

The Hidden History of the Israeli Conflict

Sunday Address, July 18, 2004, Joe Kaye

Joe Kaye has been active on the issues of peace and social justice for almost half a century. He has been active in fighting U.S. intervention in Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, the Congo, and the Mideast; and during the Cold War he was active in the struggle for nuclear disarmament and for detente. After the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 he became a leading member of the Palestinian solidarity organization, called the November 29 Coalition. He continued to follow developments through the two intifadas and the peace process and has spoken at a number of Palestinian-sponsored events. He will bring to our attention some facts rarely brought to the attention of the general public, facts of which he claims even a great number of progressives are unaware.

This is not a comprehensive history, just a few dry facts soaked in the tears of Palestinian mothers and the blood of Palestinian children.

Turn of the Century

At the turn of the 20th century, there was a place called Palestine, about the size of New Jersey, land of a thousand villages, self-sufficient, by no means affluent, but one survived, in spite of the exactions of its Turkish rulers.

At the turn of the century, during the first Zionist stirrings in Europe, the Jews in Palestine owned only 4 percent of the land and constituted only 10 percent of the population. Almost half a century later, at the time of the partition, the Jews would still own less than 10 percent of the land.

At the turn of the century, when the Zionists began laying their plans for a Jewish state, Palestine was predominantly Arab and Islamic as a result of the Arab conquest at the end of the 7th century. Compared to the ruthless oppression of previous rulers, the Arab conquerors of Palestine treated their Jewish subjects with considerable tolerance and even sympathy. When the Crusaders invaded in the 12th to 14th century, Jews and Muslims joined together in defense of their towns. And once the Crusaders gained the upper hand, most of the Jews were slaughtered. During the reign of the Ottomans that followed, as well as in the brief period of Egyptian rule, in the 1830s before Ottoman restoration, the Jews prospered. This in contrast to the notion cultivated by the Zionists and Israel that Moslems and Arabs are congenitally and fanatically anti-Jewish. There is a long history of peaceful cohabitation of Jews and Moslems in Arab countries, in contrast to the unremitting hostility and persecution they faced by every variety of Christian in Europe.

At the turn of the century, colonialism was in its heyday. It was the period of the European carving up of Africa, then the carving up of the Arab world, an imperialism unashamed. It was the time of the White Man's Burden, the Western civilizing mission. And following the first world war with its rhetoric about self-determination, it became a

period also of a more veiled colonialism, of Great Powers who would no longer grab colonies, but rather magnanimously accept the responsibility of a mandate to gradually bring the natives to self-rule. Having wrested Palestine in the First World War from the Ottoman Empire, such a mandate was given to England by the English-controlled League of Nations, as well as a mandate for Iraq and what the British carved out as TransJordan, placing two puppet kings on Iraqi and TransJordanian thrones.

At the turn of the century began the fateful movement for a Jewish state. Launched by Theodore Herzl, a Central European Jew, Zionism was a response to the growing national chauvinism in European countries where, underpinned by theories of racial superiority, Jews became a favorite target of persecution.

The British

But how could the Zionists set up a new state? Only with the assistance of a Great Power, an imperialist power. Herzl went to the Turkish Sultan, to the German Kaiser, offering the services of his movement. Finally, an approach was made to the British Government. What could the Zionists offer Britain for its support? A top Zionist leader Max Nordau told British leaders that the Jews were prepared to protect the route to India through the Near East, while Chaim Weizman, Herzl's leading successor, told the British that the Jews in Palestine could help protect the Suez Canal. Arab loyalty, on the other hand, was shaky.

And so the deal was struck. Lord Balfour, British Prime Minister, issued a statement calling for the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine but adding that Arab rights should in no way be prejudiced. To this day, the Balfour Declaration is considered to have some kind of solid legal and moral authority. It is strange indeed that it could be thought legitimate for a colonial power to give away a country inhabited by one people to another. But, sharing the colonialist mentality, it seemed perfectly natural to the Zionists. As Herzl wrote in 1895, "The Jewish state would form part of a defensive wall for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism."

