



Introduction to the Second Edition

The logical implication of trying to create a continent neatly divided into coherent territorial states, each inhabited by a separate ethnically and linguistically homogeneous population, was the mass expulsion or extermination of minorities. Such was and is the murderous *reductio ad absurdum* of nationalism in its territorial version, although this was not fully demonstrated until the 1940s. ... The homogeneous territorial nation could now be seen as a programme that could be realized only by barbarians, or at least by barbarian means.

E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*

Background

To resolve what was called the 'Jewish question' – i.e., the reciprocal challenges of Gentile repulsion, or anti-Semitism, and Gentile attraction, or assimilation – the Zionist movement sought in the late nineteenth century to create an overwhelmingly, if not homogeneously, Jewish state in Palestine.¹ Once the Zionist movement gained a foothold in Palestine through Great Britain's issuance of the Balfour Declaration,² the main obstacle to realizing its goal was the indigenous Arab population. For, on the eve of Zionist colonization, Palestine was overwhelmingly not Jewish but Muslim and Christian Arab.³

Across the mainstream Zionist spectrum, it was understood from the outset that Palestine's indigenous Arab population would not acquiesce in its dispossession. 'Contrary to the claim that is often made, Zionism was not blind to the presence of Arabs in Palestine', Zeev Sternhell observes. 'If Zionist intellectuals and leaders ignored the Arab dilemma, it was



chiefly because they knew that this problem had no solution within the Zionist way of thinking ... [I]n general both sides understood each other well and knew that the implementation of Zionism could be only at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs.' Moshe Shertok (later Sharett) contemptuously dismissed the 'illusive hopes' of those who spoke about a "mutual misunderstanding" between us and the Arabs, about "common interests" [and] about "the possibility of unity and peace between the two fraternal peoples." "There is no example in history", David Ben-Gurion declared, succinctly framing the core problem, 'that a nation opens the gates of its country, not because of necessity ... but because the nation which wants to come in has explained its desire to it.'⁴

'The tragedy of Zionism', Walter Laqueur wrote in his standard history, 'was that it appeared on the international scene when there were no longer empty spaces on the world map.' This is not quite right. Rather it was no longer politically tenable to *create* such spaces: extermination had ceased to be an option of conquest.⁵ Basically the Zionist movement could choose between only two strategic options to achieve its goal: what Benny Morris has labeled 'the way of South Africa' – 'the establishment of an apartheid state, with a settler minority lording it over a large, exploited native majority' – or the 'the way of transfer' – 'you could create a homogenous Jewish state or at least a state with an overwhelming Jewish majority by moving or transferring all or most of the Arabs out.'⁶

Round One – 'The Way of Transfer'

In the first round of conquest, the Zionist movement set its sights on 'the way of transfer'. For all the public rhetoric about wanting to 'live with the Arabs in conditions of unity and mutual honor and together with them to turn the common homeland into a flourishing land' (Twelfth Zionist Congress, 1921), the Zionists from early on were in fact bent on expelling them. 'The idea of transfer had accompanied the Zionist movement from its very beginnings', Tom Segev reports. "Disappearing" the Arabs lay at the heart of the Zionist dream, and was also a necessary condition of its existence. ... With few exceptions, none of the Zionists disputed the desirability of forced transfer – or its morality.' The key was to get the timing right. Ben-Gurion, reflecting on the expulsion option in the late 1930s, wrote: 'What is inconceivable in normal times is possible in revolutionary times; and if at this time the opportunity is missed and what is possible in such great hours is not carried out – a whole world is lost.'⁷

The goal of 'disappearing' the indigenous Arab population points to a virtual truism buried beneath a mountain of apologetic Zionist literature:



what spurred Palestinians' opposition to Zionism was not anti-Semitism, in the sense of an irrational or abstract hatred of Jews, but rather the prospect – very real – of their own expulsion. 'The fear of territorial displacement and dispossession', Morris reasonably concludes, 'was to be the chief motor of Arab antagonism to Zionism.' Likewise, in his magisterial study of Palestinian nationalism, Yehoshua Porath suggests that the 'major factor nourishing' Arab anti-Semitism 'was not hatred for the Jews as such but opposition to Jewish settlement in Palestine.' He goes on to argue that, although Arabs initially differentiated between Jews and Zionists, it was 'inevitable' that opposition to Zionist settlement would turn into a loathing of all Jews: 'As immigration increased, so did the Jewish community's identification with the Zionist movement. ... The non-Zionist and anti-Zionist factors became an insignificant minority, and a large measure of sophistication was required to make the older distinction. It was unreasonable to hope that the wider Arab population, and the riotous mob which was part of it, would maintain this distinction.'⁸ It ought also to be remembered that Zionist leaders consistently claimed to be acting on behalf and with the support of 'world Jewry', a claim which to many Palestinians seemed increasingly credible, as first non-Zionist Jews in Palestine were marginalized during the Mandate as noted above and, especially after 1967, as non-Zionist Jews around the world became, if not a small minority, certainly an increasingly voiceless one.

