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The Jewish Claim to Palestine

(1) Background-and the Impact of Jewish Immigration

The Jewish people and the land of Israel have been linked together for nearly four thousand years. Unlike its relationship to Jewish history and religion, Palestine has at no stage implied a unique national or holy significance to the Arabs. There was never such a concept as an Arab homeland in Palestine. Since Imperial Rome introduced the name Palestine to replace Judea, the country was never a separate national entity. For three centuries prior to 1918 it was ruled by various provinces belonging to the Ottoman Turks, and then remained under British occupation and mandate until 1948. During the nineteenth century, under the Ottoman administration, Palestine was regarded as a depopulating country. There were very few Jews, and not very many Arabs. In the whole of Palestine, on both sides of the Jordan (including areas of Syria and Lebanon), there were only about 200,000 people, of whom about one half were Arabic speaking, a quarter Turkish, and some 8—15 per cent Jewish.

* It is significant that the early Arab nationalists never referred to Palestine, but described it as Southern Syria. On July 2, 1919 the Syrian General Congress adopted a resolution stating:

We ask that there should be no separation of the southern part of Syria, known as Palestine, nor of the Littoral Western zone which includes Lebanon, from the Syrian country. We desire that the unity of the country should be guaranteed against partition under whatever circumstances.

* As late as May 1947 Arab representatives at the UN General Assembly stated that:

Palestine was part of the province of Syria . . . politically the Arabs of Palestine were not independent in the sense of forming a separate political entity.

- * Even later, on May 31, 1956, Ahmed Shukairy, the Saudi Arabian delegate to the UN, told the Security Council:
It is common knowledge that Palestine is nothing but Southern Syria.

The continuous Jewish habitation in Palestine since the thirteenth century B.C. remained uninterrupted even after the destruction of Judea by the Romans in A.D. 70. However, under succeeding occupiers Palestine degenerated as a country and became sparsely populated, and over the centuries her fertile lands turned into sandy deserts, malarial marshes and eroded hills. It is significant that by the twentieth century the number of villages in the area was only half of what it had been three hundred years earlier.

- * Thus, when a significant Jewish emigration to Palestine commenced, a number of Arab leaders saw the Jewish return as a benefit to the whole area. Emir Feisal signed an agreement with Dr Chaim Weizmann the Zionist leader on January 3, 1919 which stated that:

. . . mindful of the racial kinship and ancient bonds existing between the Arabs and the Jewish people, I realise that the surest means of working out the consumation of their national aspirations is through the closest possible collaboration in development of the Arab State and Palestine, and being desirous further of confirming the good understanding which exists between them . . .

On March 3, 1919 Feisal wrote to another leading Zionist, Felix Frankfurter who subsequently became a U.S. Supreme Court Justice:

We Arabs, especially the educated among us, look with deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement. . .

We will wish the Jews a hearty welcome home . . . We are working together for a reformed and revised Near East, and our two movements complement one another. The movement is national and not imperialistic. There is room in Syria for us both. Indeed, I think that neither can be successful without the other.

The regeneration of Palestine and the increase in Arab population both began in the 1920s with the growth of Jewish immigration and under the impact of Jewish agricultural development. Arabs prospered because of the better facilities and economic conditions created by Jewish immigration, and Palestine itself changed from a country of Arab emigration to one of Arab immigration.

From 1922, Arabs began migrating to Palestine from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Trans-Jordan and Egypt. Between World War I and World War II the increase in Arab population was extraordinary, particularly in areas of Jewish concentration and development such as Haifa, where the increase was no less than 216 per cent. Where there was no Jewish development the population increase was much less, such as 32 per cent in Bethlehem and 42 per cent in Nablus. Palestine's overall Arab population more than doubled, from 565,000 in 1922 to over 1,200,000 in 1947—an increase which stood in stark contrast to the record of other Arab countries such as Trans-Jordan (see App. No. 2, pp. 124—6 below).

