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THE ROLE OF THE US IN THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF JEWISH NATIONALISM

Carl D. McIntosh

Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

20 September 1974

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THE ROLE OF THE US IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
JEWISH NATIONALISM

by

Colonel Carl D. McIntosh  
Corps of Engineers

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This essay analyzes the US-Israeli relationship and the role the US has played in the development of Israel as a nation-state. The historical background, from the development of the concept of a "national home" for the Jews in Palestine to the establishment of the present commonwealth of Israel, was traced. Concentration was given to those aspects of this process which caused US involvement, with special emphasis on conflicts which resulted in Arab antagonism toward the US. This analysis of the US-Israeli relationship reveals the profound political influence, both domestic and international, of the Jewish US citizens. This influence, via the mass media, has tended to dictate US-Israeli relations until the present energy crisis. Conclusions include the US present attempt to promote a more balanced approach to the Arab-Israeli disputes.

The conflict in the Middle East between the Arabs and the Jews is the result of people competing for the same territory. Both Arabs and Jews have developed profound emotional and historical attachments to a section of land formerly called Palestine. The nineteenth century found two ideologies, Zionism and Arab nationalism setting a collision course for the twentieth century. Zionism, which advocated the gathering of World Jewry and its settlement in Palestine; and Arab nationalism, which advocated Arab autonomy within the Ottoman Empire; caused only a local crisis originally, but recently has developed international dimensions.

The United States grew increasingly concerned about the Soviet presence in the Middle East following World War II. This fear of the Soviet Union resulted in a U.S. policy to bolster the economic and military strength of Middle Eastern countries in the hopes that they would remain Western allies; and her position has been to maintain friendship toward both Israel and the Arab states. Ironically, as U.S. involvement in the Middle East has increased, her relationship with the Arab states has soured and her influence has dwindled; because the Arabs feel that the U.S. is greatly influenced by Zionist interest and favors the nation of Israel. As the Arabs came to interpret U.S. policy as being pro-Israeli, they became convinced that they must look elsewhere for military and economic assistance. Thus the U.S.S.R. has emerged as the major source of Arab military supplies, and they exert great influence in the political sphere.



In order to analyze the US-Israeli relationship and the role the U.S. has played in the development of Israel as a nation-state; one must briefly trace the conception of "a home in Palestine for the Jews" with concentration on those aspects of this concept which caused conflict with Arab nationalism. Two of the most controversial and widely discussed documents concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict have been the McMahon Correspondence of 1915-1916 and the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The controversy centering around these documents is due, in part, to the fact that they were the first concrete commitments made to the Arabs and Zionists by the British government. Both of these documents are cited by the Arabs and the Zionists in the justification of their claims to the land that was formerly Palestine, and is now the state of Israel.

Prior to WWI, the Arabs wished to gain their independence from the harsh rule of the Ottoman Sultan, and they made their desire known to Great Britain. Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner of Egypt, and Hussein Ibn Ali, the Sherif of Mecca, corresponded in a series of letters. The British promised to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sherif, with the exception of a section in present day southeastern Turkey and portions of Syria lying west of districts of Damascus, Hama, Hama, and Aleppo. The Arabs accepted the promise in good faith and began their revolt against the Ottoman Turks, and this revolt became very important to the Allied cause during the war. After the war, controversy arose over the ambiguous language

concerning the boundary limits, and it is not known today whether or not the British intended to include Palestine in the area of Arab independence. But, be that as it may, the Arabs base their claim to Palestine on this McMahon Correspondence.

On 8 January 1918, President Wilson publicized a program designed to foster world peace at the conclusion of World War I. His program, known as the "Fourteen Points" advocated the idea of a new world society which would be governed by the consent of the governed. Of special importance to the Arabs, was Wilson's twelfth point which called for self-government for the peoples under Turkish rule. Since the great majority of Palestine's population was Arab and Muslim, these Palestinian Arabs saw in this proposal an opportunity to establish their own state and government.

As early as 1896, Theodor Herzl advocated a political state for the Jewish people, and this provided an inspiration for the Zionist movement. Since the Ottoman Sultan prohibited purchase of land in Palestine by Jews, the Zionist concentrated on gaining support for their Jewish state from the British. Finally, on 18 June 1917 Lionel Walter Rothchild submitted a declaration on behalf of the Zionist to the British government. The declaration urged the British government to recognize Palestine as the "national home" of the Jewish people. Arthur James Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, replied that the British government viewed with favor this declaration. The term "national home" was not clearly defined by either the Zionists or the British, but the declaration was interpreted by the



Zionist as a British commitment to help them fulfill their nationalistic aspirations in Palestine. The Mandate of Palestine, promulgated by the League of Nations, incorporated the Balfour Declaration; thus implying an international commitment to support the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people.