From its incipient stirrings in the late nineteenth century through the watershed revolt in the 1930s, Palestinian resistance consistently focused on the twin juggernauts of Zionist conquest: Jewish settlers and Jewish settlements.⁹ Apologetic Zionist writers like Anita Shapira juxtapose benign Jewish settlement against recourse to force.¹⁰ In fact, settlement *was* force. 'From the outset, Zionism sought to employ force in order to realize national aspirations', Yosef Gorny observes. 'This force consisted primarily of the collective ability to rebuild a national home in Palestine.' Through settlement the Zionist movement aimed – in Ben-Gurion's words – 'to establish a *great Jewish fact* in this country' that was irreversible (emphasis in original).¹¹ Moreover, settlement and armed force were in reality seamlessly interwoven as Zionist settlers sought 'the ideal and perfect fusion between the plow and rifle.' Moshe Dayan later memorialized that 'We are a generation of settlers, and without the combat helmet and the barrel of a gun, we will not be able to plant a tree or build a house.'¹² The Zionist movement inferred behind Palestinian resistance to Jewish settlement a generic (and genetic) anti-Semitism – Jewish settlers 'being murdered', as Ben-Gurion put it, 'simply because they were Jews' – in order to conceal from the outside world and itself the rational and legitimate grievances of the indigenous population.¹³ In the ensuing bloodshed



the kith and kin of Zionist martyrs would, like relatives of Palestinian martyrs today, wax proud at these national sacrifices. ‘I am gratified’, the father of a Jewish casualty eulogized, ‘that I was a living witness to such a historical event.’¹⁴

It bears critical notice for what comes later that, from the interwar through early postwar years, Western public opinion was not altogether averse to population transfer as an expedient (albeit extreme) method for resolving ethnic conflicts. French socialists and Europe’s Jewish press supported in the mid-1930s the transfer of Jews to Madagascar to solve Poland’s ‘Jewish problem’.¹⁵ The main forced transfer between the two world wars was effected between Turkey and Greece. Sanctioned by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) and approved and supervised by the League of Nations, this brutal displacement of more than 1.5 million people eventually came to be seen by much of official Europe as an auspicious precedent. The British cited it in the late 1930s as a model for resolving the conflict in Palestine. The right-wing Zionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky, taking heart from Nazi demographic experiments in conquered territories (about 1.5 million Poles and Jews were expelled and hundreds of thousands of Germans resettled in their place), exclaimed: ‘The world has become accustomed to the idea of mass migrations and has almost become fond of them. Hitler – as odious as he is to us – has given this idea a good name in the world.’ During the war the Soviet Union also carried out bloody deportations of recalcitrant minorities such as the Volga Germans, Chechen-Ingush and Tatars. Labor Zionists pointed to the ‘positive experience’ of the Greek-Turkish and Soviet expulsions in support of the transfer idea. Recalling the ‘success’ (Churchill) of the Greek-Turkish compulsory transfer, the Allies at the Potsdam Conference (1945) authorized the expulsion of some thirteen million Germans from Central and Eastern Europe (around two million perished in the course of this horrendous uprooting). Even the left-wing British Labour Party advocated in its 1944 platform that the ‘Arabs be encouraged to move out’ of Palestine, as did the humanist philosopher Bertrand Russell, to make way for Zionist settlement.¹⁶

In fact, many in the enlightened West came to view displacement of the indigenous population of Palestine as an inexorable concomitant of civilization’s advance. The identification of Americans with Zionism came easily, since the ‘social order of the Yishuv [Jewish community in Palestine] was built on the ethos of a frontier society, in which a pioneering-settlement model set the tone’. To account for the ‘almost complete disregard of the Arab case’ by Americans, a prominent British Labour MP, Richard Crossman, explained in the mid-1940s: ‘Zionism after all is merely the attempt by the European Jew to build his national life on the



soil of Palestine in much the same way as the American settler developed the West. So the American will give the Jewish settler in Palestine the benefit of the doubt, and regard the Arab as the aboriginal who must go down before the march of progress.' Contrasting the 'slovenly' Arabs with enterprising Jewish settlers who had 'set going revolutionary forces in the Middle East', Crossman himself professed in the name of 'social progress' support for Zionism. The left-liberal US presidential candidate in 1948, Henry Wallace, compared the Zionist struggle in Palestine with 'the fight the American colonies carried on in 1776. Just as the British stirred up the Iroquois to fight the colonists, so today they are stirring up the Arabs.'¹⁷

