



The Untold History of Palestine & Israel

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Abby Martin (AM): For two weeks, the Empire Files team travelled the West Bank and Palestine. What we saw was one of the biggest human rights disasters on the planet; a brutal and growing military occupation that thrives off U.S. sponsorship. Soon to be strengthened even more by another 38 billion in U.S. tax dollars, the largest military aid deal in history. The stark reality is never taught to us in school. And whenever we do hear about Palestine in the media, might as well be directly from the Pentagon.

AM: It's a place the majority of Americans only get a firsthand look at on so-called birthright tours, which sell Israel as a fun, peace loving country living under threat of genocide from Muslims. The side we saw was very, very different.

AM: But the truth is actually much clearer. And before we show you what we saw on the ground, we must go back to understand the real history of how things got to where they are today.

AM: Many people have seen this famous map showing the ever shrinking borders of Palestine, but likely far less people could explain why the borders have changed so dramatically.

AM: Each phase and the stories behind them are essential pieces to a puzzle that we're told is just too complicated.

AM: First, how did these original borders of Palestine form? From the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. The countries of the modern Middle East were once the same swath of territory owned by the Ottoman Empire. Of the nearly 500,000 people living in Ottoman Palestine, 75% were Muslim, 20% Christian and 5% Jewish. Nearly 100% were Arab. Its cities, especially Jerusalem, were buzzing hives of Arab art and culture, a destination for intellectuals across the Middle East. Before Palestine had borders, it was a recognisable

nation. Its cultural identity is distinct with deep roots in the land.

AM: But plans for that land were being made elsewhere in the world. In the late 1800s it was being eyed to be colonised. In the United States, Europe and Russia anti-Semitism was a dangerous and growing force. Mob killings of Jewish people were a regular occurrence.

AM: In this climate of terror began what is known as Zionism or the belief in an exclusively Jewish state to be established somewhere in the world. From its founding through the first half of the 20th century the Zionists remain an extremely small minority among Jewish people. The ideology was rejected by both religious and secular Jewish people who agree that anti-Semitism was a great danger but that they should organise to defeat it in their home countries rather than by mass exodus to another people's land. Many argue that exporting entire Jewish populations from Europe was, in essence, acquiescing to the demands of anti-Semites. But Zionism, however marginalised, became a fervent political movement led by its proclaimed father, Theodor Herzl, an Austrian atheist. While first considering Argentina and Uganda as a homeland the Zionist movement claimed the rights to what it called Greater Israel, which includes all of Palestine and part of today is Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Egypt. Their right to this land was based on the ancient biblical kingdoms of the Old Testament, which disappeared 600 years before the birth of Jesus. Herzl's job became jet setting around the world, lobbying those in power he thought would be sympathetic to his project. The Zionists, more than anything, needed money to fund settlements and ultimately a decree from the world's colonial powers. Herzl wrote to the Grand Duke of Baden: "If it is God's will that we return to our historic fatherland, we should like to do so as representatives of Western civilisation and bring cleanliness, order and well-established customs to this plague ridden, blighted corner of the Orient". The early Zionists promised to make Palestine a vanguard against barbarism – a.k.a. an extension of Western military power – and build highways of the civilised peoples – a.k.a. trade for European millionaires. The centre of the campaign for the Creation of Israel was the slogan: "A land without a people, for a people without a land".

AM: The assertion that there were no people in Palestine prior to Zionist settlements became the keystone of their policies. They were always very well aware of the people there.

AM: In the words of another leading Zionist, Israel Zangwill, Palestine is not so much occupied by the Arabs as overrun by them.

AM: From its inception, political Zionism was not only a plan for colonisation and expansion, but one of expulsion the lands indigenous inhabitants.

AM: Much of historic Palestine was semi-feudal. With farmers living and working on land owned by wealthy individuals who lived far away in fancy cities of Syria and Jordan. Zionist settlers began purchasing this land in 1882. Many evicted its indigenous people to build the first settlements. Despite Jews, Muslims and Christians living in relative harmony for

thousands of years, this sprouted immediate tension and conflict. With the Zionist project getting a slow start a new opportunity presented itself with the outbreak of World War One. Herzl and his partners near the victors would be slicing up the colonies of the losers, which included Palestine. Aristocrats from Great Britain, France and Russia were secretly carving up the Middle East amongst themselves. The infamous Sykes-Picot agreement drew new borders, creating Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the first formal borders of Palestine. It was put under British colonial control. Riots in Jerusalem protested the takeover by yet another empire. With Ottoman Palestine becoming British mandate Palestine the Zionist movement had won a major step. With the flick of a wrist a small group of British lords issued the Balfour Declaration pledging to help achieve this objective.

