



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



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Palestine and Israel

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Some time ago, I read the book by Thomas Keneally titled, *Schindler's Ark*. I was taken by Schindler's story and his rescue of many Jews. I saw Spielberg's movie *Schindler's List* when it came out in 1993. I was so impressed by the movie that I showed the film to our son Tommy when he came for a visit.

Keneally's book and Spielberg's movie led to many copycats...followed by articles on the subject in magazines. ...Followed by TV talk shows. ...Followed by the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. ...Followed by more movies (*Munich*, for example), and more books. Over and over again---media renditions of the movie *Ground Hog Day*.

More than once, I said to myself, *Stop. Enough. We need to focus on present problems. And if we must speak of past genocides, how about equal time for the Cambodians? Who speaks for them? Who speaks for the Rwandans? Who speaks for the American Indians? Who speaks for the citizens of Nanking?*¹ I was sympathetic to what happened to the European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. But I was growing weary of the events being brought up time and again.

Most likely, I was letting my thoughts be influenced by my (still) adamant belief that the 1917 Balfour Declaration and a U.N. Mandate---leading to the creation of the state of Israel---has proved be a disaster for everyone.

Everyone? Yes, including Israel. Even with the progress made in combating terrorism since 9/11, it is only a matter of time before weapons of mass destruction are going to be available to insurgents and terrorists. They will attempt to attack Israel. They will also attempt to attack the United States, partially because of America's unbalanced support of Israel.

By discussing this subject, I realize I've stepped onto thin ice. A noted columnist, Richard Cohen, was accused of being anti-Semitic for writing less controversial words about Israel.² At a minimum, I likely have upset my Jewish, Evangelical Christian, and Catholic friends and relatives. I ask for your patience to allow me to present what is perhaps a rather unorthodox view on the subject.

Below are two paragraphs written by Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, The first was written in 1917.^{3 and 4}

His Majesty's Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done

¹ Eventually, the Chinese will even that score with the Japanese.

² See the Op-Ed sections of *The Washington Post*, April 25, and May 24, 2006.

³ The first paragraph is part of the famous/infamous "Balfour Declaration." The second paragraph is a follow-up to his declaration. See footnote 5 for my source.

⁴ Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Sa'ud* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 136.

which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.

Two years later, he declared:

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

In these proclamations, the swagger of British imperialism shines through. Fantastic assertions. Arrogant claims. And from the standpoint of the "existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine," just plain wrong.

Yet Balfour's ideas were put into effect after WWII. He alone did not create Israel, but his position in the British government and his stand on the issue was of monumental importance to the Zionist movement.

What should have been done? In the wake of the emotions and anguish of the Holocaust, perhaps nothing else could have been done except partition-off a chunk of land and declare it to be Jewish territory. Perhaps I'm insensitive to the plight of the Jews after WWII. Perhaps.

But I continue to believe the subsequent U.N. partitioning was morally wrong. No one should be able to stake claim to a *conceptual* homeland in which they do not reside to the detriment of the people who *physically* live there. But that is exactly what happened.

To be fair, willing Arabs⁵ sold-off vast acreages of territory to Jews. It was not as if the Jews invaded with tanks and guns (money was the weapon of choice). The Jews' migrations into the area were a big problem, but not the biggest problem. The biggest problem was U.N. mandate 181 (1947), which partitioned the land that led to the Jewish state.

What Should Have Happened?

What should the U.N. have done? *Absolutely nothing, a hands-off approach.* The Jews should have been able to continue their legal purchases of land and their inhabiting the land they bought. The world should have left the region alone to allow the situation to take its own course; more of a gradual change, and not a stark declaration that created havoc.

Stability does not come from boundary partitioning. Dividing land and peoples into arbitrary "nations" is artificial. It is too sudden to allow a gradual accommodation---an evolution---to occur. In the 1800s and 1900s, the Middle East "boundaries" were tribal-based. The same for Africa. Then, the European imperialists came along and mapped the regions into countries---often splitting tribes into different states. The post-WWI partitioning of the former Ottoman Empire and the post-WWII partitioning of Africa resulted in tremendous instability among and between clans and ethnic groups

⁵ "Israel," *Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia*. The vast majority of Palestinians were Muslim Arabs.