Come 1948, the Zionist movement exploited the 'revolutionary times' of the first Arab-Israeli war – much like the Serbs did in Kosovo during the NATO attack – to expel more than 80 per cent of the indigenous population (750,000 Palestinians), and thereby achieve its goal of an overwhelmingly Jewish state, if not yet in the whole of Palestine.¹⁸ Berl Katznelson, known as the 'conscience' of the Labor Zionist movement, had maintained that 'there has never been a colonizing enterprise as typified by justice and honesty toward others as our work here in Eretz Israel.' In his multi-volume paean to the American settlers' dispossession of the native population, *The Winning of the West*, Theodore Roosevelt likewise concluded that 'no other conquering nation has ever treated savage owners of the soil with such generosity as has the United States'. The recipients of this benefaction would presumably have a different story to tell.¹⁹

Round Two – 'The Way of South Africa'

The main Arab (and British) fear before and after the 1948 war was that the Zionist movement would use the Jewish state carved out of Palestine as a springboard for further expansion.²⁰ In fact, Zionists pursued from early on a 'stages' strategy of conquering Palestine by parts – a strategy it would later vilify the Palestinians for. 'The Zionist vision could not be fulfilled in one fell swoop', Ben-Gurion's official biographer reports, 'especially the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish state. The stage-by-stage approach, dictated by less than favorable circumstances, required the formulation of objectives that appeared to be "concessions".' It acquiesced in British and United Nations proposals for the partition of Palestine but only 'as a stage along the path to greater Zionist implementation' (Ben-Gurion).²¹ Chief among the Zionist leadership's regrets in the aftermath of the 1948 war was its failure to conquer the whole of Palestine. Come 1967, Israel exploited the 'revolutionary times' of the June war to



finish the job.²² Sir Martin Gilbert, in his glowing history of Israel, maintained that Zionist leaders from the outset conceived the conquered territories as an undesired ‘burden that was to weigh heavily on Israel’. In a highly acclaimed new study, *Six Days of War*, Michael Oren suggests that Israel’s territorial conquests ‘came about largely through chance’, ‘the vagaries and momentum of war’: they just happened. A careful review of the historical record, however, suggests that they were just *waiting to happen*. In light of the Zionist movement’s long-standing territorial imperatives, Sternhell concludes: ‘The role of occupier, which Israel began to play only a few months after the lightning victory of June 1967, was not the result of some miscalculation on the part of the rulers of that period or the outcome of a combination of circumstances, but another step in the realization of Zionism’s major ambitions.’²³

Israel confronted the same dilemma after occupying the West Bank and Gaza as at the dawn of the Zionist movement: it wanted the land but not the people.²⁴ Expulsion, however, was no longer a viable option. In the aftermath of the brutal Nazi experiments with and plans for demographic engineering, international public opinion had ceased granting any legitimacy to forced population transfers. The landmark Fourth Geneva Convention, ratified in 1949, for the first time ‘unequivocally prohibited deportation’ of civilians under occupation (Articles 49, 147).²⁵ Accordingly, after the June war Israel moved to impose the second of its two options mentioned above – apartheid. This proved to be the chief stumbling block to a diplomatic settlement of the Israel–Palestine conflict.

The ‘Peace Process’

Right after the June war the United Nations deliberated on the modalities for achieving a just and lasting peace. The broad consensus of the General Assembly as well as the Security Council called for Israel’s withdrawal from the Arab territories it occupied during the June war. Security Council Resolution 242 stipulated this basic principle of international law in its preambular paragraph ‘*emphasizing* the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war’ (emphasis in original).²⁶ At the same time, Resolution 242 called on Arab states to recognize Israel’s right ‘to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats and acts of force’. To accommodate Palestinian national aspirations, the international consensus eventually supported the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza once Israel withdrew to its pre-June borders. (Resolution 242 had only referred obliquely to the Palestinians in its call for ‘achieving a just resolution of the refugee problem’.)



Although Defense Minister Moshe Dayan privately acknowledged that Resolution 242 required full withdrawal, Israel officially maintained that it allowed for ‘territorial revision’.²⁷ Israel’s refusal in February 1971 to fully withdraw from the Sinai in exchange for Egypt’s offer of a peace treaty led directly to the October 1973 war.²⁸ The basic parameters of Israeli policy regarding Palestinian territory were set out in the late 1960s in the proposal of Yigal Allon, a senior Labor Party official and Cabinet member. The ‘Allon Plan’ called for Israel’s annexation of up to half the West Bank, while Palestinians would be confined to the other half in two unconnected cantons to the north and south. Sasson Sofer notes generally the ‘fertile dualism’ of Israeli diplomacy – one might rather say ‘fertile cynicism’ – of ‘pointing to the uniqueness of the Jewish question in order to obtain legitimacy, and then stressing the normality of Israel’s sovereign existence as a state which should be accorded all the international rights and privileges of a national entity’. In the case at hand Israel demanded, like all sovereign states, full recognition yet also claimed a right, in the name of unique Jewish suffering and despite international law, to territorial conquest. As shown elsewhere, invocation of the Nazi holocaust played a crucial role in this diplomatic game.²⁹