So the British opened the doors of Palestine to a steady flow of Jewish immigration, which rose ever more rapidly. In 1936 there were 384,000 Jews; by 1946 the figure would reach over 600,000.

A World Zionist Congress was launched which set up an agency to buy Palestinian land. The only willing sellers were Arab absentee landlords. Whole villages were bought up and their entire population evicted. Jewish settlers now barred Palestinians from grazing their herds on land that had been traditionally communal. And Zionist settlers refused to hire Arab labor.

As the struggle against both British rule and Zionist encroachments developed, a Palestinian village loyalty was being transformed into a national consciousness. Riots and uprisings were breaking out as early as 1921 and with mounting intensity culminating in

the great rebellion of 1936 to 1939. During these struggles, the Zionists assisted the British in putting down Arab resistance.

The British were preparing the Arabs for self-rule by murdering 50,000, and stuffing 100,000 into prisons. Their methods of teaching democracy included bombardment of villages, collective punishment, such as blowing up every house in villages suspected of harboring resistance fighters, methods learned well by their Israeli pupils. When the Zionists felt strong enough after the great influx of Jewish refugees from Nazism, they decided they no longer needed the British and turned on their former benefactors, carrying out a campaign of terror against both the British and the Arabs in preparing to set up their own state. So facing resistance by Jews and Arabs, the British dumped the problem into the laps of the UN, hoping that responsibility would be returned to them when no solution proved feasible.

The United Nations

On November 29, 1947 the United Nations Security Council voted to partition Palestine, giving half of it to the Jewish third of its population, and this despite the fact that 92 percent of the land was owned by Arabs. In the state created for the Jews, almost half the population was Arab, while in the area set aside for the Arab state there were less than 10,000 Jews. Jerusalem was to be placed under international control.

The Zionists accepted the partition plan and were portrayed as reasonable, willing to make compromises, in contrast to the intransigent Arabs who refused any notion of a Jewish state. But there was a reason for Zionist reasonableness, revealed by David Ben Gurion, who later became first Israeli Prime Minister: "After the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the state," he explained, "we will abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine." The real Zionist attitude was expressed by Chaim Weizmann, later Israel's first president: "The British told us that there are several hundred thousand Negroes there but this is a matter of no consequence." Note this well for those who bristle at the idea that Israel is a racist state.

Israeli Expansion

In their victory in the war of 1948, the Israelis not only retained territory assigned to them by the UN but also seized the fertile Galilee, as well as virtually everything bordering on the sea and the Arab neighbors, so that now about three-quarters of Palestine was under Israeli control, surrounding the other quarter.

By prearrangement with Israel, Jordan annexed the West Bank while Israel in its territory engaged in a campaign of destruction, confiscation and plunder. In terror, more than 700,000 poured out of their villages, stampeded into what is now the West Bank, Gaza or neighboring countries, a stampede which continued well into 1949, long after the fighting was over.

To this day the Israelis have maintained that that flight was voluntary, that the Palestinians had been ordered to leave by their leaders and Arab governments.

The flight of the Palestinians, said Israeli President Weizmann “miraculously simplified Israel’s task.” It did indeed, but there was nothing miraculous about it.

Even before the State of Israel was officially proclaimed, the Zionists forced a quarter of a million Arabs to flee their homes. Immediately after the General Assembly passed the Partition Plan, Zionists launched an undeclared war.

Later, an official Israeli censorship board would prohibit Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin from including in his memoirs a first-hand account of one of those expulsions, the expulsion of 50,000 Palestinian civilians from their homes near Tel Aviv on orders from Ben Gurion. This was confirmed by Ben Gurion’s war diaries wherein he admitted or boasted that he had given orders for the destruction of Arab population islands in Jewish areas.

After occupying a village, the Israeli military would usually begin by dynamiting its houses. Arrest and imprisonment and deportation were the lot of most of those who attempted to stay or were caught trying to return to their homes. In hundreds of cases these returnees were shot on the spot as “infiltrators.” Virtually the entire Arab urban population was eliminated.