We will never know if the hands-off approach would have worked; it is one of those "what ifs?" that haunt us.

It would be folly to attribute all the woes of the former Middle East "colonies" to the boundaries set up by the European imperialists. Human nature being what it is, the people living there would have found a reason to attack and pillage each other's tents and camels. My point is that the sudden partitioning, coupled with illogical borders, led to many of the problems that exist today.

Aside from the U.N. Mandate, what should the United States have done? At a minimum, the U.S. should have honored President Roosevelt's promise to (the Arabs), "...he would do nothing to assist the Jews against the Arabs and would make no move hostile to the Arab people."⁶

Roosevelt supported the plan of the Saudi Arabian leaders of sending a mission to the West to explain the Arab viewpoint on Palestine, "...he thought this a very good idea because he thought many people in America and England were misinformed." Speaking to Congress, he said, "From (the King of Saudi Arabia), I learned more of the whole problem of the Moslems and more about the Jewish problem in 5 minutes than I could have learned by the exchange of a dozen letters."⁷

A Saudi Prince was once asked what should have been done to aid the WWII Jews. He replied, "They should have been given Germany." Poetic justice, to be sure. And cruel. But what happened to the Palestinians was also cruel.⁸

I have also been troubled by people being labeled anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic if they state America is too heavily influenced by the "Jewish lobby." Perhaps lobby is the wrong catchword, but the idea behind the claim is valid. No better example of this influence can be provided than the statement made by President Truman about the situation. He had convened the U.S. Chiefs of Mission of Saudi Arabia and other countries to listen to their concerns about the increasing anger and fear of the Arabs about his pro-Zionist statements:

"I'm sorry, gentlemen," said the President, summing up his position with the utmost candor, "but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents."⁹

Politics, pure and simple; Truman had to count votes. A rose by any other name is still a rose. A lobby by any other name is still a lobby.

As you may have noticed, I dislike the Balfour Declaration (and the U.N Mandate). I have been troubled by the Declaration since I read it many years ago. A statistic goes to the heart of the matter: The population of the Palestine area was at that time 92 percent Arab, 8 percent Jews. By what ethical or moral rationalization can a very small minority suddenly assume political control over a majority population? If not control the allotted 50 percent of the "control." Because the

⁶ Robert Lacey, 272.

⁷ Congressional Record: 79th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. 91. Pt 2 (1945), 1622; Robert Lacey, 272.

⁸ If justice had really prevailed, the European Jews would have been ceded the land owned by the Europeans who were responsible for the genocide. Of course, this idea is a ridiculous notion to Zionists---not to mention the current land-owning Europeans. As well, it does not consort with the idea of Jews returning to a homeland.

⁹ Robert Lacey, 275.

turf was the ancient homeland of the displacers? That very turf was also the ancient homeland of the folks who were displaced.

Those who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible inform me it is part of Biblical prophecy. They say the Jews are ordained to take over the Holy Land---as part of the eventual Armageddon. Hm, which also entails the Jews being converted to Christianity---or being killed-off.

It is common knowledge---even accepted by many Jews----that the civil rights of the ongoing residents of Palestine were desiccated when the Balfour Declaration and associated U.N. Resolution 181 kicked-in after WWII. The Palestinian Arabs were dislodged from their home land.

The Jews had not been the dominant population in that area since they were expelled by the Romans in 135 AD. The status quo was cast aside by a decree that *in one day* altered centuries of political evolution.¹⁰ The Saudi Arabian King at that time (Abdul Aziz) complained to Britain, "...would the people of Scotland like it if the English suddenly gave their country to the Jews?"¹¹

Since 1948, Israel has not only become a state, it has taken over more land---in violation of U.N. resolutions. They are brazen actions in keeping with the best of the European imperialistic models of the past.

With this "land grab," Israel lost its moral platform. Israel became what it had once abhorred: A subjugator of weak, demoralized people. Without question, the wall and the security gates have saved lives. But they are also reminders of the un-natural situation, as well as a deep insult and a great inconvenience to the average non-Jew living in the area.

Make no mistake, the non-Jewish people living with and within that wall are almost hostages. They endure hours of queues passing to their jobs in Israel. They are subject to denial of entry to their very livelihoods. Sometimes because a guard does not like the way they present themselves, they are denied entry.