The United States initially supported the consensus interpretation of Resolution 242, making allowance for only ‘minor’ and ‘mutual’ adjustments on the irregular border between Israel and the Jordanian-controlled West Bank.³⁰ In heated private exchanges with Israel during the UN-sponsored mediation efforts of Gunnar Jarring in 1968,³¹ American officials stood firm that ‘the words “recognized and secure” meant “security arrangements” and “recognition” of new lines as international boundaries’, and ‘never meant that Israel could extend its territory to [the] West Bank or Suez if this was what it felt its security required’; and that ‘there will never be peace if Israel tries to hold onto large chunks of territory’. Referring to it explicitly by name, the US deplored even the minimalist version of the Allon Plan as ‘a non-starter’ and ‘unacceptable in principle’.³²

In a crucial shift beginning under the Nixon–Kissinger administration, however, American policy was realigned with Israel’s.³³ Except for Israel and the United States (and occasionally a US client state), the international community has supported, for the past quarter-century, the ‘two-state’ settlement: that is, the full Israeli withdrawal/full Arab recognition formula as well as the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. The United States cast the lone veto of Security Council resolutions in 1976 and 1980 affirming the two-state settlement that were endorsed by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and neighboring Arab states. A 1989 General Assembly resolution along similar lines passed 151–3 (Israel,



US, and Dominica). Despite the historic geo-political changes in the past decade, the international consensus has remained remarkably stable. A 2002 General Assembly resolution ('Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine') affirming Israel's right to 'secure and recognized borders' as well as the Palestinian people's right to an 'independent state' in the West Bank and Gaza passed 160–4 (Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, US). The 2002 UN voting record on virtually every resolution bearing on the Israeli–Palestinian (and –Syrian) conflict was similarly lop-sided. In the UN Third Committee the vote was 156–3 (Israel, Marshall Islands, US) regarding 'the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination', while in the Fourth Committee the vote was 148–1 (Israel) regarding 'Assistance to Palestinian refugees', 147–4 (Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, US) regarding 'Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 war', 147–5 (Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, US) regarding 'Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees', 147–4 (Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, US) regarding 'Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues', 145–5 (Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, US) regarding 'Applicability of the Geneva Convention ... to the Occupied Palestinian Territory', 145–6 (Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Tuvalu, US) regarding 'Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories', 141–5 (Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, US) regarding 'Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people', and 144–1 (Israel) regarding 'The occupied Syrian Golan.' Responding to the Syrian charge that 'Israel stood isolated' in the international community Israel's ambassador rejoined that 'to the right' it had truth and 'to the left, justice', and he did not call that isolation. Indeed, he left out Nauru, Tuvalu, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands. This record is often adduced as proof of the UN's bias against Israel. In fact the exact reverse is true. A careful study by Marc Weller of the University of Cambridge comparing Israel and the occupied territories with similar situations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, East Timor, occupied Kuwait and Iraq, and Rwanda found that Israel has enjoyed a 'virtual immunity' from enforcement measures such as an arms embargo and economic sanctions typically adopted by the UN against member states condemned for identical violations of international law. Given its conflict with the 'entire world community', Israel has unsurprisingly set as a crucial precondition for negotiations that Palestinians 'must drop their traditional demand' for 'international arbitration' or a 'Security Council mechanism'.³⁴

The main obstacle to Israel's annexation of occupied Palestinian territory from the mid-1970s was the PLO. Having endorsed the two-state settlement, it could no longer be dismissed as simply a terrorist organi-



zation bent on Israel's destruction. Pressures mounted on Israel to reach an agreement with the PLO's 'compromising approach'. Consequently, in June 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon, where Palestinian leaders were headquartered, to head off what Israeli strategic analyst Avner Yaniv dubbed the PLO's 'peace offensive'.³⁵ With the Palestine question diplomatically sidelined after the invasion, West Bank and Gaza Palestinians rose up in December 1987 against the occupation in a basically non-violent civil revolt, the *intifada*. Israel's brutal repression (compounded by the inept and corrupt leadership of the PLO) eventually resulted in the uprising's defeat.³⁶ After the implosion of the Soviet Union, the destruction of Iraq, and the suspension of funding from the Gulf states, Palestinian fortunes reached a new nadir. The US and Israel seized on this opportune moment to recruit the already venal and now desperate Palestinian leadership – 'on the verge of bankruptcy' and 'in [a] weakened condition' (Uri Savir, Israel's chief negotiator at Oslo) – as surrogates of Israeli power. This was the real meaning of the Oslo Accord signed in September 1993: to create a Palestinian Bantustan by dangling before Arafat and the PLO the perquisites of power and privilege, much like how the British controlled Palestine during the Mandate years through the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husayni, and the Supreme Muslim Council.³⁷ 'The occupation continued' after Oslo, a seasoned Israeli observer, Meron Benvenisti, wrote, 'albeit by remote control, and with the consent of the Palestinian people, represented by their "sole representative," the PLO.' And again: 'It goes without saying that "cooperation" based on the current power relationship is no more than permanent Israeli domination in disguise, and that Palestinian self-rule is merely a euphemism for Bantustanization.' The 'test' for Arafat and the PLO, according to Savir, was whether they would 'us[e] their new power base to dismantle Hamas and other violent opposition groups' contesting Israeli apartheid.³⁸

