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Editorial

SCURRYING TOWARDS BETHLEHEM

IT IS NOW NINE MONTHS since the outbreak of the second Intifada against the longest official military occupation of modern history—currently entering its thirty-fifth year. The conflict over Palestine, of course, goes back much further. The first clashes between Arabs and Jews date from the twenties of the last century. Since 1948 five wars have been fought by Israel, and two civil wars unleashed by side-effects in adjacent states. Whatever the battles in the Middle East, however, there are few divisions today in the West. Here, it is safe to say, there is no major international issue on which there is such consensus and so much cant as the question of Palestine—where a ‘peace process’ unanimously applauded by respectable opinion has supposedly been unfolding for a decade, whose progress can only be jeopardized by resort to violence. It is in the interest of all parties, so the official wisdom runs, that the uprising in the West Bank and Gaza be brought to an immediate stop. To cut through the mass of obfuscation that surrounds relations between Israelis and Palestinians, of which this notion is an end-product, is a task beyond any brief review here. But a few basic considerations can be set down.

I

The conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine is a clash between two nationalisms, a kind of which the last century has been full. Its

peculiarity has lain in an asymmetry between its antagonists. Palestinian national consciousness crystallized late, out of a wider Arab identity, after the disaster that befell the community when it was overwhelmed by Jewish arms in 1948—the *Nakba*. The Jewish nationalism that forced its Palestinian counterpart into being had, by contrast, taken organizational shape by the turn of the century. The Zionist movement founded by Herzl was a variety of the ethnic nationalism of nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe, where it found the mass of its adherents—a typical example of the awakening of divided or oppressed peoples of the region, in the epoch before and after the First World War. Two traits, however, marked off the position of the Jews. On the one hand, they occupied no common territory (and spoke no common language), but were scattered in pockets across the continent. On the other, they possessed a religious tradition of great antiquity which furnished an alternative basis—mediate or immediate—of identity, linked to a sacred homeland beyond Europe. In taking for its goal the establishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel, Zionism could draw on mobilizing reserves of theological and cultural energy more than capable of compensating for its lack of a conventional land or linguistic base.

Still, the obstacles to creating a nation-state thousands of miles away from the location of its constituents, in a terrain long inhabited by others, under the rule of a vast state representing another religious faith, would have been insurmountable save for a further factor, which was to make Zionism more than just another nationalist movement of the time. Sociologically, the Jews of Europe were sharply bifurcated. In Eastern Europe—above all, Poland and Russia—most of them were poor and downtrodden, exposed to humiliation and danger from every hostile prejudice of Christian anti-semitism: in a position worse than that of even the most oppressed of other nationalities in the region. In Western Europe, on the other hand, they included not only many members of the prosperous middle-class—*Besitz* and *Bildungsbürgertum*—but some of the greatest fortunes of the continent. At one end of Europe was the *shtetl* of Chagall or Martov; at the other, the *haute finance* of the Rothschilds and Warburgs, or the career of Disraeli. The shadow of anti-semitism fell on all Jews, whatever pinnacle of wealth or power they might reach, linking the highest to the lowest ranks of life, as the Dreyfus affair—the detonating episode of Zionism—made clear. But in the Belle Époque the top end of European Jewry nevertheless enjoyed an *entrée* to ruling circles of an imperialist Europe beyond the dreams of any other oppressed nationality

of the time. Without this paradoxical double determination, from above and below, Zionism could never have realized its goals.

2

The First World War gave the movement its breakthrough with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which announced British support for the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, coming on the heels of earlier French promises. London's decision to back Zionism was an unambiguous product of inter-imperialist calculation. Its immediate aim was to mobilize Jewish opinion in Russia and America behind the Allied War effort at a difficult moment—after the February Revolution, and before US entry into the conflict—while putting down a marker against French designs on Palestine. Behind it, however, also lay a long-standing ideological disposition within Protestant culture, with its powerful attachment to the Pentateuch, that favoured the return of the Jews to the Holy Land.¹ This strand of Christian Zionism, boasting a distinguished pedigree going back to the seventeenth century, formed an essential background to the shield extended by the British imperial elite to the build-up of Jewish settlements in Palestine, once Britain had made sure of its control of the region at Versailles. In 1918, there were some 700,000 Arabs and 60,000 Jews in Palestine. Twenty years later, there were 1,070,000 Arabs and 460,000 Jews.

Zionism thus acquired its peculiar dual nature. A movement of European ethnic nationalism became, inseparably, a form of European overseas colonialism. The settler colony created by Zionism in pre-war Palestine was *sui generis*. Unlike the English colonists in North America or

¹ Among those who advocated or prophesied the recovery of the land of Israel by the Jews were Milton, Locke, Newton, Priestley, Fichte, Browning, as well as the better known case of George Eliot. Among politicians could be numbered Shaftesbury, Palmerston, Milner, Lloyd George. In the Enlightenment tradition, there was Napoleon's call to the Jews to reconquer their patrimony, during the Syrian campaign of 1799. See the careful study by Regina Sharif of this neglected subject: *Non-Jewish Zionism*, London 1983, *passim*. Among political and bureaucratic elites, Christian Zionism was often quite compatible with anti-Semitism, since it projected departure of local Jews to the Holy Land: for this, see Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate*, New York 1999, pp. 33–36 et seq.

Australia, the Yishuv did not confront scattered hunter-gatherers but a dense peasant population which could not be shoved aside or wiped out. Unlike the French colonists in Algeria, or former Dutch colonists in South Africa, it could not afford to exploit native labour on a major scale without risking the creation of a *pied-noir* society in which it would become a minority. The task of constructing an ethnically homogeneous nation-state in a hostile environment could only be carried out by creating a separatist community bonded together by ideological belief, and undivided by any class chasm. That meant the *kibbutzim*: subjectively socialist in inspiration, in practice the only available solution to the problem of colonization without native labour, empty land, or extensive venture capital.² Apartheid was a mystification in South Africa, where there was never any 'separate development' of the races, and the term was no more than a euphemism for the most extreme forms of exploitation of blacks by whites; but something like it was the provisional objective of inter-war Zionism.

