

**IS AN EXTRICATION
FROM A WEB OF NEEDS,
INTERESTS, GREED,
HATRED, AND RECURRING
VIOLENCE POSSIBLE?**

Excerpt from book, *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. An actual 'never-ending story'* (2018) providing an historical context for the present Gaza War in the Middle East.



**Albert Fiorino,
KGCHS, PhD,
MA, PhL, MEd,
OCT**

© Toronto, Ontario
Canada 2024

Is an Extrication from a Web of Needs, Interests, Greed, Hatred, and Recurring Violence Possible?*

The tangled web of needs and interests

The choices available to the parties in the conflict are not new. His Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom, which was given the responsibility to oversee the affairs of Palestine by the League of Nations following the end of World War I and a major player in the ever-intensifying conflict, entertained these solutions in some form or another during their mandate. Indeed, as will be evident near the end of this chapter, we will be revisiting these solutions and use them as points of reference for the development of our own four basic options available.

It should be pointed out that the Palestinian Arabs still formed the majority of the Palestine population when these options were being

considered, and in the case of two of those proposed by His Majesty's Government, the Palestinian Arabs rejected two of those options.¹⁰ In all fairness to the Palestinian Arabs of the time, the proposals did not appear genuine in light of the fact that to the rest of the world, especially the French people, Palestine had been clandestinely designated by His Majesty's Government not simply as a national homeland for the Jews, as their official position stated, but as the future "état des juifs"—the future Jewish State.¹¹

In making an appeal to conscience and a sense of justice, we are simply echoing a similar plea made by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in his February 13, 1931 letter to Jewish Agency President Chaim Weizmann. In that letter, Prime Minister MacDonald reassured Jews of His Majesty's Government's continued commitment to the spirit and letter

of their mandate, following the previously released statement of policy, *Palestine: Statement of Policy (The Passfield Paper)* in which its author, Secretary of State for the Colonies Lord Sidney Webb Passfield, had recommended a curtailment of Jewish immigration to Palestine.¹² He ends his letter by reminding both parties that:

“But if their efforts are to be successful, there is need for cooperation, confidence, readiness on all sides to appreciate the difficulties and complexities of the problem, and, above all, there must be a full and unqualified recognition that no solution can be satisfactory or permanent which is not based upon justice, both to the Jewish people and to the non-Jewish communities of Palestine.”¹³

In 1917, His Majesty's Government made a commitment, in good faith, to the Jews of the world, to facilitate their return to their homeland in Palestine. This promise was made in return for their support in the war effort in a letter sent by Foreign Affairs Secretary Lord Arthur James Balfour's letter to Zionist leader Lord Lionel Walter Rothschild. This letter is more commonly known as the *Balfour Declaration*.¹⁴

While this commitment was self-serving, it also stemmed from a genuine and deeply rooted desire, shared then and now, by many nations around the world, to restore their ancestral lands to the Jewish people, who had been forced to wander the Earth for over two millennia, in Diaspora. The hope on the part of His Majesty's Government was, as is evident through their official positions taken during the 1920s and most of the 1930s, that, just as the

Bedouin tribes were gradually becoming accepting of their Hashemite rulers, the Arab majority of Palestine might eventually form one integrated nation with the Jews, in the best-case scenario, or learn to live in peaceful co-existence under a Jewish dominated government of Palestine.

Getting into a political double bind

However, His Majesty's Government also made a commitment to the Arabs in return for their help in driving out the Turks from the region and thus bring down the Ottoman Empire. This commitment took the form of a promise to help the Arabs create a unified Arab state along the Fertile Crescent. However, contrary to a recently released article in the *Gulf News* by Sobhi Ghandour, "Don't play into Zionist hands," an article filled with several highly fanciful conspiracy theories, His Majesty's Government's promise did not include "...the

whole of Palestine west of the Jordan.”¹⁵ Thus, we read in *The British White Paper of June 1922*:

“In the first place, it is not the case, as has been represented by the Arab Delegation that during the war His Majesty's Government gave an undertaking that an independent national government should be at once established in Palestine. This representation mainly rests upon a letter dated the 24th of October 1915, from Sir Henry McMahon, then His Majesty's High Commissioner in Egypt, to the Sharif of Mecca, now King Hussein of the Kingdom of the Hejaz. That letter is quoted as conveying the promise to the Sharif of Mecca to recognise and support the independence of the Arabs within the territories proposed by him. But this promise was given subject to a reservation made in the same letter,

which excluded from its scope, among other territories, the portions of Syria lying to the west of the District of Damascus. This reservation has always been regarded by His Majesty's Government as covering the vilayet of Beirut and the independent Sanjak of Jerusalem. The whole of Palestine west of the Jordan was thus excluded from Sir Henry McMahon's pledge."¹⁶

The McMahon correspondence of 1915 with the Sharif of Mecca, the *Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916* signed between Britain and France, and the *Balfour Declaration* were critical for His Majesty's Government for creating and cementing the necessary political alliances which were crucial in the defeat of the Central Powers (German Empire, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire, and the Kingdom of Bulgaria) in the region, and to ensure that the Allied Powers (United Kingdom, France, Russian Empire, Belgium, Greece, Italy, Japan, Monte-

negro, Serbia, and Romania) remained of the same mind with respect to the future disposition of the conquered territories.

