palestinian government under the control of the PLO. The suicide attacks started *after* Israeli withdrawal from the territories and in response to Arafat's propaganda, inspired by al-Husseini's. The Israeli military presence in the disputed territories is the consequence, not the cause, of Palestinian terrorism. This terrorism began in the 1920s under the leadership of al-Husseini, long before the existence of the state of Israel.

The longest occupation in history was the occupation of India by Great Britain. There was not one single suicide attack against the British during all this time. The cruellest and most unjustified occupation at present is the occupation of Tibet by China. Yet Tibetans do not blow themselves up among innocent Chinese and they do not kill their children. As for poverty, which some say is the other cause of Palestinian terrorism, how is it that countries like Haiti and Bangladesh are not international manufacturers of terrorism?

It was precisely at the height of the Oslo process that Arafat exposed his strategy to Arab diplomats in a hotel in Stockholm on 30 January 1996: 'We plan to eliminate the state of Israel and establish a purely Palestinian state ... We will make life unbearable for Jews by psychological warfare and population explosion. Jews will not want to live among Arabs.'<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The aim of Zionism was to make the Jews into a free people on their own land and to allow their creative genius and their culture to flourish fully. This goal has been achieved. Yet Zionism also had another goal, which has not been achieved. Herzl, who died exactly one hundred years ago, finished his book, *The Jewish State*, with the following words: 'I believe that an extraordinary generation of Jews will emerge. The Macabees will rise again. I repeat: the Jews who want a state will get it. We will live as free men on our own land, we will die at peace in our own homes. The world will be liberated by our liberty, enriched by our richness, made great by our greatness. Everything we try to accomplish for our own good will have beneficial repercussions for the rest of humanity.'<sup>37</sup> The Jews who want to can live freely on their own land. But although some die at peace in their own homes, others die in their houses, murdered in cold blood, or blown to pieces in the street. And although Israeli technology enriches other peoples and countries, the world has not been liberated by our liberty and has not been made great by our greatness.

The state of Israel is accused of being a criminal state, of being the principal violator of human rights in the world, of being the incarnation of Nazism, of being the last obstacle to peace in the Middle East. At the United Nations and in American and

European universities, Israel is condemned and boycotted more than any other country. Its leaders are threatened with prosecution as war criminals.

It is obviously cowardly and absurd to equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. But it is dishonest and hypocritical to apply double standards to criticism of Israel and of other countries. The Israelis criticize their own country harshly and all day long. But there is a difference between criticism and demonization; between saying that Sharon is wrong on this or that decision and comparing him to Hitler; between saying that the Israeli military presence beyond the 1949 armistice lines is illegal and saying that the very existence of the state of Israel is illegitimate; between saying that the Arab–Israeli conflict must be resolved and saying that Israel is the root of all evil; between saying that the policy of targeted assassination of terrorist leaders is counter-productive and saying that it is responsible for anti-Semitism in France. It is hypocritical to show support for Palestinian Arabs without mentioning the Tibetans or the Kurds, whose national rights are far more authentic and ancient, and who do not play football with the decapitated heads of their victims. It is hypocritical to accuse Israel of war crimes when its army takes defensive or punitive measures to protect its civilian population, and to close one’s eyes, ears and mouth to the genocide in Sudan. It is hypocritical to rail indignantly against ‘Israeli occupation’ and to say nothing about the occupation of Lebanon by Syria, of Cyprus by Turkey or of Tibet by China. It is hypocritical to serve as a human shield for Arafat when the Israeli Army is trying to apprehend his protégés, but never to be a human shield outside Israeli cafés and cinemas to prevent human bombs. As Alan Dershowitz has written, immediately after Arafat rejected all the offers of peace at Camp David without making any counter-proposal, and after he responded to peace with war, international public opinion was mostly behind Israel. As soon as Arafat sent women and children to have themselves filmed in front of Israeli tanks, international opinion turned again. But this same international opinion was not satisfied with falling into Arafat’s trap. It literally went mad. Trying to understand the causes of this extreme and irrational volte-face, Dershowitz concludes that ‘Israel is the Jewish state and the “Jew” among the states of the world.’<sup>38</sup> It is no longer ‘the Jews’ who are the root of all evil and the true causes of their own misfortunes, but ‘Israel’ and ‘Sharon’. It is no longer ‘the Jews’ who control world finance but ‘Sharon and his entourage’ who control Bush and the neo-conservatives. Thanks to the Jewish state, the Jews are no longer at the mercy of nations. But the Jewish state has not put an end to nations’ hatred of the Jews – on the contrary. The idea that the Jews can be strong and defend themselves horrifies those who have become accustomed to humiliating them for centuries. Zionism cannot put an end to hatred of the Jews because this hatred has nothing to do with the Jews themselves, but rather with the ideas they have represented since they appeared on the stage of history.