Israel's settlement policy in the Occupied Territories during the past decade points up the real content of the 'peace process' set in motion at Oslo. The details are spelled out in an exhaustive study by B'Tselem (Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) entitled *Land Grab*.³⁹ Due primarily to massive Israeli government subsidies, the Jewish settler population increased from 250,000 to 380,000 during the Oslo years, with settler activity proceeding at a brisker pace under the tenure of Labor's Ehud Barak than Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu. Illegal under international law and built on land illegally seized from Palestinians, these settlements now incorporate nearly half the land surface of the West Bank. For all practical purposes they have been annexed to Israel (Israeli law extends not only to Israeli but also non-Israeli Jews residing in the settlements) and are off-limits to Palestinians



without special authorization. Fragmenting the West Bank into disconnected and unviable enclaves, they have impeded meaningful Palestinian development. In parts of the West Bank and East Jerusalem the only available land for building lies in areas under Israeli jurisdiction, while the water consumption of the 5,000 Jewish settlers in the Jordan Valley is equivalent to 75 per cent of the water consumption of all two million Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank. Not one Jewish settlement was dismantled during the Oslo years, while the number of new housing units in the settlements increased by more than fifty per cent (excluding East Jerusalem); again, the biggest spurt of new housing starts occurred not under Netanyahu's tenure but rather under Barak's, in the year 2000 – exactly when Barak claims to have 'left no stone unturned' in his quest for peace. During the first eighteen months of Prime Minister Sharon's term of office (beginning early 2001), forty-four new settlements – rebuked by the UN Commission on Human Rights as 'incendiary and provocative' – were established in the West Bank.⁴⁰

'Israel has created in the Occupied Territories a regime of separation based on discrimination, applying two different systems of law in the same area and basing the rights of individuals on their nationality', the B'Tselem study concludes. 'This regime is the only one of its kind in the world, and is reminiscent of distasteful regimes from the past, such as the Apartheid regime in South Africa.'

As Jewish settlements expand, Israel has begun corralling West Bank Palestinians into eight fragments of territory, each surrounded by barbed wire with a permit required to move or trade between them (trucks must load and unload on the borders 'back-to-back'), thereby further devastating an economy in which roughly one-third of the population is unemployed, half the population lives below the poverty line of \$2 per day, and one-fifth of children under five suffer from malnutrition largely caused – according to US, UN and European relief agencies – by Israeli restrictions on transporting food. 'What is truly appalling', a *Haaretz* writer lamented, 'is the blasé way in which the story has been received and handled by the mass media. ... Where is the public outcry against this attempt to divide the territories and enforce internal passports ... [and] humiliate and inconvenience a population that can scarcely earn a living or live a life as it is?'⁴¹

After seven years of on-again, off-again negotiations and a succession of new interim agreements that managed to rob the Palestinians of the few crumbs thrown from the master's table at Oslo,⁴² the moment of truth arrived at Camp David in July 2000. President Clinton and Prime Minister Barak delivered Arafat the ultimatum of formally acquiescing in a Bantustan or bearing full responsibility for the collapse of the 'peace



process'. Arafat refused, however, to budge from the international consensus for resolving the conflict. According to Robert Malley, a key American negotiator at Camp David, Arafat continued to hold out for a 'Palestinian state based on the June 4, 1967 borders, living alongside Israel', yet also 'accepted the notion of Israeli annexation of West Bank territory to accommodate settlements, though [he] insisted on a one for one swap of land of "equal size and value"' – that is, the 'minor' and 'mutual' border adjustments of the original US position on Resolution 242. Malley's rendering of the Palestinian proposal at Camp David – an offer that was widely dismissed but rarely reported – deserves full quotation: 'a state of Israel incorporating some land captured in 1967 and including a very large majority of its settlers, the largest Jewish Jerusalem in the city's history, preservation of Israel's demographic balance between Jews and Arabs; security guaranteed by a US-led international presence.' On the other hand, contrary to the myth spun by Barak–Clinton as well as a compliant media, 'Barak offered the trappings of Palestinian sovereignty', a special adviser at the British Foreign Office observed, 'while perpetuating the subjugation of the Palestinians.' Although accounts of the Barak proposal significantly differ, all knowledgeable observers concur that it 'would have meant that territory annexed by Israel would encroach deep inside the Palestinian state' (Malley), dividing the West Bank into multiple, disconnected enclaves, and offering land swaps that were of neither equal size nor equal value.⁴³