The Arab desire for a unified Arab state along the Fertile Crescent was also intricately connected with their equally ardent desire to retain the pan-Islamic character and culture of the region which they had enjoyed during the Ottoman occupation. These desires never included a significant presence of Jews in the area or for that matter a significant presence of any other minority including Christians. So long as these minorities did not challenge the Islamic hegemony, their principle of religious toleration would be sufficient to accommodate their existence.

Shattered promises breed hatred

Once it became known that His Majesty's Government was willing to help the Zionists of Europe establish a Jewish National Homeland in

Palestine to show their appreciation for their contribution to the war effort, the Arabs' dreams became seemingly shattered and their grand plans spoiled. Therein lies the origins of the Arabs' intransigence in bringing the conflict to a peaceful resolution. Therein also lies the origins of the Arabs' intense hatred for the Jews, a hatred which reached malevolent proportions in the 1960s as many of the Arab nations in the region went on the 'warpath', intent on the complete annihilation of the newly created State of Israel and its people. A couple of select quotations from that period clearly validate this intent.

As an example, very soon after Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had just ordered the withdrawal of the United Nations (UN) Emergency Force, which had been stationed in the Sinai since 1959 to act as a buffer between

Israel and Egypt, the Voice of the Arabs radio station announced on May 18, 1967:

“As of today, there no longer exists an international emergency force to protect Israel. We shall exercise patience no more. We shall not complain any more to the UN about Israel. The sole method we shall apply against Israel is total war, which will result in the extermination of Zionist existence.”¹⁷

Two days later May 20, 1967, Syrian Defence Minister Hafez Assad declared to his nation that:

“Our forces are now entirely ready not only to repulse the aggression, but to initiate the act of liberation itself, and to explode the Zionist presence in the Arab homeland. The Syrian army, with its finger on the trigger, is united.... I, as a military man, believe that the time

has come to enter into a battle of annihilation.”¹⁸

However, by publicly espousing these evil desires, which had been the key driving forces behind the Arabs’ opposition and resistance to the creation of a Jewish National Homeland in Palestine and the basic reasons for their present rejection of the State of Israel, they were echoing the exact malicious intentions that were behind the German Nazis’ final solution for the Jewish people.

Hatred breeds more hatred and that has been one of the few constants and predictable developments in the conflict. This hatred coupled with a mixed bag of other soiled motives, two of which were noted earlier, have blinded the leadership of both sides, in varying degrees of course, from seeing the kinds of forward-looking options which should be

examined and taken seriously to resolve the conflict.

In yearning for a unified Arab state, the local Arab populations ignored the fact that for over four hundred years they had been a conquered people living under the control of the Ottomans. And in the process, they also downplayed the fact that, despite their war effort during World War I, they remained a conquered people and as such subject to the predispositions of the Allied Powers of which His Majesty's Government was a key player. While it is true that the empires of the age were waning, and colonial rule was becoming politically unpopular, the Allied Powers still ruled the day when it came to the disposition of the spoils of war. While His Majesty's Government's ambitions to protect and defend their imperial and colonial interests should never be underestimated in discussing the origins of the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, neither should their magnanimity and genuine efforts in trying to do the right thing for both parties in the conflict over the course of almost thirty years following the release of the *British White Paper of June 1922*.

This conflict superbly illustrates for us the myriad of dilemmas that emerge when we are confronted with problems stemming from the highly complex and dynamic relationships that exist between the one and the many, the whole and its parts.

It is difficult enough for any one of us to understand the motives, the thoughts, the covert and overt machinations, and the behaviours and actions of an individual living out his or her existence in a relatively stable environment. Any significant increase in the complexity and rate of change in that same environment will make such a task incredibly

more difficult. However, when the behaviours and actions of groups operating in environments of increasing complexity and rapid change are scrutinized, the task to understand the motives, the thoughts and overt and covert machinations becomes gargantuan. We would need omniscient powers to make sense out of the driving forces—the dynamics—and thus the workings of such groups. We risk acting in ignorance of the sacred beliefs and passionate history that pulses within the minds of those stakeholders.

The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has involved these kinds of dynamics from its very inception. Thus, we are not even going to attempt any kind of definitive and detailed description of how this conflict unfolded and the reasons for its seemingly insoluble nature, for there are always alternative versions and reasons that one can unearth from the heaps

upon heaps of informational wreckage and other data traces that have been amassed or that have been dispersed throughout our ever-revolving sphere which we like to call home, planet Earth, during the last one hundred years.

Notes

*Excerpts from Albert Fiorino, *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. An actual 'never-ending story'*, pp. 81-91.

¹³His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, *Letter to Chaim Weizmann*, President of the Jewish Agency, London: February 13, 1931, p. 5.

¹⁴His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. Lord Arthur James Balfour, *Balfour Declaration*, a letter from Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild of the British Zionist Federation, November 2, 1917.

¹⁵Sobhi Ghandour, "Don't play into Zionist hands," in *Gulf News*, June 29, 2011.

¹⁶His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, *British White Paper of June 1922*, London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1922, p. 3.

¹⁷Mitchell C. Bard, "The 1967 Six-Day War," *Jewish Virtual Library*, Chevy Chase, MD: AICE, 2008, p. 3.

¹⁸*Ibid*, pp. 3f.