The key to the flight of the Palestinians was Deir Yassin, a village near Jerusalem. 250 men, women and children, including infants, were systematically massacred by Israel terror units, one of whose leaders was Menachem Begin, later to be Prime Minister. While hiding the massacre from the world, the Israelis took grizzly pictures of the slaughtered and distributed them in Arab villages with the caption, “This is what will happen to you if you don’t leave.”

Other massacres have been documented, half of which took place before the first soldier from Arab states set foot on Palestinian land. And the massacres continue to this day, most recently in Gaza in the refugee camps of Jennin and Raffah, Gaza, that 10th circle of hell to which not even Dante dares venture, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, isolated from the rest of the occupied territories, home of over a million Palestinians mostly living in camps of desolation—a better term being reservations—and what more appropriate place for the indigenious—as in the United States.

530 Arab villages and towns were depopulated. 10,000 Arab shops passed into Jewish hands (as thousands of Jewish shops had passed into German hands under the Nazis).

By the 1970s, Arab “citizens” of Israel had lost over 80 percent of their land, which they had owned or cultivated before 1948. The Palestinians call this the Nakba, the Catastrophe.

The Zionist Claim

Let us step back and ask what is the basis for the Zionist claim to Palestine?

- The Jews were promised Palestine by God, as narrated in the Old Testament.
- The Jews inhabited the land as a sovereign nation two thousands years ago and are entitled to its recovery.
- The history of the Jewish people is a record of centuries-old, virtually universal persecution, including expulsions, massacres, and finally the Holocaust. The world therefore owed the Jewish people a secure refuge.

The problem with the Old Testament rationale, apart from the fact that only a small portion of the world's people believe in its divine authority, is that in practice the greater number of the early Zionist immigrants were irreligious, their politics left wing. As for the Jewish presence 2,000 years ago, the question is what do we do with the past 1,500 years of continuous Arab habitation?

My talk is burdened with statistics. That does not make for an attentive audience. The statistics seem abstract, but they represent suffering, dispossession, humiliation. They are concentrated expressions of human torment.

Trees

Here I shall introduce a number of political categories. The first political category is "tree." Uprooting trees is part of the strategy to destroy the viability of Palestinian life.

Listen to this Palestinian:

When a farmer plants a new tree, it takes five years before it produces anything, and then another five years before it reaches the level of production of a mature tree. For us, the trees are more than just trees. Olive trees present the symbol of our existence, our culture, our identity. All of our folk songs are about our trees and the olive harvest. Every olive tree has a story that connects it to the life of his owner. My father would say to us, "I planted this tree when your mother was pregnant" or "This is the tree where your grandmother and I sat together.

In the first uprising, or Intifada, the Israelis destroyed over 120,000 olive trees. After two years of the second Intifada, Israelis had destroyed over 700,000 trees. Here, irony is added to injury. For as Zionist charities every year ask people to contribute to plant a tree in Israel, they destroy hundreds of thousands. They have claimed to make the desert bloom; they are turning blooming land into desert.

Another political category: houses. The Israelis demolished houses by the thousands: to build a road, or because they were inside a "security zone," or because the inhabitants were not in it during a particular period, or to make room for a Jewish settlement, or because supposedly there were terrorists living there.

It is interesting to note the difference in media coverage and attitude when a natural disaster hits somewhere in the world and hundreds of homes are carried away in floods or destroyed by fire. Aid is immediately mobilized and sympathy is universal. But somehow in the case of Palestinians, the loss of thousands of their homes caused by deliberate human cruelty is met with silence, indifference.

The political category of roads. In order to build a by-pass road for 25 settlers, Israel destroys thousands of acres of land that had been the livelihood of Palestinian families. On account of the systematic segmentation of the land, it has become impossible to drive more than a few miles without entering Israeli-controlled territory with its military checkpoints and its systematic brutalization and humiliation of the Palestinian population.

The coroner's verdict: death by strangulation.

Water

No surprise that water is a political category of the highest importance that will one day overtake oil as the earth's most contentious resource. As everything else in the occupied territories, Israel controls Palestinian water resources.

A dozen years since occupation, the Israeli Water Authority had not approved the construction of a single well by the Palestinians for agricultural purposes and had even forbidden the digging of wells to catch rainfall.

