

ZIONIST COLONIALISM  
IN PALESTINE

by  
*Fayez A. Sayegh, Ph.D.*



Research Center \* Palestine Liberation Organization  
Beirut, Lebanon  
September 1965

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## FOREWORD

The past two decades, which have witnessed the collapse of European Imperialism and the progressive elimination of Western Colonialism from Asia and Africa, have witnessed also the introduction of a new form of Colonialism into the point-of-intersection of those two continents. Thus, the fading-out of a cruel and shameful period of world history has coincided with the emergence, at the land-bridge between Asia and Africa, of a new offshoot of European Imperialism and a new variety of racist Colonialism.

The fate of Palestine thus represents an *anomaly*, a radical departure from the trend of contemporary world history. Scores of nations and peoples have come to enjoy their right to self-determination, at the very time when the Arab people of Palestine was finding itself helpless to prevent the culmination of a process of systematic colonization to which Palestine had been subjected for decades. This climactic development took the combined form of forcible dispossession of the indigenous population, their expulsion from their own country, the inplantation of an alien sovereignty on their soil, and the speedy importation of hordes of aliens to occupy the land thus emptied of its rightful inhabitants.

The people of Palestine has lost not only *political control* over its country, but *pyhsical occupation* of its country as well: it has been deprived not only of its inalienable right to *self-determination*, but also of its elemental right to *exist* on its own land!

This *dual* tragedy, which befell the Arab people of Palestine in the middle of the twentieth century, symbolizes the *dual* nature of the Zionist program which had begun to unfold itself in Palestine in the late nineteenth century.

I.

## THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF ZIONIST COLONIALISM

The frenzied "Scramble for Africa" of the 1880's stimulated the beginnings of Zionist colonization in Palestine. As European fortune-hunters, prospective settlers, and empire-builders raced for Africa, Zionist settlers and would-be state-builders rushed for Palestine.

Under the influence of the credo of Nationalism then sweeping across Europe, some Jews had come to believe that the religious and alleged racial bonds among Jews constituted a Jewish "nationality" and endowed the so-called "Jewish nation" with normal national rights—including the right to *separate existence* in a territory of its own, and the right to create a Jewish *state*. If other European nations had successfully extended themselves into Asia and Africa, and had annexed to their imperial domains vast portions of those two continents, the "Jewish nation" — it was argued — was entitled and able to do the same thing for itself. By imitating the colonial ventures of the "Gentile nations" among whom Jews lived, the "Jewish nation" could send its own *colonists* into a piece of Afro-Asian territory, establish a *settler-community*, and, in due course, set up its own *state* — not, indeed, as an imperial outpost of a metropolitan home-base, but as a home-base in its own right, upon which the entire "Jewish nation" would sooner or later converge from all over the world. "Jewish nationalism" would thus fulfil itself through the process of colonization, which other European nations had utilized for empire-building. **For**

**Zionism, then, colonization would be the instrument of nation-building, not the by-product of an already-fulfilled nationalism.**

The improvised process of Jewish colonization in Palestine which ensued was hardly a spectacular success, in spite of lavish financial subsidies from European Jewish financiers. By and large, Jews were more attracted by the new opportunities for migration to the United States or Argentina, than by the call for racial self-segregation as a prelude to state-building in Palestine. The objective of *escape* from anti-Jewish practices prevailing in some European societies could be attained just as well by emigration to America; the objective of *nation-building* — which alone could make the alternative solution of large-scale colonization in Palestine more attractive — was still far from widespread among European Jews in the late nineteenth century.

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The failure of the first sporadic effort to implant a Zionist settler-community in Palestine during the first fifteen years of Zionist colonization (1882-1897) prompted serious reappraisal and radical revision of strategy. This was accomplished by the First Zionist Congress, held at Basle in August 1897 under the leadership of Theodor Herzl.

Haphazard colonization of Palestine, supported by wealthy Jewish financiers as a mixed philanthropic-colonial venture, was from then on to be eschewed. It was to

be supplanted by a purely nationalistic program of organized colonization, with clear political goals and mass support. Hence the over-all objective of Zionism formulated by the Basle Congress: "*The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law*"<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is worth noting that, from the Basle Program of 1897 until the Biltmore Program of 1942, Zionists preferred the euphemism "home" to the clear term "state" which would have been certain to arouse opposition in many quarters. But in spite of public assurances to the contrary, Zionists were aiming from the outset at the creation of a settler-state in Palestine. At the conclusion of the Basle Congress, Herzl wrote in his diary: "If I were to sum up the Basle Congress in one word — which I shall not do openly — it would be this: at Basle I founded the Jewish State. If I were to say this to-day, I would be met by universal laughter. In five years, perhaps, and certainly in fifty, every one will see it"<sup>(2)</sup>.