The Jewish enclave in Palestine was distinctive in another respect too. From the start it was a settler society without a home country—a colony that never issued from a metropolis. Rather, it had a proxy imperialism behind it. British colonial power was the absolute condition of Jewish colonization. Without the mailed force of the British police and army, the Arab majority—90 per cent of the population—would have stopped the Zionist build-up in its tracks after the First World War. Zionism depended completely on the violence of the British imperial state for its growth. When the Arab population finally realized the extent of Jewish penetration, it rose in a massive revolt that lasted from April 1936 to May 1939—historically, the first and largest Intifada. London deployed 25,000 troops and squadrons of aircraft to crush the rebellion: the largest colonial war of the British Empire in the whole inter-war period. The counter-insurgency campaign was aided and abetted by the Yishuv—Jews supplying a majority of Wingate's death squads. By the outbreak of the Second World

² This is the conclusion of Gershom Shafir's fundamental work, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914*, which traces the gradual emergence of the logic of 'exclusive Jewish employment' in the period prior to the First World War. For his analysis of subsequent years, see 'Zionism and Colonialism—a Comparative Approach', in Ilan Pappé, ed., *The Israel/Palestine Question*, London 1999, pp. 81–96.

War, British imperialism had broken the back of Palestinian political society, clearing the way for the post-war triumph of Zionism.

3

Nestling within the British Empire, the Jewish colonists were never completely at one with it. Friction between overseas settlers and their metropolitan base is a constant of colonial history, from the Boston Tea Party and the *cabildo* of Buenos Aires to Ian Smith and the OAS.³ Unlike any other, the relationship of the Yishuv to Whitehall was without sentimental ties of kinship or culture. Whatever the Anglophilia of brokers in London like Weizmann, for the tough-minded leaders of the settler community itself the pact between British colonialism and Jewish nationalism was purely instrumental.⁴ Tensions rose as soon as London, seeking to curb Arab discontent, tried to taper Jewish immigration, amidst gathering Nazi persecution in Germany. But the Second World War offered an opportunity for the armed wing of mainstream Labour Zionism to gain military experience and equipment under British command, and to secure Churchill's backing for an independent Jewish state in Palestine once hostilities were over.⁵ The more radical, and much smaller, Irgun wing of Zionism led by Begin did not wait for peace, launching an insurrection against Britain in 1944—to the fury of Ben-Gurion, whose forces collaborated with the British to hunt it down. Continuing immigration controls after 1945, when the full enormity of the fate of European Jewry under the Nazis was known, forced the

³ This was pointed out long ago by Maxime Rodinson: *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, New York 1973, pp. 64–5.

⁴ For some dry comments on the extent of Weizmann's understanding of the English, see David Vital, *Zionism: the Crucial Phase*, Oxford 1987, p. 163. Jabotinsky, as he notes, was less sentimental and more clear-sighted: p. 365.

⁵ Churchill's long-standing Zionism was based on racial rather than religious convictions. He expressed his social darwinist beliefs unambiguously to the Peel Commission in 1937, comparing Palestinian Arabs to the proverbial emblem of envious egoism in the animal world: 'I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger, even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America, or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher grade race, a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place'. See Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, comp. vol. 5, part 3, Boston 1983, p. 616.

Haganah to rally to the Irgun strategy. For a year, Britain was confronted with a fully-fledged settler revolt; and though Labour Zionism, cowed by the British crack-down, called off the struggle in August 1946, the Irgun and LHI never let up. By the spring of 1947, Britain had turned over its Mandate to the United Nations.

4

Then, as now, for the UN read US. In 1947 American control of the organization in New York, less comprehensive than today, was still quite sufficient to determine the outcome of its deliberations on Palestine. In Washington, Truman was a convinced Christian Zionist. A Commission of Enquiry, headed by a Swedish judge with Ralph Bunche at his side, and bugged by Zionist microphones, reported that Palestine should be divided. The Jews, with 35 per cent of the population, should receive 55 per cent of the land; the Arabs, with 65 per cent of the population, 45 per cent of the land. Within the proposed Jewish state, there were to be virtually as many Arabs as Jews; within the Arab state, virtually no Jews—ratios justified on the grounds that future Jewish immigration to Israel could be expected to create a decisive majority in the territory allocated to them, in time to come. Undoubtedly impressed by the Irgun's anti-imperialist campaign, the USSR—which alone could have blocked these arrangements—endorsed them: the essential service that Begin's unswerving attacks on Britain rendered Zionism. Resistance to the plan, widespread among smaller nations in the UN, was overpowered by American bribes and blackmail, to secure the necessary two-thirds vote in the General Assembly.⁶ Truman, the architect of the outcome, called himself with every right the modern Cyrus.

⁶ Among other nice touches, Liberia—in origin another settler state created at US initiative—was told that it would be brought to its knees by a rubber embargo if it dared to vote against the UN plan. Supreme Court Justices Murphy and Frankfurter—no less—brought the Philippines to heel. Bernard Baruch was struck off to threaten France that all American aid would be cut off if it voted against partition. The Cuban Ambassador reported that one Latin American country—possibly Cuba itself, targeted for priority pressure by Truman a few days earlier ('Cuba still won't play')—was paid \$75,000 for its vote. See Michael Cohen, *Palestine and the Great Powers 1945–1948*, Princeton 1982, pp. 294–9. Cohen notes that sympathies engendered by the Judeocide were not sufficient to pass the UN resolution: 'it would be owing to more mundane factors that the required extra votes were obtained at the eleventh hour'.

News of the UN resolution set off a spontaneous Palestinian uprising, which was crushed within six months by the Yishuv while British forces held the ring, ensuring that no Arab army could intervene. On their departure the state of Israel was declared, and Arab armies belatedly invaded. Outnumbered and outgunned by the IDF, they were routed by early 1949—with one exception, the condition of Jewish triumph. The real plan of partition had preceded the phoney one. Twelve days before the UN resolution, the Zionist leadership had offered a secret deal to the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan, conceding it the West Bank in exchange for a free hand elsewhere, since both parties were determined to pre-empt any chance of a Palestinian state.⁷ Jordan was a client state of Britain, which gave the arrangement its nod. When fighting broke out, King Abdullah duly seized his prey and let his allies fend for themselves. Israel emerged from the war in possession of a much larger territory than granted it by the UN, while Jordan annexed the West Bank.

5

In the course of the two waves of fighting between November 1947 and March 1949, but principally during the first, over half the Arab population was driven out of Palestine by Jewish attacks—some 700,000 persons. From the mid-thirties onwards, Zionism had tacitly presumed clearance of Arabs from its chosen terrain by forcible eviction, since their presence was incompatible with the homogeneous national state at which it aimed, and it was by then clear there was no chance of buying them out. Off the record, its leaders made no bones about this logic.⁸

⁷ See Avi Shlaim's account, in *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine*, New York 1988, pp. 110–16. Abdullah was paid for his collusion with cash, after he had pointed out to an emissary from the Jewish Agency that 'one who wants to get drunk should not count the glasses', meaning—as Shlaim puts it—that 'he who wants a state has to make the necessary investments': pp. 78–82.