Israel confiscates 80 percent of the water that should be used by Palestinians and gives it to the settlers. While Palestinians lack water for their most fundamental needs, the Jewish settlements have watered gardens and swimming pools (shades of Apartheid South Africa).

The Wall

The political category of walls: Begun a couple of years ago, the 24-foot Apartheid Wall, as it is dubbed by the Palestinians, built on occupied territory, has caused destruction of almost 1,000 homes. 30,000 Palestinian farmers have lost their livelihood as their land has ended up on the wall's other side. The wall surrounds the big Jewish settlements, making an emphatic assertion of their permanence, penetrating at times deep inside the West Bank. It is estimated that the wall will cause the expropriation of still another 15 percent of Palestinian land. The Israelis may make some minor adjustments as a gesture to court decisions, but the wall will stand.

In 37 years of occupation, the longest occupation in modern history, a little over half of the total land area in the West Bank is now in Jewish hands. Here are maps showing the work of the boa constrictor, strangling the life out of the Palestinian people. I invite you to inspect these maps later.

Back before partition, when the Zionists were trying to win public opinion for a Jewish state, Golda Meir purred: “The state will not be Jewish in a sense that Jews will have more rights than non-Jews or that the Jewish community will enjoy a privileged status as compared with the other communities.” Afterwards, the same Golda Meir now Prime Minister, told the world: “There is no such thing as a Palestinian people. It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn’t exist.” Echo of the famous Zionist slogan: “A land without people for a people without land.”

To deal with the embarrassing reality, the Israeli authorities do whatever they can to obliterate every sign of the Palestinian presence. They “disappear” them in the textbooks. They disappear them on their maps. The occupied territories are called Judea and Samaria. But sometimes the Israeli leaders can afford to be frank. Admitted Hero General Moshe Dayan: “There is not a single Jewish village in this country that has not been built on the site of an Arab village.”

As part of the rationale for invading Iraq, the Bush Administration has cited Saddam Hussein’s war crimes, as well as the repeated violations of UN resolutions.

The number of UN resolutions condemning Israel runs into the dozens—resolutions calling on Israel to permit the return of the refugees, resolutions condemning the refusal of Israel to permit their return, resolutions condemning Israeli settlements, condemning the annexation of Jerusalem, repeatedly calling on Israel to withdraw from occupied territory, condemning Israel for its violations of human rights, land requisitions, house demolitions, mass arrests and detentions, deportations.

War Crimes

As for war crimes: Of course there is the systematic murder of civilians, including children.

The Geneva Convention says collective punishment is a war crime. But collective punishment is Israel’s bread and butter. It carries out deadly punitive expeditions against towns and villages in retaliation for Palestinian military strikes. It repeatedly imposes curfews. How can one make real what it means to live under curfew, to be confined as in a prison cell, to lean out the window and be shot at, to be unable to get food or medical care, to have children live in a straitjacket?

Israeli army roadblocks are everywhere making travel a misery. Trips to and from work that should take minutes take hours, access to doctors and hospitals often prevented. Crops going to market are spoiled. Soldiers frequently bar Palestinians from reaching their own orchards. It is harassment which makes the daily grind of living almost insupportable. All of this violates international law. Settlements by the occupier are contrary to international law.

One in five Palestinians has passed through prison and detention centers. The International Red Cross and human rights organizations have reported systematic Israeli torture of prisoners.

Then the steady drumbeat of assassinations, again universally recognized as an international war crime.

It is not enough that the Palestinians must contend with the Israel military occupation forces, they are faced with the attacks and harassment of the ever-growing settler population, attacks which go on with impunity. They burn greenhouses, destroy irrigation networks and damage fields. They have commandeered the crops of Palestinian farmers.

Apartheid

One of the propaganda themes attempting to varnish Israel's image is the description of Israel as an "oasis of democracy" in an otherwise undemocratic region. The economy and infrastructure of Israel was built by apartheid practices. While the needs of Jewish business ultimately broke down the embargo on Arab labor, Palestinians are still barred from many types of work, being used basically as unskilled labor.