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In addition to defining the ultimate objective of Zionism, the Basle Congress made a diagnosis of the

1. Cohen, Israel, *A Short History of Zionism*, London, Frederick Muller Co., 1951, p. 47.
2. Herzl, Theodor, *Tage Bücher*, Vol. II, p. 24; quoted in Cohen, Israel, *A short History of Zionism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11 and 47-48.

special character and circumstances of Zionist colonization in Palestine, and formulated a practical program suited to those special conditions. Three essential features in particular differentiated Zionist colonization in Palestine from European colonization elsewhere in Asia and Africa, and called for Zionist innovations:

(1) Other European settlers who had gone (or were then going) to other parts of Africa and Asia had been animated either by economic or by politico-imperialist motives: they had gone either in order to accumulate fortunes by means of privileged and protected exploitation of immense natural resources, or in order to prepare the ground for (or else aid and abet) the annexation of those coveted territories by imperial European governments. The Zionist colonists, on the other hand, were animated by neither impulse. They were driven to the colonization of Palestine by the desire *to attain nationhood for themselves*, and to establish a Jewish state which would be independent of any existing government and subordinate to none, and which would in due course attract to its territories the Jews of the world.

(2) Other European settlers could coexist with the indigenous populations — whom they would exploit and dominate, but whose services they would nevertheless require, and whose continued existence in the coveted territory they would therefore tolerate. But the Zionist settlers could not countenance indefinite coexistence with the inhabitants of Palestine. For Palestine was fully populated by Arabs, whose national consciousness had already been awakened, and who had already begun to nurse aspirations of independence and national fulfillment.

Zionist colonization could not possibly assume the *physical proportions* envisaged by Zionism while the Arab people of Palestine continued to inhabit its homeland; nor could the Zionist *political* aspirations of racial self-segregation and statehood be accomplished while the nationally-conscious Arab people of Palestine continued to exist in that country. **Unlike European colonization elsewhere, therefore, Zionist colonization of Palestine was essentially incompatible with the continued existence of the "native population" in the coveted country.**

(3) Other European settlers could, without much difficulty, overcome the obstacles obstructing their settlement in their chosen target-territories: they could count on receiving adequate protection from their imperial sponsors. But the prospective Zionist colonizers of Palestine could count on no such facilities. For, in addition to the *Arab people of Palestine*, certain to resist any large-scale influx of settlers loudly proclaiming their objective of dispossessing the "natives", the Zionists were likely to encounter also the resistance of the *Ottoman authorities*, who could not view with favor the establishment, on an important segment of their Empire, of an alien community harboring political designs of independent statehood.

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It was in order to counteract these peculiar factors of its situation that the Zionist Movement, while defining its *ultimate objective* at the First Zionist Congress, pro-

ceeded to formulate an appropriate *practical program* as well. This program called for action along three lines: *organization, colonization, and negotiation.*

(1) The *organizational* efforts were given supreme priority; for, lacking a state-structure in a home-base of its own to master-mind and supervise the process of overseas colonization, the Zionist Movement required a quasi-state apparatus to perform those functions. The World Zionist Organization — with its Federations of local societies, its Congress, its General Council, and its Central Executive — was established at Basle in order to play that role.

(2) The instruments of systematic *colonization* were also promptly readied. The "Jewish Colonial Trust" (1898), the "Colonization Commission" (1898), the "Jewish National Fund" (1901), the "Palestine Office" (1908) and the "Palestine Land Development Company" (1908), were among the first institutions established by the Zionist Organization. Their joint purpose was to plan, finance, and supervise the process of colonization, and to ensure that it would not meet the same fate which the earlier experiment of haphazard colonization had met.

(3) While the instruments of colonization were being laboriously created, diplomatic efforts were also being exerted to produce *political conditions* that would permit, facilitate, and protect large-scale colonization.

At the beginning, these efforts were focused mainly on the Ottoman Empire, then in control of the political fortunes of Palestine. Direct approaches to the Ottoman

authorities were made; lucrative promises of financial grants and loans were dangled before the eyes of the Sultan; and European Powers were urged to intercede at the Porte on behalf of the Zionist Organization, in order to persuade the Sultan to grant the Organization a Charter for an autonomous Zionist settlement in Palestine. Other efforts were exerted to induce the German Emperor to endorse the creation of a Chartered Land Development Company, which would be operated by Zionists in Palestine under German protection. Still other attempts were made to obtain permission from the British Government to establish an autonomous Zionist settlement in the Sinai Peninsula, as a stepping-stone towards colonization in Palestine. But none of these efforts bore fruit.