⁸ Private intentions and public pronouncements were at variance from the start. As early as 1895, Herzl noted in his diary: 'We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our country . . . Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly'. In 1938 Ben-Gurion told the Jewish Agency Executive he saw nothing wrong with the idea of 'compulsory transfer' of the Arab population, explaining: 'I favour partition of the country because when we become a strong power after the establishment of

When the chance came, they took it. Local Arab flights assisted them, but the fear that drove these was a function of the killings and expulsions of the war waged by the Zionist high commands, in which massacre, pillage and intimidation were instruments of policy to spread terror among the target population. The war of Jewish independence unleashed a massive operation of ethnic cleansing, on which Israel as a state has rested ever since. The expulsions were carried out in the typical conditions of *Nacht und Nebel*—under cover of military darkness—in which nearly all such crimes were committed in the twentieth century. A distinctive series of euphemisms, deconstructed below by Gabriel Piterberg, was devised by the victors to mask the fate of Palestinians. The clearance was not just of a people. Land and property were seized with a speed and on a scale that no settlers had ever before achieved in colonial history. In early 1947, Jews owned 7 per cent of the land of Palestine. By the end of 1950, they had appropriated 92 per cent of land within the new state—booty including homes and buildings of every kind.⁹ A rump of 160,000 Arabs were left, as internal refugees within Israel.

In the scales of terror, the *Nakba* does not compare with the *Shoah*. The Nazi extermination of the Jews in Europe was an enormity of a different order, and the disproportion between them has traditionally been used to justify, or attenuate, the expulsion of Palestinians that lies at the foundation of Israel. To this day, it is the mantle of the Judeocide that covers the actions of the Zionist state, in the eyes not only of the Israeli population or Jews of the diaspora, but Western opinion at large. Historically, however, there was little or no connexion between them. By 1947, the fighters of the Haganah and Irgun were well aware of what had happened to the Jews trapped in Nazi Europe. But they would not have acted otherwise even if every compatriot had been saved. Zionist

the state, we will abolish partition and spread throughout all of Palestine'. By 1944 he was warning his colleagues that it would be impolitic to discuss 'transfer' openly, 'because it could cause [us] harm in public opinion in the world', giving 'the impression that there is no room in Palestine without ejecting the Arabs', and so forcing 'the Arabs onto their hind legs' in protest. Eliahu Dobkin, a Mapai colleague, added bluntly: 'There will be in the country a large [Arab] minority and it must be ejected. There is no room for our internal inhibitions [in this matter]': see Benny Morris, 'Revisiting the Palestinian exodus of 1948', in Rogan and Shlaim, eds, *The War for Palestine, Rewriting the History of 1948*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 41–7.

⁹ Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: the Socio-Territorial Dimension of Zionist Politics*, Berkeley 1983, p. 143.

objectives had been laid down well before Hitler came to power, and were not altered by him. Ben-Gurion once said he was willing to sacrifice the lives of half the Jewish children of Germany, if that was the price of bringing the other half to Palestine, rather than leaving them all safely in England.¹⁰ Of how much less account was the fate of the Arabs, children or adults. The goal of a Jewish national state in the Middle East admitted of no other solution than that which was forcibly realized by the *Nakba*. After the event, the Judeocide has served as pretext or mitigation, but it had no immediate bearing on the outcome. In Europe and America, it gained external sympathy for the Zionist war of independence, but this was never a decisive factor in its success.

All ethnic nationalisms—and all nationalisms are in some measure ethnic—contain seeds of potential violence against other nationalities. Not differing cultural traits, but historical situations determine whether these bear fruit. Jewish nationalism was born of a combination of deterritorialized despair and socio-political privilege. Like most national movements, it mobilized high ideals and devoted courage among its adherents. But it could achieve aims that came relatively easily or peacefully to others placed in more fortunate positions, only by colonial collusion and violent dispossession. For that enterprise, Zionism required cadres of an implacable temper, and duly bred them. In the gallery of modern nationalisms, their record is at one end of a spectrum of ruthlessness, crowded by many others. There is no reason either to exalt their success, which depended largely on imperial power, or embellish their conduct, whose consequences fester to this day. But they were not exceptional in pursuit of their goal. They were ordinary cleansers.

6

The state that emerged from Zionist victory was less ordinary. Juridically, Israel became a republic based on blood and faith—confessional and biological criteria combining to define actual or potential citizens in full right as those individuals either born of a Jewish mother, or of attested Mosaic persuasion, regardless of geographical location. The Law

¹⁰ See Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist–Arab Conflict 1881–1999*, London 1999, p. 62. Ben-Gurion made his remark in 1938, a month after *Kristallnacht*.

of Return guaranteed residence in Israel to anyone complying with these theologico-ethnic requirements, while any return of Palestinian refugees to their homes was blocked. Over five million further Jewish immigrants were absorbed into Israel in the next fifty years, while Arabs were reduced to permanently inferior status, denied the right to purchase Jewish land or property, enter the armed services, or organize without political constraint. The Zionist state, meanwhile, held over 90 per cent of land in its direct or indirect keeping, while the trade-union arm of the ruling Labour party controlled a complex of enterprises—banks, factories, services—employing about a quarter of the workforce. Military expenditure was consistently the highest in the world, long accounting for some 25–40 per cent of GNP, and leading swiftly to the build-up of a nuclear arsenal.