The Arabs were angry because their wishes were not considered. They constituted approximately ninety percent of the population in Palestine<sup>1</sup>, and were referred to in the Mandatory Agreement as merely "the other sections" of the population; whereas reference was made to the Jewish community by name. In addition, in formulating the Mandatory Agreement, the findings of a high-level American commission headed by Dr. Henry King and Charles Crane had been ignored. The King-Crane Commission recommended the unification of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine as a single, independent state; and reported that dividing the Arab territory into Mandates as the French and British advocated would not be advisable. But the U.S. had come into the war late and had little say at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919-1920. In keeping with her isolation policy, she did not join the League of Nations; and therefore, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine were delivered into the hands of the victors.

The Zionists, finding their cause greatly strengthened, encouraged large-scale Jewish immigration to Palestine; and began to purchase land on which these immigrants could work and live. Unrestricted immigration and land purchase aggravated the Palestinian Arabs. The Mandatory Agreement provided for the establishment of a Jewish Agency, which assisted Jewish

immigration as well as agricultural and educational programs. The Agency, also, gradually assumed quasi-governmental functions, and this experience in politics and self-rule proved to be extremely valuable to the Zionist when the time came for the establishment of their own government. During the ten years prior to WWII, there was a large increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine due to the mushrooming of anti-Semitism in central Europe. The Arabs rejected the idea that they should bear the burden of European guilt in relation to the Jew; and as the Jewish population grew, friction between the Arabs and the Jews turned to violence.

In 1939 Great Britain issued a "White Paper" which stated that she would continue to govern Palestine for ten years; and if Arabs and Zionists were able to cooperate with one another they would then be given more responsibility in running the government until, eventually, Palestine would become an independent state. However, stringent restrictions were placed on the number of Jewish immigrants to Palestine and the amount of land that could be purchased by the Jews. This attempt by the British to placate the Arabs was initiated in order to protect the British interests in the Middle East at that time. There was a rising interest in the area by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, and the British badly needed control of this land and the support of its Arab inhabitants there and throughout the Middle East. Apparently, the average American was uninformed by problems in the Middle East, and unconcerned about the plight of the Jews in general.

In March 1938, a majority of Americans believed that the persecution of German Jews was either wholly or partly their own fault...in both 1938 and 1943, about 8 out of 10 Americans were opposed to increasing immigration quotas for political refugees from Germany, Austria, and other countries that had passed under Nazi rule...in 1939 more than 6 out of 10 Americans were against special quotas for refugee Jewish children.<sup>2</sup>

In 1942 the steamer Struma carrying hundreds of Jews to Palestine was denied entrance due to the restrictions on Jewish immigration. The Struma returned to sea and sank, drowning all but one of its passengers. The impact of this tragedy and the atrocities of Nazi Germany resulted in the organization of the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs, which held a conference at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City.

The Biltmore Conference is particularly noteworthy, because it marked the first occasion on which most Zionists publicly called for the establishment of a "Jewish commonwealth" rather than an undefined "national home". In 1922 Congress had sanctioned the idea of a "national Jewish home", and in routine manner congressional and state legislative declarations had continued to advocate this. However, after the Biltmore Conference, the Wright Compton Palestine Resolution<sup>3</sup> of 1944 was introduced; this resolution called for the establishment of a "Jewish Commonwealth. That same year both the Democratic and Republican party platforms mentioned a commonwealth in Palestine. Domestic politics in election years invariably waters down any statesmanlike concern for the national interest, but this was especially true in 1944. In his concern for the outcome of the election, Harry Truman bowed to the will of

the Zionist. Since seventy-five percent of American Jewry lived in fourteen cities concentrated in the states with the largest electoral vote, and forty-two percent were residents of New York City, the key to the Empire State with its forty-five electoral votes, he could do no less.<sup>4</sup>

While the Zionist were organizing Zionist groups throughout the world, developing a favorable and sympathetic international climate, wooing politicians and government officials, and publishing their position in the Western press; the Arabs were becoming more frustrated. They were disunified and were ill-schooled in the art of Western diplomacy and public relations. Due to this Zionist influence and to the emotional aspects involved, the general public in the United States began to support Zionism without any complete appreciation of its international political consequences.