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By the end of the first decade following the inauguration of the new Zionist Movement in 1897, Zionism had made little progress towards putting its elaborate colonization apparatus to work, and had scored even less success in its political efforts to obtain governmental permission and facilities for colonization in Palestine.

Its hopes for *de jure* colonization shattered, Zionism shifted its strategy once more, and turned to *de facto* colonization — hoping to gain thereby some political leverage which would serve it in good stead when the time came for renewal of its attempts to secure political recognition. In 1907/1908, therefore, a new phase of Zionist colonization was inaugurated, without prior "legalization" or sponsorship by a European Power. It was

more consciously nationalistic in impulse, more militantly segregationist in its attitude towards the Palestinian Arabs, and more concerned with strategic and political considerations in its selection of locations for its new settlements. But, for all its enhanced dynamism and sharpened ideological consciousness, the second wave of Zionist colonization was not appreciably more successful than the first, as far as its magnitude was concerned.

By the outbreak of the first World War, therefore, the Zionist colonization of Palestine had met with only modest success in over thirty years of action. *In the first place*, Zionists were still an infinitesimal minority of about 1<sup>0</sup>/<sub>10</sub> of the Jews of the world. Their activities had aroused the fear and opposition of other Jews, who sought the solution of the "Jewish Problem" in "assimilation" in Western Europe and the United States, not in "self-segregation" in Palestine. *In the second place*, Zionist colonization had proceeded very slowly. After thirty years of immigration to Palestine, Jews were still under 8<sup>0</sup>/<sub>10</sub> of the total population of the country, in possession of no more than 2 1/2<sup>0</sup>/<sub>10</sub> of the land. And, *in the third place*, Zionism had failed to obtain political endorsement from the Ottoman authorities controlling Palestine, or from any European Power.

The War, however, created new circumstances which were destined to improve considerably the fortunes of Zionist colonization in Palestine. For the War set the stage for an alliance — concluded in 1917 — between British Imperialism and Zionist Colonialism, which, during the following thirty years, opened the gates of Palestine to Zionist colonizers, facilitated the establishment of a

Zionist settler-community, and paved the way for the dispossession and expulsion of the Arab people of Palestine and the creation of the Zionist settler-state in 1948.

Whereas *unilateral Zionist colonization* failed, in the thirty years preceding the First World War, to make much headway, *the alliance of Zionist Colonialism and British Imperialism* succeeded, during the thirty years following the First World War, in accomplishing the objectives of both parties.



## II

### THE ALLIANCE OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM AND ZIONIST COLONIALISM

Until the First World War, Britain's policy in the Middle East had revolved around the maintenance of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire in Asia. The European domains of the Empire had been emancipated from Ottoman domination, and the North African domains had been annexed by various European Powers, long before the War; but the Asian domains had been insulated in the meantime from the imperial rivalries of the European Powers. Britain's imperial interests in the area — namely, control over the Suez Canal, and immunization of the region from rival European domination over the "overland route" to India — were better served by a tractable Ottoman Empire than they would have been by a European "Scramble for the Middle East", which might have brought one or another of Britain's European rivals to the vicinity of the Canal or athwart the "overland route".

When Turkey joined the Central Powers in the War, however, the premises of Britain's imperial policy for the Middle East were shattered overnight. Alternative policies for the post-War period had to be made.

At first, Britain envisaged a new order for the Middle East, in which Arab autonomy would supplant Ottoman imperial rule in South-West Asia. Anglo-Arab agreements to that effect, concluded in the fall of 1915, led to the Arab Revolt against Turkey in 1916.

But the pressures of other European Powers — then

wartime allies of Britain — precluded sole British overlordship. Secret agreements were therefore reached in the spring of 1916 between Britain, France, and Tsarist Russia, for division of the Ottoman spoils.

These agreements, however, soon proved irksome to the more empire-minded among Britain's policy-makers. For they threatened to bring France perilously close to the eastern approaches to the Suez Canal. And as British feelings of security (predicated on the belief in the impenetrability of the Sinai Peninsula) had been destroyed by recent wartime experiences, it came to be felt that not only Sinai, but also Palestine, must be made safe in order that the Canal might be rendered secure. The 1916 Anglo-French agreement, providing for the internationalization of most of Palestine, came therefore to be viewed with alarm by empire-minded British statesmen; and the staking of French claims to the entirety of Palestine could hardly have served to allay the aroused apprehensions of British imperialists.