Within Israel even the majority, Sephardic Jewish population are second-class citizens. While immigrants from Poland, for example, received preferential treatment in housing and jobs, the Moroccans and Yemeni Jews were dumped in remote border settlements. The so-called Israeli Arabs, placed for 20 years under martial law, now constitute close to 20 percent of the Israeli population. They are segregated, only a small minority being allowed to live in a few "mixed" cities, and forbidden by law from living in the new quarters of Jerusalem. They receive only a fourth to a third of what the state budget gives to Jews for communal services and education.

Israel defines itself as a Jewish state and vows that nothing will ever be done to alter that. Is this not akin to apartheid South Africa declaring itself a state of the white race? And who should know better than South African Prime Minister Vorster, who called Israel an apartheid state, approvingly.

Foreign Policy

But let us move on to another indicator of Israel's so-called democracy, its foreign policy. One of Israel's closest allies over the years was Apartheid South Africa. Close economic ties were established. In the 1970s, Israel was South Africa's principal arms supplier. Not a single country in the world recognized the Bantustans set up by the South African Government. But Israel furnished one of those Bantustans, Ciskei, with weapons and military training. Today in free South Africa those Bantustans have disappeared, but Israel, dazzled by their example, is trying to set up similar Palestinian Bantustans in the occupied territories.

The most notorious collaboration of Israel with South Africa involved the joint testing of an atomic bomb off the South African coast. Not only did Israel support the South African dictatorship. Israel was the leading supplier of the Zairian army serving the monster Mobutu. Israel was particularly active in assisting the brutal military dictatorships of Latin America, especially in the 1970s when because of domestic political constraints, Washington could not directly do so and turned to Israel as its proxy.

Thus Israel sent warplanes to the government of the generals in Argentina, trained the security forces of the Fascist dictatorship of El Salvador, provided 95 percent of Nicaraguan Dictator Somoza's military equipment, and supplied the military needs of the genocidal Guatemalan dictatorship responsible for the slaughter of over 100,000 overwhelmingly indigenous people

An aside: Zionists try to suppress criticism of their rule and of their ideology by accusing their critics of being either anti-Semitic or self-hating Jews. I guess they put me into the latter category.

Zionism

The fact is that at one time all the rabbis in Europe considered Zionism a heresy, just as there are Hassidic rabbis today who in New York attend Palestinian solidarity rallies. I quote the eloquent statement by the largest Jewish workers' organization at the time of the old Russian Empire:

Instead of an exodus...the Bund advocates greater cooperation with the non-Jewish world, especially with the underprivileged, suffering peoples. Instead of nationalistic justice, which is often oblivious to the suffering of those outside of its particular group, the Bund teaches international justice which combines justified Jewish claims with respect for the rights of other groups.

Zionism is not Judaism. It is a political ideology, a political movement. Israel has no right to speak for or represent the Jews of the world.

The PLO and the Intifada

The Palestine Liberation Organization was set up in 1964 by the Arab Governments to ensure their control over the Palestinian movement. But the PLO asserted its independence after the debacle of the Arab armies in 1967 and Israel's total occupation.

With the destruction of most of the PLO's forces in Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, it was generally believed that it would take a generation for the resistance movement to recover. The Palestinians took heart, however, when they saw the Israelis retreating under the harassing blows of the Lebanese popular movement. And so the first Intifada, which means "shaking off," broke out at the end of 1987, sparked by the killing of four Palestinians by Israeli troops, but really the product of a newfound confidence. The Intifada was organized by grassroots leadership, a ramified network of popular

committees. With the exception of stone throwing, this first Intifada was primarily non-violent: mass demonstrations, tax revolts, boycotts of Israeli goods, Palestinians growing their own food in home and community gardens, commercial strikes.

The Iron Fist

The Israeli response to Palestinian nonviolence was a policy dubbed the “iron fist,” a ruthless application of overwhelming force—storming into homes in the middle of the night, ransacking belongings, beating the occupants bloody, closing of schools, mass deportations. One in five between the ages of 15 and 55 arrested, tens of thousands tortured. One of the components of this “iron fist” policy was the deliberate breaking of Palestinian arms and legs. This tactic, however, led to such an outcry, even in Israel itself, that it had to be abandoned.