Consider in this regard Israel's reaction to the March 2002 Saudi peace plan. Crown Prince Abdullah proposed, and all twenty-one other members of the Arab League approved, a plan making concessions that actually went beyond the international consensus. In exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal, it offered not only full recognition but 'normal relations with Israel', and called not for the 'right of return' of Palestinian refugees but rather only a 'just solution' to the refugee problem. A *Haaretz* commentator noted that the Saudi plan was 'surprisingly similar to what Barak claims to have proposed two years ago' at Camp David. Were Israel truly committed to a comprehensive withdrawal in exchange for normalization with the Arab world, the Saudi plan and its unanimous endorsement by the Arab League summit ought to have been met with euphoria. In fact, after an ephemeral interlude of evasion and silence, it was quickly deposited in Orwell's memory hole. When the Bush administration subsequently made passing reference to the Saudi plan in a draft 'road map' for settling the Israel–Palestine conflict, Israeli officials loudly protested.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Barak's – and Clinton's – fraud that Palestinians at Camp David rejected a maximally generous Israeli offer provided crucial moral cover for the horrors that ensued.

**Learning from the Nazi Holocaust**

In September 2000, Palestinians embarked on a second *intifada* against Israeli rule. In the ‘warped thinking’ of Israelis since Oslo, *Haaretz* journalist Amira Hass wrote soon after the renewed resistance,

the Palestinians would accept a situation of coexistence in which they were on an unequal footing vis-à-vis the Israelis and in which they were ranked as persons who were entitled to less, much less, than the Jews. However, in the end the Palestinians were not willing to live with this arrangement. The new *intifada* ... is a final attempt to thrust a mirror in the face of Israelis and to tell them: ‘Take a good look at yourselves and see how racist you have become.’

Meanwhile, Israel, having failed in the carrot policy it initiated at Oslo, reached for the big stick. Two preconditions had to be met, however, before Israel could bring to bear its overwhelming military superiority: a ‘green light’ from the US and a sufficient pretext. Already in summer 2001, the authoritative *Jane’s Information Group* reported that Israel had completed planning for a massive and bloody invasion of the Occupied Territories. But the US vetoed the plan and Europe made equally plain its opposition. After 11 September, however, the US came on board. Sharon’s goal of crushing the Palestinians basically fit in with the US administration’s goal of exploiting the World Trade Center atrocity to eliminate the last remnants of Arab resistance to total US domination – or, in Robert Fisk’s succinct formulation, ‘to bring the Arabs back under our firm control, to ensure their loyalty’. Through sheer exertion of will and despite a monumentally incompetent leadership, Palestinians have proven to be the most resilient and recalcitrant popular force in the Arab world. Bringing them to their knees would deal a devastating psychological blow throughout the region.⁴⁵

With a green light from the US, all Israel now needed was the pretext. Predictably, it escalated the assassinations of Palestinian leaders following each lull in Palestinian terrorist attacks. ‘After the destruction of the houses in Rafah and Jerusalem, the Palestinians continued to act with restraint’, Shulamit Aloni of Israel’s Meretz party observed. ‘Sharon and his army minister, apparently fearing that they would have to return to the negotiating table, decided to do something and they liquidated Raed Karmi. They knew that there would be a response, and that we would pay the price in the blood of citizens.’⁴⁶ In fact, it was plainly the case that Israel desperately sought this sanguinary response. Once the Palestinian terrorist attacks crossed the desired threshold, Sharon was able to declare war and proceed to beat the basically defenseless civilian Palestinian population into submission.



Only the willfully blind could miss noticing that Israel's March–April invasion of the West Bank, 'Operation Defensive Shield', was largely a replay of the June 1982 invasion of Lebanon. To crush the Palestinians' goal of an independent state alongside Israel – the PLO's 'peace offensive' – Israel laid plans in September 1981 to invade Lebanon. In order to launch the invasion, however, it needed the green light from the Reagan administration and a pretext. Much to its chagrin and despite multiple provocations, Israel was unable to elicit a Palestinian attack on its northern border. It accordingly escalated the air assaults on southern Lebanon and after a particularly murderous attack that left two hundred civilians dead (including sixty occupants of a Palestinian children's hospital), the PLO finally retaliated, killing one Israeli. With this key pretext in hand and a green light now forthcoming from the Reagan administration, Israel invaded. Using the same slogan of 'rooting out Palestinian terror', Israel proceeded to massacre a defenseless population, killing some 20,000 Palestinians and Lebanese between June and September 1982, almost all civilians. One might note by comparison that, as of May 2002, the official Israeli figure for Jews 'who gave their lives for the creation and security of the Jewish State' – that is, the total number of Jews who perished in (mostly) wartime combat or in terrorist attacks from the dawn of the Zionist movement 120 years ago until the present day – comes to 21,182.⁴⁷