AM: The British made it much easier for well-funded settlement projects to take more Palestinian land, dispossessing even more people.

AM: Yet Zionists aim for a homeland in all of Greater Israel without the indigenous Arabs was still driving them. In 1919, a U.S. envoy reported: "The Zionists looked forward to a practically complete dispossession of the present non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine." Settlers have now become 10% of the population growing with large donations from Western tycoons. The settlements had already created a refugee crisis. This photo from 1929 depicts a rally in Syria of Palestinian refugees, of which there were 50,000. With this new backing, the colonial project picked up its pace, purchasing even larger chunks of earth from the feudal landlords and creating small pockets of territory. Leader in the settlement movement, Ben-Gurion, who would become Israel's first prime minister and mascot for Tel Aviv's airport, wrote about the early days: "We were not just working. We were conquering, conquering, conquering land. We were a company of conquistadors". From 1920 to 1939, the settler population rose from 10 to 30% and there was no confusion about what they were there to do. As Gurian himself said: "We must expel the Arabs and take their places". Throughout these years, Palestinians launched several attacks on the encroaching settlements. Big clashes between settlers and Palestinians and cities grew deadly, killing many on both sides. But an era of wildly disproportionate death was about to begin.

In 1936, the Palestinians launched a mass general strike. Protests lit up in numerous cities, and the strike held strong for six months. While initially peaceful, the British occupiers responded by declaring martial law. They recruited Zionist fighters to join them in raiding and attacking Palestinian villages. Scores of dissidents were executed. The strike evolved into an armed uprising against British rule. The British, along with their Zionist partners, used a strategy of blowing up thousands of Palestinian homes. In a single day in the village of Jaffa, they demolished over 200. This uprising was drowned in blood by the sheer force of the British imperial machine by 1939. 5000 Palestinians were left dead. On the other side, 300 settlers and 250 British soldiers. It was through this bloody repression that the Zionists formed a bona fide armed forces with thousands of them who were trained and armed by the British army. In reality, it consisted of two wings, the Haganah, the official military force recognised by British authorities, and the other, a more radical wing, the Zionist militias; the

biggest, the Irgun with membership in the thousands. The Irgun was a more hardline terrorist organisation that mostly targeted Palestinians, bombing civilian markets and more. Years later, they would also start attacking British soldiers. Their most famous attack was the bombing of the King David Hotel, murdering 91 people, among them 17 Jews. This ruthless approach of the Irgun was so popular in the settler consciousness that one of its head commanders who presided over many massacres would later become prime minister of Israel Menachem Begin. Albert Einstein and dozens of other Jewish academics and icons published a letter in the New York Times describing Begin's movement as a political party closely akin in its organisation, methods, political philosophy and social appeal to the Nazi and fascist parties.

As both the Hagana and the Irgun advanced colonisation, their goal remained clear. President of the Jewish National Fund, a group designated to reclaim the land of Israel, Joseph Whites, wrote in 1940: "There is no room for both people in this country ... and there is no way besides transferring the Arabs from here to neighbouring countries, to transfer them all. We must not leave a single village, a single tribe". The unprecedented genocide by the Nazi cancer killed at least 6 million Jewish people. Millions more were exterminated for their nationality, for being gay, leftists and more. The utter fear the Holocaust unleashed greatly popularised the formerly fringe ideology of Zionism to large sectors of Jewish society. Finally, in 1947, the 70 year long lobbying campaign to be granted a formal state came to fruition. The British crown turned its colony of Palestine over to the United Nations, which cut it into pieces. Changing this phase of Palestine's map speckled with small dots of settler territory into this, the Jewish state of Israel, which was created on top of another country gifted with 55% of its land. Palestine was cut into three separate parts, and the capital of Jerusalem, the centre of Palestinian life became a UN controlled international zone. But there was a big problem for the Zionists. Their new state was still 40% Arab. This was an unacceptable notion for Ben-Gurion and other Israeli leaders who stated: "There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60 percent".