There is an even more troubling aspect to this situation. America is joined at the hip with Israel. Regardless of the injustice of what happened to the European Jews, the United States has bound itself so tightly to Israel that we have almost become its subject. Is this tie in our best interests? Just look at the Middle East now. How much of the turmoil in that land is because of the partitioning? How many of America's foreign relations problems are attributable to our one-sided support of Israel, to the detriment of the other people in the region? If you take the time to trace back today's problems, many of them find their roots in the Balfour Declaration and U.N. Mandate: Gaza, the West Bank, the intifadas, the creation of the terrorist groups in Lebanon and Palestine. On and on.

Let's return to the subject of the Jewish Lobby. The premier group is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Along with others, such as the American Jewish Committee, the

¹⁰ May 14, 1948, when the British mandate was terminated.

¹¹ Robert Lacey, 259.

Anti-Defamation League, the Washington Public Affairs Council, and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, the AIPAC is almost a part of our government.¹²

These organizations' contributions to political campaigns amount to huge sums and have helped defeat and elect several Senators and Representatives: "Pro-Israel money helped defeat Republican Reps. Paul Findley of Illinois, Pat McCloskey of California, and Sen. Charles Percy of Illinois, all of whom were deemed too sympathetic to Arab causes and too critical of Israel."¹³

Since WWII, the United States has taken on Israel as its most favorite foreign affairs client state. We provide about \$3 billion a year to the nation as direct foreign aid, more than any other nation, and to a nation that is affluent and largely self-sufficient. We are pledged to come to Israel's aid in the event of an attack.¹⁴

Back to the Present and Learning from the Past

You now know my bias. I'm sure my views led me to become vexed with the frequent rehashing of the Holocaust in the media. Yesterday, I softened my opinion on the subject. I took a few hours off to visit a demonstration.

As I proceeded from the Metro subway stop to the Darfur demonstration on the National Mall in Washington DC, I encountered people wearing T-shirts and carrying placards with "Never Again" printed on them. At first, I did not catch-on to the meaning of the slogan. But soon, I grasped the idea that it meant: *Never again shall we tolerate genocide*. The theme of the entire demonstration was just that: Never Again.

Many young people were at the rally, and they too proclaimed, "Never Again." How did these youngsters become aware of an event that occurred before they were born? In between their MTV, video games, and iPod flights from reality¹⁵---their own Exodus---the ever-present Holocaust programs somehow made their way into their consciousness.

Many programs, books, articles, and articles have kept the topic alive. A reminder of the old saws of *learning from history*, of *avoiding the mistakes made in the past*, and the new slogan, *Never Again*.

I walked back to the Metro with the realization that my annoyance with too much Holocaust revisiting was misplaced. I also reflected back to the mid-1940s and the intense feelings about the WWII genocide that led to the creation of Israel. Had I been a world leader, perhaps I would have supported the U.N. resolution. I don't know. But if any of us think Israel is not a fundamental part of the current world problem with terrorism (and not just bin Laden), I respectfully say to you that you are ignoring reality.

¹² Glenn Frankel, "A Beautiful Friendship," *The Washington Post Magazine*, July 16, 2006,16.

¹³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵ A National Geographic poll revealed (for people in America between the ages 18-24): (a) 33% couldn't locate Louisiana on a map, (b) Six of ten could not locate Iraq, (c) 47% could not find India, (d) 75 % could not find Israel, and (e) 100% didn't care. Source for (a) - (d): Randolph E. Schmid, "Lost Generation can't find States with Maps or Wits," *The Washington Times*, May 3, 2006, A1. Source for (e): Your On the Street Reporter.

Like Iraq, it's water under the bridge. America is as committed to making Iraq successful and secure, as it is with Israel.

Perhaps I should be spending time writing happier reports. I also suspect I am too far gone to alter my views regarding the consequences of Lord Balfour's Declaration and the U.N. action. The Jewish citizens of Israel will likely tag me as an insensitive bigot for holding these views. I hope not. I trust my readers will at least look upon the Palestinians' situation with a bit more empathy.

Let me hear from you. I suspect I'm about to receive some tart responses from my Jewish friends.