The sixfold expansion of the Jewish population of Israel and the creation of a new linguistic community out of so many disparate arrivals was, by any standards, a remarkable feat of social engineering. In retaliation for the defeat of 1948–49, successive Arab states persecuted or expelled their Jewish communities, to whom Israel offered generous shelter and welcome in telling contrast to the fate of Palestinian refugees in Arab lands. With the collapse of the USSR another major wave of immigrants was successfully assimilated. These were achievements of a high order. Economically, however, this structure was never viable on its own. What alone made it possible were huge subventions from abroad. For thirty years after independence, domestic taxes never came near meeting official expenditures.¹¹ The Jewish Agency poured in money from the diaspora, and West Germany supplied large-scale reparations, but by themselves these would never have been sufficient to keep Israel solvent. It was the United States that made possible the Zionist fortress. No accurate computation of the cumulative value of unilateral transfers of capital from the American state, many of them tucked away in thickets of technical provisions, ever seems to have been made. But there is little doubt that, as Avi Shlaim has written of the last decade, ‘never in the

¹¹ For example, total public expenditures exceeded 70 per cent of GNP in each of the years 1980 to 1985. ‘Taxation alone cannot finance such a rate of expenditures, but due to US aid and other foreign non-debt sources, this is not really necessary. In the Lebanon War year 1982, enough foreign resources were mobilized to allow the government to facilitate the 71.5 per cent of GNP in expenditures, with only 56.6 per cent in domestic finance’: Yakir Plessner, *The Political Economy of Israel*, Albany 1994, p. 177.

annals of human history had so few people owed so much to so many'.¹² In the more technical language of two other loyal analysts, Israel has been a 'rentier state'.¹³ The consolidation and expansion of the country depended completely on an immense funnel of arms and funds from Washington. In effect, the imperial baton that the UK relinquished in 1948 was passed to the US. Ever since, Zionism has relied on a carapace of American power as it once did on British.

The depth and strength of the relationship, however, has been of another order. Not only is the United States incomparably wealthier and more powerful than Britain was even in its heyday, let alone its declining inter-war years. Within it the Jewish community, which by its own efforts has become the most successful of all immigrant groups in the country, exercises an influence on the state beyond the dreams of any counterpart in the past of European Jewry. Entrenched in business, government and media, American Zionism has since the sixties acquired a firm grip on the levers of public opinion and official policy towards Israel, that has weakened only on the rarest of occasions. Taxonomically, the colonists have in this sense at length acquired something like the metropolitan state—or state within a state—they initially lacked. Conversely, Israel has acted as a reliable surrogate for the US in many a regional operation. The strength of this axis has grown with every decade. In the nineties, the flow of US subsidies to Israel trebled. No apter illustration of the intimacy of the relationship could be given than the costly concluding act of Clinton's rule, appropriate in so many other ways—the Presidential pardon of a runaway Belgian crook in exchange for a financial consideration, at the urgent personal request of the Premier and Foreign Minister of Israel, seconded by the Mayor of Jerusalem and the former head of Mossad.

¹² *The Iron Wall—Israel and the Arab World*, London 2000, p. 487. Shlaim is referring not to the post-independence years, but to the nineties.

¹³ Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, 'Introduction: the Socioeconomic Liberalization of Israel', in Shafir and Peled, eds, *The New Israel—Peacemaking and Liberalization*, Boulder 2000, p. 6. 'In recent years external funds in the form of grants, contributions and unrequited transfers have totalled around \$6 billion annually', according to the Economist Intelligence Country Report, *Israel 2000*. Above and beyond such *ex gratia* largesse, it notes: 'A vital asset to the Israeli economy has been the country's close alliance with the US, which has given Israeli governments access to long-term official credits, and under the umbrella of official guarantees, to the domestic US bond market': p. 37.

The creation of Israel shook the Arab world, contributing to the rise of a new and more vehement nationalism in Egypt, Syria and Iraq in the course of the fifties. Logically viewing this as a potential threat, Labour Zionism conspired with France, then engaged in the Algerian War, and Britain, incensed by the nationalization of the Suez Canal, to launch a tripartite attack on Egypt in 1956. Mindful of the danger of driving Nasser into the arms of the USSR, and irritated at the lack of consultation with the US, Eisenhower brought the assault to a halt. The lesson was learnt. Eleven years later, this time having procured American blessing, Israel obliterated the Egyptian air-force, seized Sinai and the Golan heights, annexed East Jerusalem and occupied the West Bank and Gaza, in a pre-emptive six-day blitz. An attempted Arab counter-attack in 1973 was thwarted by a massive American sea and airlift: fighter-bombers, troop transports and tanks. Six years later, in response to US inducements, Egypt abandoned allies and Palestinians to their fate, signing a separate peace to recover Sinai. Freed from danger in the south, Israel struck north again, invading Lebanon in 1982 to destroy Palestinian bases there and seize a buffer zone.

In 1967 Isaac Deutscher remarked that Israel had embarked on a course of *sich totsiegen*—triumphing itself to death.¹⁴ Victories followed one after another, with little sign of death. But one difficulty persisted. Conquest of the West Bank and Gaza brought over one and a half million Palestinians under Israeli military occupation: too many to digest as infra-citizens 1950-style, and too many to expel as refugees 1948-style, in the absence of a more prolonged war. The *Blitzkrieg* of 1967 was too swift for major cleansing—in those few days, only 120,000 Arabs fell subject to ‘retroactive transfer’, not nearly enough to alter the negative demography of Judæa and Samaria. In that more limited sense, Deutscher was right. The Israeli elite split over the consequences. Labour Zionism, which in 1949 had nearly heeded Ben-Gurion’s urgings and annexed the West Bank outright, but vacillated and missed its chance, thereafter clung to the view that the Hashemite regime in Jordan, as subservient a neighbour as could be hoped for, remained the best bet to take care of the zone, as a contractual gendarme. Likud Zionism held fast to the

¹⁴ ‘The Arab–Israeli Conflict’ (interview conducted by Peter Wollen), NLR 1/44, July–August 1967, pp. 30–45.

notion that Eretz Israel by definition included Judæa and Samaria. The first option was undone when Jordan scrapped its claims to the West Bank, and accepted a Palestinian national identity. The second could only be made a reality in the event of another major conflagration, and attendant wave of expulsions, not immediately forthcoming. The result was a strategic impasse. In the interim, both sides fell back on a programme of incremental Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, to criss-cross and squeeze the area of Palestinian habitation in a gradually tightening vice, pending some more definitive resolution.

8

Twenty years of military occupation and settler encroachment, however, eventually ignited popular resistance. The Intifada which broke out in December 1987 started as a spontaneous, unarmed movement of civil resistance by the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank. Fighting with unequal weapons—mostly stones, sticks and knives against rifles and machine-guns—followed. The uprising marked the emergence of a new generation of youth, amid the awakening of a broad national consciousness, in the occupied territories. Israeli control of its conquests was never really threatened; but nor was Israeli repression capable of snuffing out the revolt. The Intifada was ended by US victories in the Cold War and Gulf War. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and rout of the last Middle Eastern state capable of crossing Washington, the Palestinian cause was isolated, and American diplomacy had a free hand to tidy up a traditional pocket of instability. The Madrid Conference and Oslo Accords were the local equivalent of the extension of NATO to Eastern Europe and the Balkan War: tying up the loose ends left by a global knock-out.