In 1946 the Anglo American Committee arrived in the tension filled area of Palestine, and recommended the immediate removal of restrictions on immigration and Arab land sales to Jews; and reaffirmed a recommendation by President Truman for the immediate admission of 100,000 refugees which no other country wanted, as they were too sick and too poor to qualify for admission elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Britain rejected the Committee's recommendations, and Jewish terrorist groups attacked British army and police posts. In February 1947, the British declared the Mandate unworkable and laid the problem of the future of Palestine in the lap of the United Nation's Special Committee on Palestine.

On 29 November 1947 the General Assembly of the U.N. adopted this special committee's proposal to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The United States not only approved the partition, but in the crucial moments before the decision she threw her full weight into the effort to mobilize the votes that were still needed.<sup>6</sup> Without this effort, the partition resolution may not have passed. The United States' aims in the area were to maintain peace, to gain Arab good will, to protect the oil interest, and to help the escapees of Hitler's massacres. The partition plan offered some prospect of fulfilling all aims, but especially of closing this painful episode of Jewish martyrdom which weighed heavily on the conscience of the Western world. To the U.S. partition seemed the only available solution.

But the Arabs refused to accept Resolution 181 concerning partition, and began a deliberate effort to alter by force this settlement.

Actual armed invasion, which began in January, was preceded by systematic Arab attacks in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa, Safad, and Ramleh; ambushes along the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road and the Haifa-Tel Aviv highway; raids against Jewish settlements in Galilee, the Hebron area, the Sharon, and Negev; and assaults on the Jewish quarters of the Old City of Jerusalem and Jaffa out-shirts of Tel Aviv.<sup>7</sup>

British rule over Palestine ended officially at midnight on 14 May 1948, and in spite of armed conflict throughout the area, a Jewish nation called Israel was proclaimed by the Provisional Government headed by David BenGurion. Eleven minutes<sup>8</sup> later, the United States recognized this new nation.



As a result of this armed conflict, known as the Arab-Israeli War of 1948-1949, over 700,000<sup>9</sup> Palestinian Arabs were forced from or fled their homes when Israel conquered the territory where they lived; and the armistice agreements left Israel with about one-quarter<sup>10</sup> more territory than it had under the partition plan.

The United States and the United Nations have not found a solution to this refugee problem. The United Nations resolved that:

The refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible.<sup>11</sup>

The U.S. has offered to help Israel with a loan to cover the compensation of the refugees, but she has refused. Israel did not see herself as the aggressor in this war and she did not want hostile Arabs returning to the area. The Arab refugees bitterly oppose settlement elsewhere.

Between 1949 and 1956, the interim period before the outbreak of the second major Arab-Israeli war, the Arab states adjacent to Israel carried out periodic border raids against her. In addition, Egypt interfered with Israeli shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba which was vital to Israel's trade. A combination of these factors, high-lighted by the nationalization of the Suez Canal by President Nasser of Egypt, culminated in the signing by Great Britain, France, and Israel of a secret



agreement which allowed Israel to attack Egypt with reassurance that she would be assisted by the two European powers.

On 29 October 1956 war broke out again between Israel and her Arab neighbors. Israeli tanks and planes invaded the Sinai Peninsula, sweeping westward with ease to the Suez Canal. However, because of international pressure exerted mainly by the United States and the Soviet Union, Israel and her allies withdrew from their occupation of Egyptian territory. Anthony Eden, Prime Minister of Great Britain, pleaded with President Dwight Eisenhower not to take such a stand as the fate of the Western European nations was at stake. But the United States took no heed; and instead stood for the rule of law and the U.N. Charter, even though she alienated herself at the time from her two major allies, France and Great Britain, and the state of Israel. Perhaps more than anything else, the stand displayed to the world that Washington can not be counted on to support Israel's policies blindly and unconditionally.

A United Nations Emergency Force was stationed on the Egyptian-Israeli border, as well as at Sharm al Sheikh, after the 1967 armistice; this was done in order to assure Israel that her shipping routes via the Gulf of Aqaba would not be jeopardized by Egyptian interference.

With the withdrawal of these Emergency Forces under insistence from Egypt, the Egyptians reestablished the blockade of Israeli ships. The Israelis saw these acts as official Arab aggression, and on 5 June 1967 moved against Egypt. In just six days Israel's armed forces had defeated her Arab

neighbors and were in control of vast areas of Arab territory including Arab Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, Sinai, west bank of the Jordan River, and the Gulf of Aqaba. These occupied territories assumed an air of permanence, because Israel's banking systems, currency, laws, taxes, and even teachers and textbooks were introduced into the area. The administrative fusion of the Old City of Jerusalem became an accomplished fact, and Israel declared Jerusalem as capital of Israel. The U.S., however, has never recognized Jerusalem as such; and has continued to keep its embassy at Tel Aviv.