AM: The audacious act of plopping a European settlers' state on top of an Arab country while excluding the native population from the discussion and decision, sparked outrage throughout the Arab world. Resistance to it escalated into a full blown war in 1948.

AM: Months after the war began, the Hagana and Irgun launched a joint campaign to address another problem called Plan Dalet.

AM: Plan Dalet targeted the most passive peaceful communities so that all Palestinians would flee. The series of terrorist attacks and mass expulsions that followed is known as the Nakba or the catastrophe. The infant ear of the state of Israel was one of widespread, vicious massacres.

AM: Deir Yassin, a village with no reported resistance, was stormed by settler militia. They bombed homes, committed mass rape of women before executing them and other atrocities.

One child survivor tells the harrowing account of his entire family being lined up and shot, including his mother, as she breastfed her newborn baby. 200 people were murdered. According to a Red Cross official who visited the site days later: "Here the -cleaning up- had been done with machine guns and hand grenades. It had been finished off with knives". Just 12 days later, Jewish forces bombed and raided the heavily populated city of Haifa while sadistically broadcasting horror recordings over loudspeakers of Arab women wailing and messages like "Flee for your lives. The Jews are using poison gas and nuclear weapons". In Abu Shusha, Israeli forces attacked and occupied the village. The Palestinians that stayed in their homes were punished with rape and hacked to death with axes. Fleeing villagers were shot on site. 60 people were officially killed, but years later, 52 more bodies were found in a mass grave.

Al-Dawayima was also captured by Israeli forces who murdered its men, women and children. 200 bodies were found with another 250 missing. Days later, Israeli troops marched into the village of Saliha, blew up a mosque, killing the nearly 80 people taking refuge inside. After the remaining villagers were ordered into the square, Israeli troops unleashed a reign of bullets upon them from machine guns mounted on armoured vehicles murdering another 70 people. One of the few survivors from the brutal attack recounts the bodies being left to rot for days before they were bulldozed into a mosque and blown up. Those who tried to resist in any way were collectively punished. One of the bloodiest of the massacres during the 1948 war was in the town of Lydda, where soldiers indiscriminately killed nearly every civilian in sight after gunshots were allegedly fired from a nearby mosque. State forces threw grenades in the windows and shot those escaping their burning homes. According to Israeli military sources, 250 people were killed in just 30 minutes.

This terror campaign largely accomplished what it set out to do. In each of these villages and in hundreds more, the Arab population left in its entirety. Eyewitness British General John Bagot Glubb doesn't hide the colonial savagery. It would be an exaggeration to claim the great numbers were massacred, but just enough were killed or roughly handled to make sure that all the civilian population took flight. Senior Israeli officer Yosef Nahmani wrote that in some villages, Palestinians greeted them with white flags and food. After seeing them executed, he said: "Where did they come by such a measure of cruelty, like Nazis? ... Is there no more humane way of expelling the inhabitants than such methods?" Nearly 800,000 fled their homes in this barrage of violence. More than half of the Arab population in all of Palestine and 80% of the Palestinians within the new Israel. They were forced in other countries and packed in refugee camps. A shocking 500 Palestinian towns and villages were ethnically cleansed and razed to the ground. The rubble would be the foundation of the new Israeli settlements. Mosche Dayan, a military commander in the 1948 war and national icon, stated: "Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You don't even know the names of these Arab villages and I don't blame you because the geography books no longer exist. Not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages aren't there either. There is not one single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population".

In this brutal rampage, the military already seized half of what had been allotted to the Palestinians. By the end of 1948 Zionists had conquered 78% of Palestine, Palestinians now left with only 22%. While some in the Palestinian resistance carried out their own attacks on civilians during the war, nothing compared to the scale of Israeli crimes during the Nakba. And as Israeli historian Ilan Papeé explained, these acts took place in the context of an ethnic cleansing that "carried with it atrocious acts of mass killing and butchering of thousands of Palestinians [who] were killed ruthlessly and savagely by Israeli troops of all backgrounds, ranks and ages". This violent expulsion of nearly a million people was so outrageous that it forced the UN to respond, issuing a resolution ordering Israel to allow all 800,000 Palestinian refugees to return to their homes.

AM: Land ownership of Palestinians plummeted. Before 1948, Palestinians owned 90% of the land. Four years later, they owned only 3%.