For the purpose, two conditions were necessary: Israeli co-initiative and Palestinian compliance. The second was easier to achieve than the first. Arafat, after hailing Saddam, was soon on his knees to Clinton. One of the least competent leaders a nationalist movement has ever produced, Washington had little difficulty cajoling him to his appointed role in the solution. Flattered by the attentions from the White House, he was more or less putty from the start. More difficult to persuade was Israel, resistant so long as Shamir was Prime Minister. But when Labour regained the upper hand in Jerusalem, Rabin and Peres—advised by

Israeli intelligence that Arafat now represented the best chance of controlling the West Bank and Gaza at one remove—were ready to proceed. The result was the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995: symbolic mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO; limited IDF withdrawal from Gaza and areas of the West Bank, and establishment of a ‘self-governing’ Palestinian Authority, in exchange for Arafat’s commitment to repress any further attacks on Israeli occupation. Such was to be the start of a ‘peace process’ leading to an unspecified final settlement in time to come, lubricated in the interim by generous Euro-American donations to the Palestinian Authority, and cooperation between its security services and Mossad, chaired by the CIA. This, Arafat explained to his people, was the royal road to an independent Palestinian state.

9

Rarely has any international agreement been greeted with such unanimous applause as the Oslo Accords: historic handshakes on the White House lawn, Nobel Prize for all participants, an avalanche of congratulatory or self-congratulatory commentaries in articles and books round the world. Realities on the ground were very different. From the start, Benny Morris has written, ‘like all occupations, Israel’s was founded on brute force, repression and fear, collaboration and treachery, beatings and torture chambers, and daily intimidation, humiliation and manipulation’.¹⁵ The advent of the ‘peace process’ altered nothing of this. What changes has it brought? After eight years, the IDF remains in complete control of 60 per cent of the West Bank, and ‘joint’ control of another 27 per cent; a network of new Israeli-only roads built on confiscated land divides and encircles the residual enclaves under Palestinian authority; the number of Jewish settlers, who monopolize 80 per cent of all water in the occupied territories, has virtually doubled; the per capita income of the Palestinian population fell by one quarter in the first five years after the Accords, and has since collapsed yet further. To these torments are now added the tyranny and corruption of the ‘police state without a state’ headed by Arafat, in those areas where it has a lease to hold down its compatriots for Israel.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Righteous Victims*, p. 341.

¹⁶ Formula coined by Beverley Milton-Edwards, ‘Internal Security and Citizenship under the Palestinian National Authority’, in Nils Butenshon, Uri Davis and Manuel Hassassian, eds, *Citizenship and the State in the Middle East*, Syracuse,

In these conditions, nothing was more certain than continuing acts of popular rebellion, escalating outside a discredited collaborationist establishment. Radical Islamist attacks on Israeli targets multiplied from the mid-nineties onwards. To break the impetus behind them, Barak's Labour regime tried to pull Arafat into a full and final settlement, according him nominal independence and a seat in the UN, in exchange for Israeli annexation of its settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem, strategic control of all territory under a Palestinian flag, and burial of any right of refugees to recover their homes in Israel. Scared at the scale of opposition to such a surrender—which meant abandoning any pretence of a return even to 1967 frontiers—and fearful of his own future if he signed, at the last minute Arafat balked. Two months later, the second Intifada exploded. This time, the rising has been a much more violent process, with a significantly broader base, drawing in dissident wings of Al-Fatah and even sections of the PNA apparatus itself, alongside fundamentalist militants. But the balance of forces has not changed. If fully unleashed, the IDF could decapitate resistance at any moment.

IO

From the start, the most courageous and lucid critic of the Oslo Accords has been Edward Said. *The End of the Peace Process*, which brings together his writings on his native country over the past five years, is a prophetic work. It combines absolute refusal of the hypocrisies and falsehoods that have dressed up arrangements designed to reconcile Palestinians to their own submission, with a complete avoidance of the vain flourishes of rhetorical compensation or retribution that have typically accompanied opposition to them. The principal political conclusion Said draws from recent history rests on an analogy with South Africa. There, he notes, the ANC was thoroughly beaten on the battlefield, its organization all but destroyed within the country itself. But by consistent campaigning abroad, it was able to delegitimize and isolate the apartheid regime morally, to a point where in the end the South African whites themselves—now subject to every kind of international boycott—

NY 2000, p. 354. The most powerful overall account of the situation in the occupied territories is Edward Said's 'Palestinians Under Siege', *London Review of Books*, 14 December 2000. See also Allegra Pacheco's impressive summary, 'The Oslo Process, Unfair and Unreal, Was Never Going to Work', *International Herald Tribune*, 6 October 2000.

sued for negotiations, and eventually dismantled their own apparatus of domination. So too, Said argues, should Palestinian resistance proceed, 'to bring parity between us and the Israelis, who so far overpower us now as to make the moral dimension our only field of struggle'.¹⁷ The long-standing inability of the PLO to bring home the realities of Israeli occupation to publics in the West, in the way that the ANC succeeded in doing over many years, is taken here as the key strategic weakness of the Palestinian cause.

The force of the argument rests on the discrepancy—certainly striking enough—between the persuasive skills of the two moments, and on the moving example of Said's own advocacy. Its limitation lies in the structural difference between the objective situations of the oppressed in the two settler states of South Africa and Israel. The Afrikaner regime was a minority laager with virtually no metropolitan back-up; shunned in the Netherlands, the most it could count on elsewhere in the West was business or bureaucratic sympathy behind closed doors. No politician outside South Africa could openly embrace apartheid. In the United States, moreover, there was a vast constituency that identified immediately and passionately with South Africa's majority black population, who were its victims. African-Americans represented an unignorable pressure against Pretoria within the American political system, under even the most reactionary administrations. The position of the Palestinian cause is the very reverse.¹⁸ While there are now significant numbers of Arab immigrants in the US, they are mostly workers—poor, divided and marginal within the social hierarchy. Israel, on the other hand—whose population is over twice that of the West Bank and Gaza—commands massive middle-class Jewish loyalty in America, and widespread sympathy across the political spectrum in Europe. Even with the best moral will in the

¹⁷ *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*, London 2000, pp. 195–9.