By early 1917, a new British cabinet was actively searching for ways and means for extricating itself from the agreements which its predecessor had reached with France for the post-War division of the spoils of war in the Arab domains of the Ottoman Empire. It was at that point that formerly abortive Zionist attempts to secure British support for a Zionist-dominated Palestine were re-activated, at Britain's instigation.

Reciprocal interests had thus come to bind British Imperialism and Zionist Colonialism. On the one hand, Britain, by utilizing Zionist influence in the United States

and in France, would avert international rule in Palestine, on the pretext that a British-sponsored program of Zionist colonization required British rule in Palestine. On the other hand, by playing a catalytic role in bringing about the designation of Britain as the ruling Power in Palestine, Zionism would at last be able to embark upon the long-awaited program of large-scale colonization in the coveted territory under the auspices and protection of a Great Power. Britain would have the assurance that an embattled Zionist settler-community would remain indefinitely dependent upon Britain's protection, and would continue to require (and justify) British presence in Palestine; while, for its part, Zionism would also have the assurance that Britain, bound internationally by its wartime commitment to facilitate Zionist colonization, would provide the Zionist settler-community with the protection it needed, during the formative stages of its establishment, against expected Arab opposition. The alliance of convenience and mutual need, binding British Imperialism and Zionist Colonialism, was complete.

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Preliminary Zionist efforts in Washington to secure America's approval were not unsuccessful — notwithstanding President Wilson's emphasis on the principle of self-determination, with which the Zionist colonization of Palestine despite Arab opposition would clash headlong. Nor were simultaneous Zionist efforts in Paris, to secure French approval of the revision of earlier Anglo-French agreements on the future of Palestine, entirely discourag-

ing. With such preparatory work out of the way, Britain announced its policy-statement of 2 November 1917, commonly known as the Balfour Declaration, proclaiming its support for the establishment of a Jewish "National Home" in Palestine. According to plan, the Zionists then requested the Peace Conference to confer the Palestine Mandate on Britain. Britain, in turn, incorporated its undertaking, first enunciated in the Balfour Declaration, in the text of the Palestine Mandate. The path was now clear, for both British Imperialism and Zionist Colonialism, to pursue jointly their respective objectives.

Britain lost no time in creating the appropriate conditions for Zionist colonization. It appointed a Zionist Jew as its first High Commissioner in Palestine. It recognized the World Zionist Organization as a representative "Jewish Agency". It opened the gates of Palestine to massive Zionist immigration, despite Arab protests. It transferred state lands to the Zionists for colonization. It protected the institutions of the fledgling "National Home". It permitted the Zionist community to run its own schools and to maintain its military establishment (the Haganah). It trained mobile Zionist striking forces (the Palmach), and condoned the existence of "underground" terrorist organizations (the Stern group and the Irgun). No wonder that, by the mid-thirties, a British Royal Commission had come to describe the Zionist settler-community in Palestine as a "state within a state". In the meantime, the Arab majority — while constantly assured that Britain would see to it that its rights would not be "prejudiced" by the rapid growth of the Zionist settler-community — was denied analogous facilities and deprived of the means for self-protection.

After thirty years of British rule, the Zionist settler-community grew to twelve times its size in 1917, and came to represent a little under one-third of the total population of Palestine. In the meantime, it had developed, under the auspices of the Mandatory Power, its own quasi-governmental institutions and a sizable military establishment.

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But Britain had not entered into the partnership with Zionism in Palestine solely in order to serve the purposes of Zionist Colonialism; it had expected the partnership to serve, equally, the purposes of British Imperialism as well. Whenever Zionism sought to accelerate the processes of state-building (which would eventually render Britain's continued presence in Palestine neither necessary nor desirable in Zionist eyes), Britain pulled in the opposite direction to slow them down. The Second World War precipitated the showdown, which in the end brought about the dissolution of the Anglo-Zionist Alliance.

By the end of the Second World War, Britain's wartime enfeeblement, and the imminent independence of India, had led to a relative diminution of Britain's interest in the Alliance, while the growing opposition of newly-emerging Arab States to Britain's role in Palestine had forced Britain to exercise some restraint in its formerly whole-hearted support for the Zionist cause. On the other hand, the advent of the United States as an active World Power, with economic and strategic interests in the Middle East, and the growing responsiveness of