The British Royal Commission of 1937 clearly related Arab development and progress with the Jewish presence. The prosperity of Arab villages was in direct ratio to their nearness to Jewish settlements. Arabs benefited from Jewish capital and were taught by Jewish farmers how to use machines. Arab industry expanded likewise; wages were higher, hours of labour less, and illiteracy declined. The budget of the Mandatory Administration was financed 70 per cent by Jewish tax-payers (who formed less than half of the population) and 30 per cent by Arab tax-payers. Yet Arabs benefited from more than 80 per cent of the budget expenditure, especially in social welfare areas such as health. The Jewish community also helped Arabs by providing finance for important non-government social services. In the year 1934 alone the Jewish Agency spent £350,000 on medical services in contrast to the £166,000 that the British Administration spent for the whole population. Similarly, from 1922 to 1925 Jews spent £403,000 on draining swamps and fighting malaria while the Mandatory Administration spent £85,000 and the Arab community nothing.

* The Royal Commission report stated (page 94):

The Arabs shared to a considerable degree in the material benefits which Jewish immigration has brought to Palestine. The obligation of the Mandate in this respect has been observed.

* The British Secretary of State for the Colonies stated in the House of Commons on November 24, 1938:

The Arabs cannot say that the Jews are driving them out of the

country. If not a single Jew had come to Palestine after 1918, I believe the Arab population of Palestine would still have been around 600,000 at which it has been stable under Turkish rule ... It is not only the Jews who have benefited from the Balfour Declaration. They can deny it as much as they like, but materially the Arabs have benefited very greatly from the Balfour Declaration.

* The Jewish population growth was

1914	85,000
1918	56,000 (decline due to World War I)
1936	400,000
1947	650,000 (restricted by 1939 White Paper)
1971	2,720,000

(2) Arab Land was not expropriated by the Israelis

Until 1948 Jewish settlement took place mainly on the coastal plain in the Valley of Jezreel and the Jordan Valley — areas largely unpopulated when the Jews settled in that part of the land. Extraordinary prices were paid for land purchased from Arabs. The 1937 Report of Britain's Royal Commission quotes a representative of the Arab Higher Committee as admitting that "nowhere in the world were such uneconomic land prices paid as by the Jews of Palestine."

Most of the lands bought by Jews were large uncultivated tracts which belonged to absentee Arab owners. The 1937 Report estimated that of the land then in Jewish possession, 57 per cent was purchased from large land owners, 16 per cent from the government, churches and foreign companies, and only 27 per cent from Arab peasants. The Commission also emphasised that very few Arabs were made landless by the purchases (see Appendix 2, pp. 117—27 below).

* The *Survey of Palestine* published in 1946 by the British Mandatory authorities showed that just prior to the partition

- 8.6% of the area now known as Israel was owned by Jews,
- 3.3% was owned by Israeli Arabs,
- 16.9% was owned by absentee Arab landlords who had left the country,
- 70% of the land was state land owned by the British

Mandatory Government, the ownership of which was passed on to Israel. Most of this land comprised the Negev Desert.

(3) **The Jewish Juridical Claim to Palestine**

Israel's juridical claims have their origins in the Balfour Declaration issued in November 1917 by the British Government which states:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

Subsequent claims derived from the rights surrendered by Turkey under the Lausanne Treaty (1923), conferred on Britain by the League of Nations mandate, and subsequently affirmed to the state of Israel by the United Nations when the latter body gave recognition to the creation of the state by a two-thirds majority in November 1947. Israel's sovereignty was further confirmed in 1949 by her membership of the United Nations.

- * Six Arab states invaded Israel in 1948. After failing in their effort to annihilate Israel, **Jordan and Egypt annexed territories that had been set aside by the United Nations for an Arab-Palestinian state.**
- * Since Israel's birth the Arabs have consistently challenged **the** right of existence of the Jewish state and embarked on a continuous world-wide economic and political campaign designed to isolate and crush Israel. **The** Egyptians also denied Israel the right of passage through the Suez Canal, despite repeated international condemnations at the United Nations, and in contravention of specific Security Council resolutions.

أقرأ وأكتب

سالم في الجيش



سلسلة لتعليم الكبار



“INTO THE SEA”

Cover illustration from a reading and writing primer
for the Syrian army.