How Israel Was Won

A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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The First Zionist Congress in 1897 proposed establishment of a Jewish state through the influence of foreign governments. Herzl failed to gaining a state in Palestine through British or German influence over the Ottoman Empire. With the approach of World War I, Britain sought justification for a permanent military presence in Palestine. Support of Jewish claims in Palestine, in conflict with Arab claims, created tensions and the justification needed.

Chapter 2 — World War I and the Balfour Declaration (1917)

Britain pledges a grant of Arab national independence over Greater Syria (including Palestine) to Sharif Hussein in exchange for help in defeating the Ottoman Empire (MacMahon-Hussein letters, 1915). Britain also pledges to war ally, France, control over parts of Greater Syria (Sykes-Picot Agreement, 1916). Britain further
pledges a homeland in Palestine to the Jews in exchange for their help in ending U.S. neutrality in WWI (Balfour Declaration, 1917). Britain plays on verbal ambiguities in an attempt to satisfy its conflicting promises to the Arabs and Jews.

Chapter 3 – The League of Nations Mandate System (1922) 19

Britain retains control of Palestine through a League of Nations mandate, which incorporates the Balfour Declaration. This declaration leads to Arab rejection of the mandate. Jewish land purchases create a landless Palestinian-Arab population resulting in social unrest. Jewish immigration provokes Palestinian-Arab violence, largely directed against the British administration (1929-1936).

Chapter 4 – Britain Curbs Jewish Statehood and Immigration (1938–1942) 29

Britain’s Peel Commission (1937) recommends two independent states to resolve the Arab-Jewish conflict. Because of a need for Arab oil in wartime, Britain acknowledges the suppressed MacMahon-Hussein letters promising Arab independence in Palestine. The Jews are appalled. The 1938 International Evian Conference on immigration offers little help to Jews in Nazi Germany. The Jews demand a state over all of Palestine in 1942 (Biltmore Program).

Chapter 5 – Britain Withdraws from Palestine (1948) 37

The U.S. government courts Arab oil while the U.S. public supports Zionism. Truman pushes for Jewish immigration into Palestine but refuses Britain the necessary support to enforce it. Britain imposes martial law to combat Jewish terrorist efforts to end British control. Proposals for a political settlement – UN trusteeship or a federation of two states (Morrison-Grady Plan) – fail. Britain intends to withdraw.

Chapter 6 – UN Proposal for Partition (1947) 47

Palestinian nationalists reject the UN partition plan because League of Nations mandate calls for a single state in Palestine. The Jewish Agency appears to accept UN partition after making a secret non-aggression pact with King Abdullah of Transjordan in which he is to annex the UN-designated Palestinian state. The Soviet Union accepts partition as a means to influence in the Middle East. “Holocaust guilt” and anti-Arab sentiment play roles in Western acceptance of partition.

Chapter 7 – Civil War (December, 1947 to May, 1948) 61

The Haganah (illegal Jewish army) and Jewish terrorists fight local Palestinians and Arab League “volunteers.” Jewish terrorism results in panicky flight of large segments of the Palestinian population. Ben-Gurion stalls on U.S. and UN truce efforts, having amassed sufficient men and arms to defeat potential intervention by Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. Meir warns Abdullah not to falter on their non-aggression
pact. Britain withdraws; the state of Israel is declared despite UN prohibitions.

Chapter 8 - International War (May, 1948 to December, 1948)

Egyptian, Syrian and Iraqi forces are inadequate either to bring Israel to terms or to block Transjordan's annexation of the UN-designated Palestinian-Arab state. During a truce (June 11) both sides cheat. The Jews amass greater superiority of arms and men than the Arabs. UN negotiator Count Bernadotte proposes: that Transjordan officially annex Palestinian areas and that Palestinians have a right to return to their homes. Shamir is involved in Bernadotte assassination. Ben-Gurion plans to capture all of Palestine but is curbed by UN and international disapproval. A January 1949 cease-fire and April armistice are achieved. Palestinian Arab territory reduced to 22% of Palestine; 70% of all Palestinian Arabs become refugees.