To repress Palestinian resistance, a senior Israeli officer in early 2002 urged the army to 'analyze and internalize the lessons of ... how the German army fought in the Warsaw ghetto'. Judging by Israeli carnage in the West Bank culminating in Operation Defensive Shield – the targeting of Palestinian ambulances⁴⁸ and medical personnel, the targeting of journalists, the killing of Palestinian children 'for sport' (Chris Hedges, *New York Times* former Cairo bureau chief), the rounding up, handcuffing and blindfolding of Palestinian males between the ages of fifteen and fifty, and affixing of numbers on their wrists, the indiscriminate torture of Palestinian detainees, the denial of food, water, electricity, medical treatment and burial to the Palestinian civilian population, the indiscriminate air assaults on some Palestinian neighborhoods, the systematic use of Palestinian civilians as human shields, the bulldozing of Palestinian homes with the occupants huddled inside – it appears that the Israeli army followed the officer's advice. When the offensive, supported by fully 90 per cent of Israelis, was finally over, 500 Palestinians were dead (including more than seventy children) and 1,500 wounded, more than 8,000 Palestinians detained in mass round-ups had been subjected to ill-treatment (and sometimes torture), more than 3,000 dwellings were demolished (sometimes with the residents still inside) leaving over 13,000 Palestinians



homeless, while the already devastated Palestinian economy suffered more than \$350 million in direct property losses.⁴⁹

The climax of Operation Defensive Shield was the Israeli siege in early April of Jenin refugee camp. A Palestinian militant told Amnesty International that the decision to resist was ‘made by the community’ against the background of an Israeli incursion the month before that had met little resistance: ‘And otherwise, where would we go? The Israelis had put a cordon around the town; we had no choice. We had nowhere else to fight.’ Human rights organizations consistently found that in the course of the siege ‘Israeli forces committed serious violations of humanitarian law, some amounting *prima facie* to war crimes’ (Human Rights Watch) and ‘the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] carried out actions which violate international human rights and humanitarian law; some of these actions amount to ... war crimes’ (Amnesty International). Some 4,000 Palestinians, nearly a third of the camp’s population, were rendered homeless in ‘destruction [that] extended well beyond any conceivable purpose of gaining access to fighters, and was vastly disproportionate to the military objectives pursued’ (HRW); indeed, ‘in one appalling and extensive operation, the IDF demolished, destroyed by explosives, or flattened by army bulldozers, a large residential area of Jenin refugee camp, much of it after the fighting had apparently ended’ (Amnesty). Some fifty-four Palestinians were killed, mostly civilians.⁵⁰ Typical of the documented Israeli atrocities in Jenin were these: a ‘thirty-seven-year-old paralyzed man was killed when the IDF bulldozed his home on top of him, refusing to allow his relatives the time to remove him from the home’; a ‘fifty-seven-year-old wheelchair-bound man ... was shot and run over by a tank on a major road outside the camp ... even though he had a white flag attached to his wheelchair’; ‘IDF soldiers forced a sixty-five-year-old woman to stand on a rooftop in front of an IDF position in the middle of a helicopter battle’ (HRW). Israeli authorities apparently didn’t initiate ‘proper investigations’ in any of the ‘unlawful killings’, giving rise to fears that the IDF has been given ‘a *carte blanche* to continue’ (Amnesty). ‘Though the IDF offensive against Nablus in April 2002 has not received the attention of Jenin’, Amnesty further found, ‘there were more Palestinians casualties (80) and fewer Israeli soldiers killed (four)’, and a comparable pattern of human rights violations and war crimes as well as the complete or partial razing of ‘religious and historical sites ... in what frequently appeared to be wanton destruction without military necessity’. In one grisly case, IDF soldiers repeatedly beat with their rifles, pummeled and flipped, and shoved off a truck and down stairs, a ‘twenty-five year-old ... paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheelchair’ (Amnesty). The IDF would later explain that the killing of a ‘large number’



of civilians has ‘deterrent value’ (senior IDF officer), and allowed for the killing of unarmed teenage boys on the grounds that they are ‘people of an age to be fighters’. It’s only a flea’s hop to the Nazi justification for killing Jewish children on the grounds that otherwise ‘a generation of avengers filled with hatred [will] grow up’.⁵¹

Recalling that Israel, ‘frequently supported by the United States’, has ‘blocked all attempts to end human rights violations and install a system of international protection in Israel and the Occupied Territories’, Amnesty International called on ‘the international community and, in particular, the United States government to immediately stop the sale or transfer of weaponry that are used to commit human rights violations to Israeli forces’.