¹⁸ The objective possibilities of the two movements to sway public opinion in the West are the terms of comparison here. The structural differences in the two situations of oppression are, of course, still more pertinent. By reason of its exploitation as the country's principal workforce, the African working-class was indispensable to the Apartheid regime, giving it an ultimate historical leverage of which, by contrast, exclusion from Israeli industry has always deprived the Palestinians. The political consequences of this contrast are explored in a striking comparative study by Mona Younis, *Liberation and Democratization: The South African and Palestinian National Movements*, Minneapolis 2000, a fundamental work for understanding the current situation.

world, there is little chance of a repetition of the South African scenario in the Middle East. Efforts to isolate Israel, and extend solidarity with the Palestinian cause, remain more than ever necessary. But it is an illusion to think that international opinion alone would have much direct impact on Zionism. There are historical situations in which the force of moral argument can be decisive, as abolition of the slave-trade or the fall of apartheid testify. But these require either a relative absence of the powerful material interests that are ordinarily determinant of political struggles, or an even balance between them, that can be tipped by moral persuasion. Neither condition holds in the Middle East today.

II

That is not to say there are no cracks in a complacent consensus. Said himself has drawn attention in these pages to one of them. In the US, as he points out, criticism of Israel is ‘the last taboo’—much riskier and rarer than of the United States itself.¹⁹ For many years American Zionism has had little difficulty stifling any serious dissent, automatically typecast as ‘self-hating’ if Jewish, or ‘anti-Semitic’ if Gentile. In Europe, there is more diversity of opinion, but its parameters typically remain narrow. For the majority of a distinguished Jewish intelligentsia—as for conservative, liberal and social-democratic outlooks at large—the memory of Nazi genocide insulates Israel from anything more than intermittent misgivings or regrets, quickly laid aside in what passes for any emergency. Reactions to the Gulf War can be taken as a Rorschach of this sensibility. The unfortunate fate of the Palestinians is deplored on all sides. Those willing to speak truthfully of the ‘peace process’ can be numbered on the fingers of one hand.

In Israel itself, on the hand, as Said has noted, home truths can be heard that are blasphemy in the Diaspora. It is there that the settler dynamic of Zionism has been most thoroughly explored; the mechanisms and scale of Palestinian expulsions documented; collusion with successive imperial powers exposed; the sanction of torture by the law protested; the confessional nature of the state denounced. It is in *Ha'aretz*, not the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Le Monde* or *La Repubblica* that the Law of Return has been freely compared to the Nuremberg Code. The emergence of a ‘post-Zionist’ scholarship and—as yet small—sector of

¹⁹ ‘America’s Last Taboo’, NLR 6, November–December 2000, pp. 45–53.

opinion is one of the most welcome developments of recent years.²⁰ The context in which it has appeared, however, is a warning against any exaggerated optimism.

12

Since the nineties, the Israeli political scene has increasingly come to resemble the American, if still with a few European touches. Economically, neoliberalism has swept away most of the traditional landmarks set in place in the fifties, as Labour has competed with Likud, and often outdone it, in zeal for deregulation and privatization. The centre piece of Histadrut's industrial empire, Israel's largest conglomerate, was snapped up and sold on by Disney; its medical complex was dismantled under Rabin; the country's biggest bank—once also a Histadrut institution—was privatized by Netanyahu. The Sharon government is currently preparing plans for the privatization of land, naturally for Jews and appropriate foreigners only. Within the space of a decade, the public sector share of GDP fell from over a half to just over a third, and of investment from 85 to 15 per cent. In today's Israel, social expenditures are lower than those of the United States. The country has become one of the two most unequal societies in the advanced capitalist world.²¹

But as in the United States, convergence—often to the point of interchangeability—between the two major parties on economic and social issues, coexists with sharply divergent electoral bases and contrasting ideological profiles. Nuances in devotion to capitalism are merely piquant.²²

²⁰ 'Post-Zionism' is a loose and in some ways misleading term. What it essentially signifies is a rejection of the official mythology of the Israeli state, and a commitment to historical truth, whatever its consequences for the story of national emancipation. It need not imply any political break with Zionism—that is, conventional support for the existing Jewish state in the Middle East. Within the ranks of post-Zionism, there is a range of opinion on the acceptability of the status quo in Israel; radical critics remain a minority. For a survey of positions, see Laurence Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates*, London 1999.

²¹ See Shafir and Peled, *The New Israel*, pp. 111–2, 194, 223, 233–4.

²² Yossi Beilin, Israel's Peter Mandelson, who devised the Oslo Accords, recently explained: 'I don't think it's fair to say that we in Labour adopted the capitalistic way—we are Social Democrats who adopted a Third Way similar to that advocated by Anthony Giddens and modelled by Tony Blair': *Tikkun*, Sept–Oct 2000, p. 11. Amid the din of construction work on new settlements and strategic roads in the West Bank, Barak found time to distribute copies of Giddens's book to all members of his cabinet.

But otherwise, to a still greater extent than in America, the more similar substantive policies are, the shriller secondary differentiation becomes. As with Democrats and Republicans, so with Labour and Likud: a *Kulturkampf* out of all proportion with real contradictions mobilizes partisan passions, as if to mask from the contestants themselves the deeper unity between them. To an even greater degree than in America, the great bulk of the academic world and intelligentsia forms a *bien-pensant* milieu of the 'centre left', whose self-deceptions are graphically depicted by Yitzhak Laor below.²³ But in a popular culture dominated by commerce and religion, its political incidence—as in the US—is slight. Two differences continue to mark off the Israeli case from the American model. PR gives the plethora of Judaic sects their own electoral representation, indeed normally making them the arbiter of coalitions in the Knesset. Likud thus has less religious ballast than the Republican Party. It also has a far less well-off electorate, since its primary support lies among poorer Sephardic immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East, despised by the better-educated Ashkenazi from Eastern Europe who form Labour's traditional base. There is thus a class skew between the two Israeli parties that inverts the US pattern. Russian immigrants, security hawks but equally anti-clerical, are swing voters. The upshot of the system has been crisply encapsulated by an Israeli observer: "The major players in the socio-political drama taking place in Israel today are of the right: the socio-economic liberal right of the capitalist upper classes—called in Israel "the left"—and the ethno-religious fundamentalist right of the labouring lower classes—called in Israel "the people".²⁴

²³ For a spirited attack on the Israeli cultural establishment from the Right, see *The Jewish State: the Struggle for Israel's Soul* (New York 2001) by Yoram Hazony, one of Netanyahu's advisers, which gives a lively picture of what the author sees as the local *trahison des clercs*—the hollowing out of Zionist faith among mainstream intellectuals, under the demoralizing influence of a minority of German-trained philosophers and historians (Buber, Scholem, Prawer, Talmon etc.), who had disavowed it from the start. The scenery Hazony deplores is for the most utterly anodyne, but his wider complaint of a general philistinism, in which ideas of any kind are at a discount, rings true. Labour's traditional culture—the mixture of machismo and schmaltz of which a figure like Amos Oz offers a typical embodiment—does little to disprove his strictures, from which Hazony does not exempt Begin or his colleagues either.

