

Talk on Palestine for L4P Cultural Event “Palestine Before 1948”
Toyota Solarium, Tuesday, November 15, 2011

I know of no major public issue about which there is such intellectual dishonesty, duplicity and hypocrisy as the “Palestinian Question.” The scale of distortion, economy with the truth, moral cowardice and outright lying is appalling to contemplate. It is to be found amongst commentators across the various media, in letters to the editor, public pronouncements, magazine and journal articles and books both popular and scholarly. It amounts to a vast web of propaganda, perpetrated and relentlessly repeated by politicians, columnists, broadcasters and writers. University-based intellectuals are among the worst offenders. Such is the hold of this mythology that it is virtually impossible for rational debate to be conducted on the topic. When the facts are related, when the truth is told, it is not that they are disputed or even disbelieved. They are simply not heard. They are received as a form of lunacy, or hatred. I speak of the situation in the United States and Canada. For in the rest of the world, including importantly in Israel itself, the truth is clearly seen, although it is not uncontested. Yet because the United States rules the world, the lies are enforced and the policies that they are designed to uphold prevail. Because Canada is a (very) junior partner in the system of rule, the lies and the policies hold sway here too, though they are modulated and there are cracks where the light gets in.

The propaganda is as follows: (1) that Israel and Jewish Israeli citizens are the (innocent) suffering victims of what is called disingenuously “Middle East violence” and Arabs, notably Palestinian ones, are the (evil) offenders; (2) that whatever “violence” Israel has committed has only been in self-defence; Arabs/Palestinians are the aggressors; (3) that Israel is the weak, little Jewish outpost fighting for its life on its own against a horde of vastly more numerous and more powerful Arabs and Arab states plus Iran; (4) that Israel’s (by definition) defensive military actions are in accord with the doctrine of “purity of arms” and in support of human rights, whereas Palestinian aggression is in the form of terrorism, and they care not for

human rights; (5) that Israel has always sought peace and made peace offers, including concessions, which the Arabs/Palestinians have rejected (because they seek to eradicate Israel from the map, or because they are stupid and never lose an opportunity to lose an opportunity, etc etc); (6) that Israel is a (Jewish) beacon of civilization and democracy in a sea of Arab barbarism and despotism; (7) that Palestinians even sacrifice their children by encouraging them to put themselves in the way of Israeli soldiers, forcing the soldiers to shoot them. This last item is perhaps the most morally depraved position in the whole collection of lies.

The truth is just about the opposite of these adumbrations. Rather, however, than take my word for it, readers should endeavour to establish this for themselves. The single, best source is the American Jewish intellectual Noam Chomsky's book *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians* (Black Rose, updated edition, 1999); see also Norman Finkelstein's *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (2nd ed., Verso, 2003); for the brutal facts see *Palestinians: Life Under Occupation* by Nancy Murray (The Middle East Justice Network, 1991); for Jewish Israelis' capacity for simultaneously knowing and denying Israeli state atrocities against Palestinians see sociologist Stanley Cohen's *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Polity, 2001, pp. 157-159), and for the travesties of scholarship see *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* edited by Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens (Verso, 1988). For Canada's role, see Tareq Ismael, *Canada and the Middle East: The Foreign Policy of a Client State* (Detselig Enterprises, 1994) and Yves Engler, *Canada and Israel: Building Apartheid* (RED/Fernwood, 2010).

In setting out a true picture perhaps the most important single datum is the following: **“In sheer numerical terms, in brute numbers of bodies and property destroyed, there is absolutely nothing to compare between what Zionism has done to Palestinians and what, in retaliation, Palestinians have done to Zionists.”** This is Edward Said, writing in 1980 in

his *The Question of Palestine* (p. x). I have never seen this brute fact acknowledged anywhere in mainstream reporting or opinion. Stark though it is this fact conceals the greater crime from which it flows, namely the stealing of Palestine from the Palestinians, apparently intended by Zionist leaders (though not all of them), facilitated by the moral and political consequences of the Holocaust, and carried out through ethnic cleansing and war in 1948 and 1967. In the words of David Ben-Gurion in 1938, “**politically we are the aggressors and they defend themselves ... The country is theirs, because they inhabit it, whereas we want to come here and settle down**, and in their view we want to take away from them their country, while we are still outside” (cited in Chomsky, p. 91). “In later years, the indigenous Arab population rejected the idea, accepted as natural in the West, that they had a moral obligation to sacrifice their land to compensate for the crimes committed by Europeans against Jews” (Chomsky, p. 92), as well they might. “Before 1948 there were 475 Arab villages in the land that became Israel. In the following years, 385 of them were completely demolished so that, in the words of Dr. Israel Shahak, “the accepted official myth of an ‘empty country’ can be taught in schools and told to visitors” (Murray, p. 6). “About half the ‘ethnically cleansed’ Palestinians were forced from their homes between November 1947 and May 1948, before any Arab army entered Palestine. A number of massacres that left hundreds of Palestinian civilians dead prompted the Arab countries to enter the conflict” (Engler, 31, citing works by Ilan Pappé, Rashid Khalidi and Benny Morris). “By the time the first Arab-Israeli war had ended in 1949 leaving Israel in control of 77% of the territory of Palestine [and Jordan the rest], more than 725,000 Palestinians, or 60% of the population, had fled in terror or were driven from their homes. Most have never been permitted to return” (Murray, p. 6). The remainder of Palestine