After the Six Day War, the United States and the Soviet Union were able to join in the unanimous United Nations Security Council Resolution for a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This resolution included these five points:

The withdrawal from territory occupied in the June War; the recognition of the right of existence of all states and the ending of claims of belligerence; free passage of all international waterways; a just solution of the Arab refugee problem; and the recognition of the right of all states to live in peace and security within recognized and guaranteed borders.<sup>12</sup>

At home, however, the U.S. seemed almost jubilant over Israel's success. The mass media indicated that the Israeli victory was a victory for Israel's supporters and benefactors in the West, also. The Detroit News quoted Gerald Ford, then House Minority Leader, of saying that Israel had bailed out U.S. interests in the area, and therefore, the U.S. should lend Israel a destroyer to replace the one sunk by the Egyptians.<sup>13</sup>

After the war, the U.S. became Israel's principle arms supplier, directly and through West Germany. The Soviet Union

began to increase arms shipment to Egypt, and began maintaining a substantial naval presence in the Mediterranean.

This war aggravated old problems and created new ones. But of all the problems, that of the Palestinian refugees probably was and is the most important. After the six days, the 700,000 refugees had swelled to more than twice that number and included Syrians and Egyptians, as well as the original Palestinians. These refugees fall into 4 categories: one group of approximately 575,000 are found in camps financed through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency; another group have found a new life in neighboring Arab countries; a third group are comprised of those Arabs living on the west bank of the Jordan River or in the Gaza Strip, governed under auspices of Israel; and finally those which make up approximately 1/10th of Israel's population.<sup>14</sup>

The refugee position is forcefully articulated by Palestinian commandos called Fedayeen. Of these resistant groups, the Al Fateh or Palestine Movement of National Liberation, is the largest and most powerful. Although it does not identify with any specific ideology or political regime; it does advocate armed struggle as the only means of influencing the enemy decisively or of stirring the masses to liberate Palestine from the Jews. These Palestinian commandos are recruited mainly from the ranks of the refugees, and they receive their indoctrination and guerilla training in Arab countries adjacent to Israel. By 1970 the commandos' raids on Israel and the counterattacks by Israeli forces had greatly undermined the

the authority of some of the Arab governments. King Hussein had to finally order his army to suppress the guerillas in Jordan. An Arab commando organization claimed to have organized the massacre at the Lod Airport in Israel on 30 May 1972, killing twenty-eight people and injuring seventy-two others. On 5 September 1972, Arab terrorists killed eleven members of the Israeli Olympic Team in Munich, West Germany. Although some of the Arab public does not support the commandos' tactics and activity, most do oppose Israel; and therefore, do support the commandos' cause.

In the fall of 1973, the Arab-Israeli war again broke out on a mass scale. Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal to attack Israeli positions in the Sinai desert, and this was co-ordinated with a Syrian assault on the Golan Heights. Israel retaliated by bombing Damascus and Cairo. The U.S.S.R. airlifted new weapons to Egypt and Syria, many being tested for the first time. These weapons included SAM6 anti-aircraft missiles, giant T62 tanks, "Frog" ground-to-ground missiles, MIG23 fighters, and large quantities of amphibious equipment.<sup>15</sup> Israel began airlifting anti-aircraft missiles and other war supplies from the U.S. Governments throughout the Arab world promised aid or troop support to Egypt and Syria. Within a few days, it became clear that this Yom Kippur war would be a long, costly war. And when Arab nations used an embargo of oil shipments to the U.S. and Western Europe as a political weapon in their war with Israel; the superpowers, the U.S. and U.S.S.R., became extremely agitated.

Although America is not dependent on importing Arab oil, the largest oil concessions in the Arab Middle East are held by U.S. owned companies.<sup>16</sup> Besides these investments in oil, significant numbers of Americans also have money in airlines, shipping firms, and other industries in the area. The area provides a ready market for U.S. consumer products and other merchandise. Also, American capital devoted to ships, refining, distributing, and marketing facilities in Western Europe are dependent on oil imported from the Middle East. The Yom Kippur War demonstrated that an Arab extortionism can threaten the industrial societies and their peoples' mode of life.

The U.S. is beginning to realize that she must not push the Arabs to extremism, because it is not in the best interests of either the Israel or the U.S. The Arabs have criticized what they believe to be a pro-Israel attitude in the U.S. They point out that millions of dollars are donated to Israel by various Jewish organizations in the U.S., and that the tax structure in the U.S. encourages such donations. The U.S. government has granted the right of dual citizenship to American Jews residing in Israel; another illustration of U.S. favoritism of Israel. On the other hand, they contend that the U.S. is the only country with enough influence on Israel to induce her to come to terms with them.