AM: To this day, they remain displaced. Tens of thousands still remain in refugee camps. Israel's excuse for refusing to honour this UN resolution is that the Palestinians left voluntarily. For those who remain inside the borders of Israel, the new regime codified into law the superiority of Jewish settlers.

AM: Israel legalised the theft of Palestinian homes and land, limited political participation and implemented a separate set of rights. Arab areas were occupied by the military and subjected to curfews. Many were arbitrarily arrested and deported.

AM: While the settlers were depopulating the land of Arabs, they also needed to repopulate it with Jews. Fear of anti-Semitism around the world was the main driver. After the 1948 war, Jews in Arab countries were targeted by a rash of anti-Semitic violence. But some in the Zionist project were even willing to sacrifice their own. From 1951 to 1952, there was a series of bombings in Baghdad, Iraq against synagogues and other Jewish targets, causing dozens of casualties. A group called the Zionist Underground was found responsible by the pro-Western Iraqi government. This is confirmed by former CIA officer Wilbur Crane Eveland writing: "In an attempt to portray the Iraqis as anti-American and to terrorise the Jews, the Zionists planted bombs in the U.S. Information Service Library and in the synagogues. Soon, leaflets began to appear, urging Jews to flee to Israel. Most of the world believed reports that Arab terrorism had motivated the flight of the Iraqi Jews and the Zionists had 'rescued' really just in order to increase Israel's Jewish population".

In 1954, a similar operation was carried out by the Israeli government itself. This time for regional ambitions in Egypt. They orchestrated a number of bombings on U.S. and British civilian targets, planning to blame Arabs and communists. Throughout the 1950s Israeli military power had grown quite formidable, armed primarily by France. They dutifully used these weapons to aid French and British imperialism, including the invasion of Egypt to try to topple Pan Arab President Gamal Nasser in 1956. But as Israel ran away in defeat like a petulant child, it demolished any building it could along the way; this in the eye of the U.S.

empire. Recognising Israel's value against nationalist movements like Nasser's, the U.S. became its main military financier and pledged its own military to protect Israel. By 1967, Israel was a far stronger military machine with monstrous American forces standing behind it.

AM: But even Israel's main ally was not safe from its brutal belligerence.

AM: That year unmarked Israeli warplanes and torpedo boats aggressively attacked a U.S. Navy ship in international waters off the coast of Egypt. The relentless barrage on the USS Liberty, which had an American flag raised high, lasted for an entire two hours. 34 people were killed and 174 wounded. According to an NSA report, U.S. officials believed it was impossible for this to be a mistake and that Israel intended to sink their ship and blame it on Egypt to goad the U.S. into invading. The attack was part of another ambitious land grab by Israel in what became known as the Six-Day War; the next chapter of Zionist expansion. Israel launched surprise attacks on Egypt, Syria and Jordan and invaded all of Palestine's remaining 22% of land. The official rationale for this major act of aggression was one of pre-emption that the Jewish population in Israel was on the verge of being killed en masse by the Arab countries surrounding them. Many Israeli officials acknowledged that it was just propaganda, including a top military commander during the war, General Mattiyahu Peled was quoted in Haaretz, admitting: "The thesis that the danger of genocide was hanging over us in June 1967 and that Israel was fighting for its physical existence as only a bluff".

The colonial superpower charged at lightning speed, showering the land with napalm, and less than a week, close to 40,000 Arabs were killed, many of them civilians and crowded cities that were firebombed and overrun by Israeli tanks. By contrast under 800 Israeli soldiers were killed, along with 20 civilians. At the end of those six days, a new map emerged; closer to the Greater Israel that the Zionists had always dreamed about. They conquered the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, the Golan Heights of Syria and the rest of Palestine. Another 300,000 Palestinians were made refugees during that short time. Many of them had already been made refugees once before, during the Nakba. While they had to ultimately return the Sinai to Egypt, the territory that Israel seized in this war remains under their control today. The map shows the existence of Palestinian territory. All of it is still subject to Israeli military occupation and law. Hundreds more illegal settlements have also chewed holes in the map, reducing actual Palestinian land mass to almost nothing. While the occupation that continues today is presented as simply security measures to protect the Israeli state from terrorism, it is the same expansion and conquest that has marked the last century.

AM: In the face of unimaginable brutality all of these years, the Palestinian people have carried out their most powerful tool of resistance: continuing to exist, keeping their roots firmly planted in the land where every possible weapon is used to expel them. And they've shown that heroic resilience will never die.

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