was conquered by Israel in June 1967, leading to another “325,000 Palestinians [being] driven out of the West Bank and Gaza” (Murray, p. 10).

These are the central and abiding historical facts that record an immense injustice, suffered by the Palestinians at the hands of Israel, with international assistance, chiefly that of the United States since 1948 (and especially since 1967), and the United Kingdom in the pre-war period, based on centuries of the West’s deep-seated and long-standing anti-Arab racism. Thus, Lord Balfour, in a memorandum two years after the Balfour Declaration of 1917, wrote: **“For in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country ... The four great powers are committed to Zionism and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land”** (cited in Chomsky, p. 90, my emphasis).

The rest of the story is the familiar nauseating tale of the policies and practices of conquest. To the ethnic cleansing already described one must add a steady diet of Israeli state terrorism – including outright military assault on essentially defenceless people, as in the attack on Gaza in 2008-2009 - cantonization and ghettoization of the Palestinian territories, exploitation of Palestinian labour, impoverishment, and relentless daily humiliations visited on the Palestinian people. As overt colonial political control has been gradually withdrawn it has been replaced by economic neo-colonial dependency (the import of the Oslo agreements according to historian Shlomo Ben-Ami). All of this amounts to quite obvious war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, massacre and torture, expulsions and collective punishment (curfews and demolition of houses and uprooting of olive trees), denial of medical care and education, theft of resources, especially water, and numerous other breaches of international human rights law, the Geneva Conventions, and United Nations resolutions. It has

all been documented in painful detail by human rights organizations and is, in a certain sense, known. Yet it is ignored by those who could do something about it or, worse, it is justified and supported. The awful irony is, of course, inescapable.

Nevertheless, “[f]or 25 years, there has been a near-unanimous international consensus on the terms of political settlement: a full peace treaty with establishment of a Palestinian state after Israeli withdrawal, an outcome that enjoys wide support even within Israel. It has been blocked by Washington ever since its veto of a Security Council resolution to that effect in 1976” (Chomsky, *The Record*, August 15, 2001, A19). Canada is implicated in either aiding and abetting or being an accessory after the fact to Israel’s crimes, as follows.

Canada’s Role

(a) Canada was an enthusiastic participant in and supporter of the 1947 plan to partition Palestine between a Jewish state and an Arab state. Pearson was lauded by Canadian Zionists for his part in formulating a plan that Zionists generally enthusiastically supported, that the U.S. backed, but which “was bitterly opposed by both the Arab majority within Palestine and by the neighbouring Arab states” (Ismael, 1994: 11). “On November 29, 1947 the United Nations General Assembly passed UN Resolution 181, voting by 33-13 to partition Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state. The partition plan awarded more than 56% of the land to the proposed Jewish state at a time when the population of Palestine consisted of 608,000 Jews and 1,327,000 Palestinian Arabs and the Jews owned less than 7% of the land” (Murray, p. 6). Acceptance of the plan by the General Assembly led to civil war then to the Arab-Israeli war of 1948.

The Arab-Israeli war of 1948 had several ramifications. First, Israel approximately doubled the size of its territory allotted to her in the partition plan; secondly, the Palestinian state, which the partition plan provided for the Palestinian Arab population, never came into existence: the territory of this proposed state that was not seized by Israel during the war was awarded by the UN to the neighbouring Jordanian state; thirdly, Israel demonstrated her overwhelming military superiority vis-a-vis the combined power of the neighbouring Arab states; and finally, as a consequence of the

war, nearly one million Palestinian Arabs became homeless refugees dependent upon world philanthropy (Ismael, 1994: 12).