It wasn’t only human rights organizations that criticized Operation Defensive Shield. Ehud Barak, for example, registered dissent: according to the former Prime Minister, Sharon should have acted ‘more forcefully’. In the meantime, dismissing criticism of Israeli atrocities as driven by anti-Semitism, Holocaust Industry CEO Elie Wiesel lent unconditional support to Israel – ‘Israel didn’t do anything except it reacted Whatever Israel has done is the only thing that Israel could have done. ... I don’t think Israel is violating the human rights charter. ... War has its own rules’ – and went on to stress the ‘great pain and anguish’ endured by Israeli soldiers as they did what ‘they have to do’.⁵² Boasting that he ‘left them a football stadium’, one of Wiesel’s agonized Israeli soldiers operating a bulldozer in Jenin later recounted in an interview: ‘I wanted to destroy everything. I begged the officers ... to let me knock it all down, from top to bottom. To level everything. ... For three days, I just destroyed and destroyed. ... I found joy with every house that came down, because I knew that they didn’t mind dying, but they cared for their homes. If you knocked down a house, you buried forty or fifty people for generations. If I am sorry for anything, it is for not tearing the whole camp down. ... I had plenty of satisfaction. I really enjoyed it.’ A B’Tselem investigation in Ramallah found that, typically, at ‘the Ministry of Education, not only was the computer network taken, so were overhead projectors and video players. Other equipment, including televisions and file cabinets full of records, such as student transcripts, were simply destroyed. ... Hard disks were taken from civil society organizations that had invested years of work and millions of dollars to compile this material.’ ‘It was simply unbelievable’, one young conscript recalled, ‘people simply made an effort to both destroy and rob. ... The sergeant major would bring a truck and load up. It was done openly.’ ‘The total picture’, B’Tselem concluded, ‘is one of a vengeful assault on all symbols of Palestinian society and Palestinian identity. This is combined with what



can only be described as hooliganism: the result of thousands of teenage boys and young men in uniform allowed to run wild in Palestinian cities with no accountability for their actions.' *Haaretz* reported that Israeli soldiers occupying Ramallah 'destroyed children's paintings' in the Palestinian Ministry of Culture, and 'urinated and defecated everywhere' in the building, even 'managing to defecate into a photocopier' – no doubt with 'great pain and anguish'. It seems that this has become an IDF rite of passage: during Israel's occupation of Beirut in 1982, soldiers similarly defecated in Palestinian cultural and medical institutions.⁵³

In July 2002, Israel moved quickly to avert yet another political catastrophe. With assistance from European diplomats, militant Palestinian organizations, including Hamas, reached a preliminary accord to suspend all attacks inside Israel, perhaps paving the way for a return to the negotiating table. Just ninety minutes before it was to be announced, however, Israeli leaders – fully apprised of the imminent declaration – ordered an F-16 to drop a one-tonne bomb on a densely populated civilian neighborhood in Gaza, killing, alongside a Hamas leader, eleven children and five others, and injuring 140. Predictably, the declaration was scrapped and Palestinian terrorist attacks resumed with a vengeance. 'What is the wisdom here?' a Meretz party leader asked the Knesset. 'At the very moment that it appeared that we were on the brink of a chance for reaching something of a cease-fire, or diplomatic activity, we always go back to this experience – just when there is a period of calm, we liquidate.' Yet, having headed off another dastardly Palestinian 'peace offensive', the murderous assault made perfect sense. Small wonder Sharon hailed it as 'one of our greatest successes'. And 'once again' in October 2002 'an outburst of violence' ended 'a period of relative calm in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict', the *Christian Science Monitor* reported, as Israel killed fourteen Palestinians and wounded more than a hundred (mostly civilians) in Gaza. 'The main Palestinian political faction, Fatah, was abstaining from terrorist attacks inside Israel and ... officials of the Palestinian authority were attempting to persuade militant Palestinian groups to do the same', it continued. The Israeli attack 'appeared to extinguish this initiative's chances for success' and 'may add credibility to assertions by Palestinians and others that Israel intentionally stokes the conflict'. European Union representative Javier Solana rued that the assault would undermine the Palestinians' new undertaking to 'distance themselves from violence' – which is presumably why the Israeli army commander in Gaza concluded that 'The operation was definitely successful from our point of view.'⁵⁴ Scoring a major victory on a related front, the Israeli government blocked Israeli peace activists in August 2002 from linking up with 700 of their Palestinian counterparts in Bethlehem. Reporting from