Statistics again: 150,000 Palestinians have lost their lives since the creation of the Israeli state. 10,000 are permanently maimed.

So to those who offer the Palestinians today gratuitous advice on how they should conduct their struggle and wonder why they can't imitate the US civil rights movement the answer is that they tried. But unlike the US Government, which, in the period of the worldwide anti-colonial rising, was sensitive to international public opinion and had to make concessions to the Black freedom movement, the Israeli government cares only about the opinion in the White House and Congress, and there they have been backed to the hilt.

The children. Their stones generally do little damage, but they gain a sense that they are contributing to the resistance, that they are not helpless. And this more than anything else prevents their utter demoralization and emotional collapse.

Treated with increasing harshness by the Israeli military, the Israelis now fire upon the children to permanently maim, and sometimes to kill. In the first three months of the present Intifada, children made up a third of those killed by Israeli soldiers or settlers. At least 7,000 had been injured, 2,000 of whom were on their way to or from school. 500 had been disabled for life.

The Peace Process

The first Intifada ended not because it was crushed by the Israelis but because the people followed their PLO leadership who assured them the so-called peace process they had embarked on would be the road to liberation. That process was initiated by Washington after defeating Iraq in the first Gulf War. It was then expected that the overwhelming display of US might would chasten the Palestinians and get them to accept a settlement far short of their previous demands. Begun in Madrid in 1991, continued through secret negotiations between the Israeli government and the PLO, in 1993 there emerged a joint Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles. That, in turn, set in motion a series of interim agreements, the most important of which, known as Oslo II, provided for Israeli military

withdrawal from a number of West Bank towns, the election and setting up of a Palestinian Authority in 2 percent of the occupied territories—yes, I said 2 percent of the occupied territories (expanded in later agreements)—a larger area comprising the Palestinian villages under a supposed joint jurisdiction, but with Israel ultimately having the last word, and finally, the area of Jewish settlements to be totally under Israeli control. The interim measures giving Palestinians a degree of autonomy were to be followed after three years by negotiations on a final settlement wherein all of the fundamental and thorniest questions would be resolved.

The price of this “peace process” was the calling off of the Intifada to be guaranteed by the Palestinian Authority. So the Palestine Authority was allowed to collect the garbage in the urban areas and provide employment to its people with a host of security forces created to stifle dissent. The Authority proceeded to throw thousands into prisons and disregard basic human rights, actions warmly supported by Israel and the United States.

And meanwhile, the Jewish population of annexed East Jerusalem, rose from 22 to 170 thousand. And meanwhile, the number of settlers on the West Bank and East Jerusalem nearly doubled to 400,000. And meanwhile the roads kept tearing up Palestinian land and the economy of the country lay in ruins, the standard of living of the people sinking dramatically.

Finally, in the face of total Palestinian disenchantment, in the face of the continued world public demand for an end to Israeli aggression and for a just peace, Barak brought forth, with President Clinton as its midwife in Camp David, an unbelievably magnanimous final offer which, again unbelievably, the Palestinians rejected. Arafat was thereupon condemned as having proved his duplicity, his lack of interest in peace, and his continued yearnings to drive the Jews into the sea.

In all the hoopla about the Barak plan, it wasn't mentioned that the State of Palestine was to be divided into four separate cantons, each surrounded by Israeli-controlled territory where Palestinian citizens and goods would require Israeli permission in order to move; it wasn't mentioned that Israel would retain control over water, borders, and airspace; not mentioned that Israel refused to take responsibility for the flight of the refugees; barely mentioned that Barak insisted on retaining Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel; not mentioned that with Palestinians having already compromised when they accepted Israel's existence on 78 percent of historic Palestine they were now expected to give up still more from the remaining 22 percent; and finally, not mentioned that most of the settlements, absolutely illegal in the eyes of international law, would not be dismantled.