Unfortunately, until recently domestic politics in America have dictated U.S. reaction to all Arab-Israeli conflicts. No American leader, whatever his stature or party affiliation, has had the political courage to suggest that a re-examination of



American policies might be in order. Israel's influence on American politics stems from a variety of factors that should be mentioned. First, is the concentration of the "Jewish vote" in the 3 key states of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and California. No candidate aspiring to the White House can ignore the electoral votes of these states. The financial contributions of wealthy pro-Israeli American Jews and firms to the campaigns of the political parties are equally important. Another element is the Jewish influence in, if not near-control of, American mass media. Related to this cultural and political influence through the mass media, is the influence of Jewish intellectuals and their presence in large numbers at many colleges and universities in America. Buttressing their influence in the theatre, the film industry, radio journals, and in the colleges and universities; is a built-in sympathy on the part of the guilt-ridden Christian conscience.

However, with the threat of an Arab oil embargo, the U.S. public has become a little more practical in its thinking. And as a result of its near-disastrous experience in the Yom Kippur War, Israel has come to the realization that she is totally dependent upon the U.S. for her security. Recently, Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, has managed to convince the Arabs that the United States has shifted from what they have regarded as one-sided support for Israel to a new even-handed policy in the Middle East.

A presidential visit from President Nixon to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Israel, and Jordan was made in order to displace



Russia as the dominant influence, and to gain assurances of uninterrupted access to Arab oil in June of 1974. Mr. Kissinger forced Israel to observe a cease-fire he had arranged, and induced Israel to withdraw forces from the Suez Canal as the price for a disengagement agreement with Egypt, and to withdraw from Syrian lands. Just how far the U.S. will go to exert pressure in the matter of Jerusalem, could become a sensitive political issue in the U.S. But it is hoped that these transactions to date have given the U.S. greater influence in the Middle East among both the Israelis and the Arabs.

Moscow has not openly undermined U.S. peace efforts, even though the crisis enabled the Russians to sell large quantities of arms to the Arabs and in return receive payment in dollars which Arab countries collect from their oil revenues. Thus, Western European countries and Japan are financing a Soviet economy which otherwise would be hard put to find the dollars it needs for buying an advanced technology abroad. Also, these Western countries continue to subsidize Arab oligarchs, who can threaten these people and utterly disrupt their economic lives.

At present, the more balanced U.S. approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict is encouraging Arabs generally to move to a closer relationship with Washington. And they are being warmly received by the practical minded American so dependent on the "gas pump". Most Americans have been sensitive to the Jewish dream for a "national home", and sympathetic to their plight from oppression; even though Americans have at times questioned the influence by the Jewish population on domestic and international

affairs. The present oil threat to the "free world" however, is making these same Americans take a second look at their nation's relationship with Israel, the nation the U.S. helped to create. Several of the states with the largest population of Jews were, also, the same states hardest hit by the energy crisis. Time may prove that economics produces stronger ties than emotions and religion. But in either case, in the future the United States must look at the Middle East objectively, and strive for lasting accord with both the Arabs and the Jews.

*Carl D McIntosh*  
Carl D. McIntosh  
COL CE USAR

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Fred J. Khouri, The Arab-Israeli Dilemma, p. 377.
2. Charles Herbert Stember, Jews in the Mind of America, p. 9.
3. Alfred M. Lilienthal, The Other Side of the Coin, p. 273.
4. Ibid., p. 275.
5. Frank Gervasi, The Case for Israel, p. 71.
6. Nadav Safran, The United States and Israel, p. 35.
7. Gervasi, p. 82.
8. Ibid., p. 92.
9. Palestine Refugees, UN Monthly Chronicle, November 1965, p. 28.
10. Theodore Draper, Israel and World Politics, p. 10.
11. Sami Hadawi, United Nations Resolutions on Palestine 1947-1966, p. 76.
12. George Lenczowshi, United States Interests in the Middle East, p. 30.
13. Abdeen Jabara, "The American Left and the June Conflict", The Arab World, p. 73.
14. James Hogan, "The Arabs and Jews: The Crisis", (Film Strip Guide), p. 35.
15. Joseph W. Grigg, "Arab Arsenal Includes Latest, Best Soviet Had to Provide", The Waco News-Tribune, 15 October 1973, p. 7-A.
16. "Oil: American's Huge Stake in Arab-Israeli Fighting", US News and World Report, 22 October 1973, p. 36.

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