In the words of the Prophet Isaiah, a day will come when all men will be brothers and when the wolf shall dwell with the lamb (an Israeli joke adds that, even then, it will be safer to be the wolf than the lamb). But that day is far off. And in order for this prophecy to come true, the Jews must be sovereign and free – hence the necessity of the Jewish state, both for the Jews and for humanity.

#### NOTES

1. *Le Monde*, 16 February 2004.
2. [www.proche-orient.info](http://www.proche-orient.info), 22 June 2004.
3. This article was originally published in a French journal, hence the specific quotes and examples related to France.
4. Cf. Yoram Hazony, 'Did Herzl Want a "Jewish State"?', *Azure*, 9 (Spring 2000), pp.44–5: Herzl often used the prefix *Juden* to instead of *jüdisch* to mean 'Jewish' (hence *Judenkongress* for Jewish Congress).
5. *Briefe und Tagebücher*, vol.2, pp.128–9.
6. *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, edited by Raphael Patai, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Herzl Press, 1960), p.56.
7. *Diaries*, p.72.
8. *Ibid.*, p.104.
9. 15 August 1899.
10. Azmi Bishara, 'Between Nationality and Nation' (Hebrew), *Teoria ubikoret*, 6 (1995), p.41.
11. *Ha'arets* (weekend supplement), 29 May 1998, pp.24, 27.
12. *Atlantic Unbound*, 22 September 1999, [www.theatlantic.com/unbound/interviews/ba990922.htm](http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/interviews/ba990922.htm).
13. Cf. Samuel Katz, *Battleground: Fact and Fantasy in Palestine* (New York: Bantam, 1973), p.88.
14. *Palestine Royal Commission Report Presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament by Command of His Majesty*, July 1937, Cmd.5479, pp.11–12.
15. *The Journey of Henry Maundrell from Aleppo to Jerusalem*, 1697 (London: Henry Bohn, 1848), pp.428, 450, 477.
16. Thomas Shaw, *Travels, or Observations Relating to Several Parts of Barbary and the Levant*, 1694–1751 (London, 1754).
17. Constantin Volney, *Travels Through Syria and Egypt in the Years 1783, 1784, 1785* (London, Pater Noster & Row, 1788), vol.2, p.36.
18. Cf. Alexandre Keith, *The Land of Israel* (Edinburgh: William Whyte, 1844), p.465.
19. Letter to Harel McLardon, 15 September 1857, British Foreign Office, doc.78/1294, no.36.
20. Cf. Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad, or, The New Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.349, 366, 375, 441–2.
21. Cf. Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *Sinai and Palestine, in Connection With their History* (London: John Murray, 1881), p.118.
22. Cf. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Note to the Secretary of State, 17 May 1939, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers* (Washington, DC: United States Government Press Office, 1955), Vol.4, p.457.
23. Arie Avneri, *Haityashvut Hayehudit Vetaanat Hanishol* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1980), p.221 (Hebrew).
24. Cf. Ernst Frankenstein, *Justice for my People* (London: Nicholson & Watson, 1943), p.127.
25. Bernard Lewis, 'The Palestinians and the PLO: A Historical Approach', *Commentary*



(January 1975). See also from the same author 'Palestine: On the History and Geography of a Name', in Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), pp.153–65.

26. *Palestine Royal Commission Report*, ch.1, p.6.

27. Félix Bovet, *Egypt, Palestine and Phoenicia: A Visit to Sacred Lands* (London, 1882), pp.384–5.

28. Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestine-Arab National Movement, 1929–1939: From Riots to Rebellion* (London, Frank Cass, 1977), vol.2, pp.81–2.

29. Quoted from Alan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel* (London: John Wiley, 2003), p.7.

30. Quoted from Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, *The Israel–Arab Reader*, 6th edn. (New York: Penguin, 2001), p.19.

31. Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).

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32. *Ibid.*, p.186.

33. Sarah Honig, 'Friendish Hypocrisy II: The Man from Klopstock St.', *Jerusalem Post*, 6 April 2001.

34. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

35. [www.pmw.org.il](http://www.pmw.org.il).

36. Ephraim Karsh, *Arafat's War* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), pp.57–8.

37. Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), pp.156–7.

38. Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel*, p.11.

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