Second Intifada

On September 28, 2000, Man of Peace Sharon forcibly intruded into the site of the Al-Aqsa mosque, one of the holiest shrines in the Moslem world, accompanied by over a thousand police. With that provocation the second intifada erupted. But as in the case of the first intifada, which was triggered by a particular incident, the new uprising was the product of long-simmering Palestinian rage over the fruitless results of years of a so-

called peace process that brought them nothing but misery and no closer to a final agreement, which Israel kept putting off on a variety of pretexts.

This time the uprising was not committed to nonviolence. The Israel response, once again, was draconian. By the second year of the uprising 100,000 acres of agricultural land were destroyed. Now they were shooting at Palestinian ambulances, at journalists trying to document the atrocities committed by the Israelis such as the use of heavy artillery against civilian neighborhoods. The entire infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority was decimated, Palestinians records destroyed (as in Iraq) to prevent the present and future functioning of elementary services for the population. Tanks constantly move in and out of every town and village leaving a trail of death and destruction in their wake.

The right of return. The US and NATO not long ago engaged in the pulverization of Serbia, allegedly because of the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. How many tears were shed by our politicians and the media about the horrible fate of the Kosovo Albanians? Both the United States and Europe went to war for these refugees and would settle for nothing less than total repatriation. As for the Palestinian refugees and their ethnic cleansing, as usual another standard is applied.

A Just Peace?

Clearly, Israel has no interest in a just peace. Why should she when she is gaining everything she wants through the present state of affairs? The Israeli strategy, and quite successful, has been to “create facts on the ground.” And for the first time an American Administration, supported by the Democratic Party standard-bearer, has recognized those “facts,” the fact of the settlements, the fact of the wall, the fact of Jerusalem as sole capital of Israel, the fact of the permanent dispossession of the refugees. And this makes a viable Palestinian state impossible. This makes peace impossible. Is it any wonder that increasing numbers of Palestinians have come to the conclusion: “The Israelis have left us with only one choice: life without dignity or dignity without life.”

The Israelis justify every act of repression and destruction in the name of their security. But every so-called security measure Israel has taken and continues to take creates only greater Israeli insecurity, greater rage among the Palestinians and among the great masses of peoples in the region—and indeed around the world. The Israelis constantly refer to the bogeyman of Palestinians wishing to drive Israel into the sea. From the beginning, the vast majority of Palestinians, including their political organizations were not about exterminating the Jews. They first tried to try to prevent the influx of hostile Jewish immigrants forced on them by their British overlord. They struggled to prevent the steady loss of their land and the erosion of their economic position. They then tried to prevent the creation and consolidation of a Jewish apartheid state, a state that by definition was opposed to the rights of Palestinians.

U.S. Responsibility

No understanding of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is possible without placing the United States at its very heart. Just as Zionism piggy-backed on British imperialism, so Israeli power has grown by fastening itself to the US superpower. In return for lavish economic and military aid, Israel acts as Washington's regional policeman against Arab nationalism. Under the pretext of fighting communism during the cold war, or terrorism now, it is nationalism which is Washington's real target, for Arab nationalism poses the greatest threat to the US oil interests.

The oil companies have always controlled US foreign policy and the top US officials, starting with Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes (under Woodrow Wilson), who later became Chief Counsel for the American Petroleum Institute, through Secretaries of State Acheson and Dulles, whose law firms played major roles in defending oil company interests, right up through the two Bush oil presidencies, including Dick Cheney and Condoleezza Rice.

To illustrate the stakes, one should note that in a 15-year period, the oil companies drew more profits out of the Mideast than the British received in 100 years of exploitation of their entire empire. Given the constant encroachments, the confiscations, the encirclements, the devastation, Palestinians are not thinking about exterminating the Jews, but they are reluctantly coming to the conclusion that the possibilities of a viable separate Palestinian state are evaporating. So while the main focus continues to be the creation of a viable independent Palestinian state, voices are being raised once again for a unitary state, a democratic, bi-national secular state, a state of all the people. Eminently reasonable and fair to most of the people of the world; a nightmare to most Israelis.

I could not present to you today a comprehensive history. Just a few dry facts soaked in the tears of Palestinian mothers and the blood of Palestinian children.