Chapter 9 - Uneasy Settlement of the 1948 War

Transjordan annexes Arab Palestine. Israel and Transjordan (now called Jordan) divide Jerusalem in defiance of UN call for an international city. Dayan escalates violence in order to intimidate Arab countries and extend Israeli territory. Jordan's King Abdullah, seen as Jewish pawn, is assassinated by Arab nationalists. Ben-Gurion proposes to Britain that Israel capture the West Bank and Egyptian Sinai and Britain incorporate Jordan. Britain demurs. Israel refuses repatriation of 750,000 Palestinian refugees despite Truman's threats. Diaspora Jews displace Palestinian Arabs in Israel. Oriental Jews suffer. The Jews adopt a "Holocaustal" perspective.

Chapter 10 - Border Turmoil in the Name of Israeli Security (1948-1955)

Palestinian refugees seeking to return home in Israel are shot by border guards. Eventually, they seek revenge through sabotage and murder. Israel pursues a policy of attack on refugee camps and villages in Egypt-controlled Gaza, Jordan and Syria. Israel sends terrorists to Cairo to blow up public and U.S. facilities, seeking to blame Egypt and spoil U.S.-Egyptian relations (Lavon Affair).

Chapter 11 - International Cold War Politics and the Suez War (1956)

Israel aligns with the United States against the U.S.S.R., but refuses a U.S. defense treaty in exchange for assurance Israel will not extend territory by force. With U.S. money for the Aswan Dam withheld, Egypt turns to Soviet money and arms. Egyptian-Israeli relations sour after Israel attacks Gaza in 1955. Israel seeks to break Arab morale. Egypt blocks Israel from Suez Canal and Strait of Tiran, nationalizing the canal for revenue. Israel attacks Egypt to provide Britain and France with an excuse to invade and "separate the combatants." The UN brands Britain, France and Israel the aggressors. Israel withdraws upon UN support of right of free passage.
Chapter 12 - External and Internal Stresses on Israel (1956-1967) 133

External threats: (1) Third World disapproval of Israeli “imperialist” collusion with Britain and France in the Suez War, and (2) PLO and Fatah terrorism. Internal threats: (1) a faltering economy, (2) ethnic conflict between Oriental and European Jews, (3) violation of Arab-Israeli citizens and Israeli self-criticism over lost idealism, and (4) public exposure of Kastner collaboration with Eichmann.

Chapter 13 - Cold War Polarization of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (1957-1966) 143

Arab nations are domestically destabilized and polarized by the Cold War. Eisenhower fails to win over Arab nations because of U.S. hostility to Arab nationalism. Kennedy falls under Jewish suspicion because he fails to oppose Arab nationalism. Kennedy reopens the Palestinian refugee issue and presses for repatriation in exchange for U.S. arms to Israel. Johnson arms Israel, as do Britain, France and Germany. The Soviets (and the United States) arm the Arab countries.

Chapter 14 - Precipitation of the Six Day War (1967) 153

Israel attacks Jordan (Qalqilia and Samu) and publicly threatens invasion of Syria. Egypt is drawn in by Soviet-sponsored Syrian-Egyptian mutual defense pact. Nasser requests partial removal of UN forces along Sinai border to show readiness to protect Syria. An apprehensive Israeli public thinks the prime minister weak. Israeli military insists on an easily-won war. Nasser is seen as a coward by Arab nations and as responsible for domestic economic failure. He closes the Strait of Tiran to Israel. Johnson presses for diplomacy, judging Israel to be invulnerable and lacking reason for war. The Soviets threaten Israel about attack of Syria or Egypt. Impending U.S.-Egyptian talks alarm Israel about Egyptian prestige. Israel invades Egypt.

Chapter 15 - The Six Day War and Its Consequences 173

Israel destroys the Egyptian air force on the ground in three hours on false claim of having been attacked. Jerusalem, the Sinai Desert and West Bank are captured in three days. The UN demands a cease-fire and the Soviets threaten Israel about further aggression. Israel, stymied by U.S. disapproval of carrying the war into Syria, attacks a U.S. intelligence ship monitoring Israeli movements. Israel invades the Golan Heights and calls its attack on the U.S. ship a “mistake.” The Soviets cut ties and threaten war on Israel. Israel completes sweep in six days. Israelis killed, 759; Arabs killed, up to 30,000. Refugees from Syria, the West Bank and the Sinai, 323,000.