²⁴ Uri Ram, 'The Promised Land of Business Opportunities: Liberal Post-Zionism in the Global Age', in Shafir and Peled, *The New Israel*, p. 236.

Such is the unpromising setting in which the future of Zionism is debated today. Here differences between the two main parties, rooted in the long-standing antagonism between Labour and Revisionist traditions, remain substantial—albeit tactical. Labour Zionism has always looked to foreign protectors of one kind or another, and been willing to make temporary adjustments of policy to accommodate them. Its outlook is pragmatic: names count for less than things. The Revisionist tradition, of greater intellectual distinction, has been more self-reliant, and less flexible: names remain a clue to things. So Labour believes that granting the Palestinians a couple of bantustans, pinioned every few kilometres by Israeli settlers and soldiers, will appease anxieties in Washington and remove a trouble-zone for Israel at little real cost; while Likud, remembering the history of Zionism itself, believes that the appetite comes with eating, and what is mere nomenclature today is likely to acquire some reality tomorrow. Neither side has any intention of contemplating real national sovereignty for the Palestinians. Confronted with the actual popular will of the West Bank and Gaza, they close ranks immediately, and you have the Sharon–Peres regime of today. Behind it, a *union sacrée* of disbelief and outrage at the rejection of Israeli ‘concessions’ at Camp David extends across the political spectrum.

It is in this context that both the courage and pusillanimity of ‘post-Zionism’ can be measured.²⁵ The outstanding intellectual achievement of the work of Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, Gershom Shafir, Baruch Kimmerling, Tom Segev, is now widely acknowledged. One edifice after another of official Zionist mythology has been dismantled. But the fearless research and uncompromising judgement that have been typical marks of their investigations of the past stop suddenly short in the present, as soon as political questions are posed. Analytical lions, these authors are prescriptive lambs. Not one seriously queried Oslo, let alone

²⁵ There is a radical current within post-Zionism, to be distinguished from the dominant trend, which rejects the premises of Zionism itself. Not all those associated with this wing accept the prefix. The historian Ilan Pappé prefers to speak of ‘A-zionism’. Under pressure of events, further political differentiation can be expected within the post-Zionist field.

Camp David. More than one gushed over Barak. None has proposed any alternative to the 'peace process'.

What should be that alternative? Historically, there was a strain within the Yishuv which argued that only a bi-national state, shared equally between Arabs and Jews, could bring justice to Palestine. This non-Zionist tradition, found principally among Jews of German origin, had its intellectual stronghold in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; and found political expression in the Communist movement. Though Edward Said has sought to revive it, in Israel today it is all but extinct. However desirable, such a solution was always bound to founder on the reality of two antagonistic ethnic nationalisms, each entitled to claim their right of self-determination.

That left only partition. All schemes for a settlement have required a division of Palestine. What is the Israeli proposal, from which post-Zionism has yet to dissociate itself? It rests on four axioms, determining the size, location, security and economy of any residual Palestinian entity to be granted self-government, or nominal statehood. Size: under a fifth of the country—Israel will keep the 78 per cent of Palestine it seized in 1948–9, plus Jerusalem and a slice of settlements in the West Bank, currently envisaged as perhaps another 5 or 6 per cent. Location: two disjointed enclaves, with no major pre-war town, and no natural harbour. Security: no defence force, simply domestic police. Economy: no reparations for the plunder of Arab property.

15

The brazen inequity of these proposals, at the heart of the 'peace process', has aroused scarcely a murmur of protest in the Diaspora, where ethnic solidarity all but universally prevails over moral principle—let alone in Israel itself. They can be taken, however, as benchmarks against which an acceptable solution could be measured. A decade ago, Guy Mandron, a French officer with some understanding of the military outlook of Israel's rulers, proposed a division of Palestine, published below, that had the merit of at least answering to two of the criteria for a just settlement. His scheme stipulated that a future Palestinian state must form a single contiguous territory, and be no less defensible by arms

than its Israeli counterpart. It is a salutary shock to look at his maps, which show the full distance between what that would mean and what is 'on offer' today. All the more so, when it is realized that this is a plan that does nothing to alter the net distribution of land between the two proposed states, and restores no major city or port to the Palestinian side. Mandron does not try to justify his preservation of the existing surface ratios, remarking that other starting-points are possible.

Today there are some six million Jews in Israel and some six million Palestinians, scattered in the occupied territories and camps in neighbouring states, and in Israel itself. Any equitable division of land between these roughly equal numbers requires rough parity of resources. The territorial configuration of a just partition would have to look something like Mandron's scheme, without the 'compensations' he makes to Israel, and with the inclusion of Haifa, whose population was two-thirds Arab in 1947: in other words, a single bloc of Palestinian territory, abandoning Gaza and covering the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Galilee and the coastline from Lebanon to Haifa, in a band alongside Israel and curving over it, to form two states with interlocking L-shapes. Reparations for Arab properties within Israeli territory looted in 1950, the last essential condition of a settlement, would go to those Palestinians unable to return to their homes across the new borders, and those now domiciled in Israel who chose to remain there.

16

It is enough to set out these conditions to hear the regretful shrug of the *belles âmes* of liberal Zionism and post-Zionism alike—"This is all very well, but it isn't remotely practical politics'. Translated: we have what we hold. There is not the slightest intention, anywhere in this front of opinion, of yielding a square inch of the 78 per cent of the country padlocked against repossession, nor the smallest idea that parting with a modicum of the remaining 22 per cent would be anything other than a 'painful concession'.²⁶ Here is Benny Morris:

Israel has done its share—it has recognized the PLO, recognized the necessity of dividing Palestine between a Jewish state and a smaller Palestinian

²⁶ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p. 651.

state. This is a vast revolution in Israeli thinking compared to where Israelis were on this question in the years between 1948–1992. Barak has even gone further, agreeing to divide Jerusalem. But Israel cannot accept the right of return without facing destruction.