Chapter 16 - The Yom Kippur War (1973) and Its Antecedents 189

The UN Resolution 242 calls for return of captured Arab lands in exchange for peace treaties with Israel. Israel balks, retaining the Sinai, West Bank and Golan Heights. The PLO proposes a single Arab-Jewish democratic state over all of Palestine. Egypt seeks return of the Sinai, attacks a disorganized IDF and advances

Chapter 17 - The PLO, the West Bank and the Lebanon Wars (1982) 209

The PLO, head-quartered in Lebanon, proposes a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and supports a Moslem majority in a civil war in Lebanon against an Israeli-supported Christian minority government (1975-1976). Israel, after returning the Sinai to Egypt in exchange for a peace treaty, looks to control the West Bank and smash its PLO leadership in Lebanon. West bank territory is confiscated for Jewish settlements and political and military oppression intensifies. Israel invades Lebanon on pretext of ending PLO terrorism and routs rival Syrian forces along the way. Reagan sides with Israel against the PLO and Soviet-supported Syria. The IDF inflicts massive losses on the PLO, Palestinian refugees, Shi'ite Lebanese villages and Beirut residents (30,000 to 40,000 killed). Begin, Shamir, Sharon and Eitan are apportioned blame for massacres in Sabra and Shatilla Palestinian refugee camps.

Chapter 18 - Likud's Greater-Israel Dream and the Intifada (1988) 243

Reagan (1982 peace plan) challenges Begin’s claim to need Jewish settlements for Israeli security and criticizes his notion of Palestinian autonomy. U.S. peace-keeping forces in Lebanon align with Christian government forces, but suicide bombings lead to U.S. withdrawal. In 1984, Begin is replaced by Shamir who then alternates with Peres as prime minister. Defense Minister Rabin’s “iron fist” policy fails to suppress a 1988 Palestinian grassroots uprising, the intifada, which Hamas and Islamic Jihad support (the PLO later). Arafat declares a Palestinian state (West Bank and Gaza) which is recognized by 100 countries including the Soviet Union, China and India – not the West. Shamir refuses to talk about Palestinian autonomy (not sovereignty) during the intifada. The 1991 Gulf War leads to the decline of the PLO and intifada when Palestinians support Saddam Hussein for his promise to fight for their rights.

Chapter 19 - The Oslo Accords and the Demise of the Peace Process (1998) 263

Rabin replaces Shamir in 1992. He continues settlement expansion and closes off the occupied territories in early 1993. Foreign Minister Peres, in secret negotiations with a weakened Arafat, prepares to make autonomy concessions in exchange for Arafat’s curbing of Hamas and recognition of Israel. These Oslo Accords hold promise of relief from an oppressive occupation but are viewed by Palestinian critics as a surrender to Israeli rule. Netanyahu replaces the assassinated Rabin in 1995, insisting that Hamas be crushed as a condition for further peace negotiations. But Arafat faces loss of Palestinian support if he severely curbs Hamas. Netanyahu

Appendix A – Government and Democracy in Israel

Three levels of government: (1) official, (2) “invisible,” and (3) military. The official government is run by a strong cabinet and weak parliament. Political power is concentrated in the central committee of the political party and prime minister. Israeli courts are constrained by the absence of a national constitution, safeguard of civil rights. The “invisible” government (Histadrut, Jewish Agency and Jewish National Fund), now less powerful than formerly, controls matters of industry, labor, health, immigration, housing and land use to the advantage of Jewish citizens. The military government enforces defense (martial) law in a discriminatory manner, controlling the personal freedom, property, civil rights and land use of Arab-Israeli citizens.

Appendix B – The Paradox of Nationalism

Zionism reflects a universal ideal of nationalism, that associated with democracy, liberalism, the value of the common man, the people’s right to self-determination and freedom from domination. Paradoxically, nationalism is also associated with the illiberal exclusion of minorities and the imperialistic conquest of alien peoples. For questions arise about who is included in “the people” and how far their “self-determination” may encroach upon that of outsiders. Further, nationalism is based on a belief in the existence of prized traits shared equally by members of this people but not by others considered less endowed or entitled. Thus, nationalism is associated with both democracy and xenophobia, with both self-defense and conquest. Zionism embraces this paradox.

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