Here is Tom Segev, freely confessing that:

What Barak was offering seems far less generous than it appeared when we didn't look at the details (sic). The land we are offering turns out to be a series of little islands with no contiguous territory, separated by Israeli settlements and roads policed by the Israeli Army. So the truth is: we didn't offer them a good deal.

then continuing imperturbably:

I've come to realize that the conflict was inevitable, the war was inevitable, and now with the settlements in place the continuation of the conflict is inevitable, and there will be no peace at this time. I was always against the settlements, but now they exist . . . They are new facts—you can't evacuate whole towns.

Here is David Grossman, acclaimed for empathy with the Palestinian plight:

Barak put everything on the table. He did it the wrong way, but I think most Israelis now know what we have to give up to make real peace. I think the election of Ariel Sharon shows that most Israelis are not mature enough to make those concessions. And when I listen to the Palestinians, I'm not sure they're willing to make the concessions they need to make, which would be to give up the demand for the right of return.²⁷

Or, as Jerome Slater, the last word in progressive Zionism, devoted to 'reconciliation' with the Palestinians, Oslo-style, has delicately put it,

²⁷ Respectively: *Tikkun*, March–April 2001 (Morris); Jan–Feb 2001 (Segev); May–June 2001 (Grossman). Shlaim, whose encomia of Barak were most effusive of all—hailing his advent to power as 'more than an earthquake. It was the sunrise after three dark and terrible years'—now writes: 'The Oslo Accords did not fail: it was Ehud Barak who undermined them. The Accords are about identifying and cultivating common interests.' In his eyes, 'the annexation by Israel of about 10 per cent of the West Bank where the bulk of the settlers reside', leaving 'a demilitarized Palestinian state, with a capital in Abu Dis, just outside the municipal boundary of Jerusalem' constitutes 'favourable terms' (sic). See *London Review of Books*, 16 September 1999 and 25 January 2001.

explaining why they cannot be allowed to return: 'The passage of time not only creates new practical realities, it also creates new or at least more complex moral realities. This is not a matter of "might makes right"; rather, what began as might may evolve into right, or at least into rights'.²⁸ Faced with such reasoning, the Revisionist tradition is more straightforward and consistent. Why not give might a little more time to do its work? If it is all right to take four-fifths of the country, what is wrong with finishing the job and taking the lot? God did not divide it, but gave it to us entire. Against the intellectual misery of the 'peace process', to which such post-Zionism forlornly clings, the argument of Eretz Israel is unanswerable.

17

No matter how brave their resistance to the IDF, the Palestinians are too weak to have much hope of obtaining justice by themselves, today or tomorrow. Sooner or later, and probably sooner rather than later, Labour Zionism will get its chance to clamp the gridiron of Camp David on them. The engrained instinct of Arafat's regime is, in the Arabic phrase, to 'scurry'.²⁹ Addicted to American pay-offs, and accustomed to CIA instructions, it is only held back by fear of popular retribution. So long as the Intifada persists, beyond control, the PNA will temporize. But no uprising can last forever. Under relentless blockade and sniper-fire, exhaustion may well set in among the population, and any kind of peace come to seem preferable to continuation of an unequal war. Who could blame them? There will be affecting scenes once again on the White House lawn, and a chorus of congratulations from the 'international community', as a dismembered statelet, its elite irrigated with grateful funds, arises somewhere west of the Jordan. Israel knows how to run an Arab subsidiary: Arafat as Major Haddad, the PNA as SLA writ large. Whether the Palestinians can be held down thus indefinitely remains, of course, to be seen. The time when Midianites and Amalekites could be

²⁸ Jerome Slater, 'Can Zionism be Reconciled with Justice for the Palestinians?', *Tikkun*, Vol 15, No 4, 2000, p. 25.

²⁹ For the term 'scurriers', coined by the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani after the Rabin-Arafat handshake on the White House lawn, and which has since acquired general currency in the Arab world, see Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, p. 578; and 'A History of Disappointment', *London Review of Books*, 22 June 2000.

extinguished without memory has past. The Israeli consensus is aware of this, which is why the most unnegotiable of all the conditions to be attached to Palestinian statehood, from which no significant dissent is ever heard, is that—while Israel remains fully armed—it be demilitarized. It has to be, since how otherwise could the raptors of 78 per cent of the land, however well guarded by their own dogs of war, ever sleep soundly at night? The demand, on which every right-thinking Israeli agrees, confesses the original, unappeasable crime.

18

Is there no other prospect? Israeli power will never yield to anything but strength. But its own has an Achilles heel. It remains a state still ultimately dependent for its defence and prosperity on the United States. Its fortune has always been a function of foreign protection, and could not survive its subtraction. If American support were ever withdrawn from Zionism, its intransigence would swiftly erode. The rigidity of public opinion in Israel, whose condition has long been its assurance of the American *placet*, is in this sense more brittle than it seems. If Washington were to pull the rug from under Jerusalem, unexpected changes of heart would not be long in coming. But how could America ever contemplate such a betrayal? The answer lies, as it has done ever since the fifties, in the Arab world. So long as both of the key Arab powers—Egypt with its population, and Saudi Arabia with its petroleum—remain client-states of America, the Middle East and its oil are safely in US hands, and there is no reason to deny Israel anything it wishes. But should that ever change, the fate of the Palestinians would instantly alter. America has invested enormous sums to sustain Mubarak's moth-eaten dictatorship in Cairo, cordially despised by the Egyptian masses, and spared no effort to protect the feudal plutocracy in Riyadh, perched above a sea of rightless immigrants. If either of these edifices were toppled—in the best of cases, both—the balance of power in the region would be transformed.

The dismal political history of the Arab world over the last half-century gives little reason for thinking this is likely in the short-run. Nor is there any guarantee that successor regimes would improve on the record of Nasser and the other failures of his time. But no stasis is permanent, even in the Middle East. Any real break in its regional system of power

will set the US compass quivering. Genuinely independent regimes on the Nile or in Mecca would soon put the importance of the Zionist connexion into perspective. Blood may be thicker than water, but oil is thicker than either. The captivity of the Palestinians is a consequence of a larger submission of the Middle East. The day the Arab world stops scurrying to Washington—should that ever come—Israel will be forced to disgorge its incommensurate gains. Short of that, Zionism is not likely to be moved.