“Canada, as a member of the Security Council ... urged the adoption of a ‘pragmatic’ position by the United Nations” (12), namely to accept the status quo with “a settlement on the basis of the *de facto* boundaries” (12). Thus, while Canada went on to build that humanitarian “custodial” role for which it is noted, namely to keep the peace and keep refugees alive, it acceded to, indeed supported, the fundamental crime at the heart of the “Question of Palestine.” [GO TO UN Resolution 194]

(b) Canada’s part in the 1956 Suez Crisis, in which Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt then withdrew after virtually universal censure, was to have been arming both sides in the interest of balance; but believing Israel to be the weaker party, Canada gave her more. “After the conclusion of the Czech arms deal, which the Egyptians perceived as a defensive measure, Canada granted an export permit for twenty-five F-86 jets to Israel at America’s request. However, this shipment was cancelled when Israel proved itself, in October 1956, capable of offensive action” (Ismael, 1994: 16). The issue came to the U.N.. “The first resolution adopted by the Assembly called for a ceasefire and withdrawal of forces, and was sponsored by the United States. Sixty- four delegations voted in favour; Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel voted against; Canada abstained” (Ismael, 1994: 17). Canada sought to compromise (between the U.S. and Britain) on aggression.

(c) However, in apparent contrast to its abstention on, opposition to, or failure to support the UN resolutions on East Timor (notably Security Council Resolutions (SCR) 384 and 389), Canada actually helped to formulate SCR 242 in response to the 1967 Arab-Israeli six-day war. Indeed, “it has become the basis of Canadian policy in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Essentially, the main text of SCR 242 affirms ‘withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories of recent conflict,’ ‘termination of all claims or states of belligerency,’ and ‘a just settlement of the refugee problem’” (Ismael, 1994: 15). It also calls “for a political settlement, freedom of navigation, and the recognition of secure and recognized boundaries” (Ismael, 1994: 22).

The official Canadian position on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied Arab territories was ... to tie it to the settlement of

other issues, a position similar to that of the United States and one favoured by Israel (Ismael, 1994: 23).

Since, however, Israel did not want to settle the matter of “secure and recognized boundaries,” having no doubt aggrandizement of territory in mind, Canada’s support for 242 has been essentially ineffectual. Terrorizing and impoverishment of the indigenous (Palestinian Arab) population have been allowed to continue - part of “a 50-year long effort to crush the Palestinians and absorb their lands” (Herman, 1994: 6).

(d) Following the six-day war Israel blew up three Palestinian villages - Beit Nuba, Yalu and Imwas - and erected “Canada Park, a 7,500-acre recreational area covered with pine forests” on the sites of the bulldozed Palestinian homes. “Montreal and Toronto Jewish philanthropists ... in 1972 donated more than \$15 million to help build it” while many Palestinians became homeless as a result of the project (Dirlik, 1991; Ismael, 1994: 10; see the 1991 Fifth Estate documentary).

Canada has offered Israel an estimated \$100 million in export credits to help it settle Soviet and Ethiopian refugees over the next five years. The offer was made through Canada’s Export Development Corporation, a crown corporation that will lend money to Israel so it can buy pre-fab housing from Canadian manufacturers (Dirlik, 1991).

These Canadian actions surely qualify as “aiding and abetting” a war crime, to quote the language of the Canadian Criminal Code.

(e) Canada opposes Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip (the bits remaining to Palestinians after the failure of the Partition Plan), yet is unwilling “to contemplate actions that would register Ottawa’s seriousness to the Israelis” (Ismael, 1994: 34). Canada claims to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinians but “stood alone among the 41 states at the Francophone Summit in Quebec [in 1987] in rejecting Palestinian statehood” (Ismael, 1994: 35). Canada supports the view that Palestinians should represent themselves at any negotiations but won’t recognize the PLO “as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.” This is so despite the U.N. recognition of the PLO since 1974, and that of 128 other countries

(Ismael, 1994: 43). Canada, with Israel, the United States and Australia, voted against a major U.N. resolution of 1983 seeking a negotiated solution but containing the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and equal footing for the PLO in an international conference.

Thus, while Canada appears to be making calls for Palestinian participation in negotiations and claims to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, it also seems to be denying them this right when the PLO is advanced as their representative, and when the rights themselves are spelled out (Ismael, 1994: 45).

(f) On March 10, 1988 Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark denounced the brutality with which Israel sought to suppress the *intifada*, begun in 1987. Yet when in the same year the Palestine National Council declared the independence of a Palestinian state, Canada refused to recognize it. When the PLO accepted 242 (and 338) in the same year, Canada responded ambiguously to the recognition of the PLO.

(g) According to Ismael, since at least 1948 the Canadian press, notably *The Globe and Mail* has been pro-Israeli. When Clark spoke out about Israeli human rights violations “the Zionist-dominated media attempted to ridicule Canada for its principled stand” (Ismael, 1994: 51). Naylor (1983) and Eglin (1992) confirm this pro-Israeli and anti-Arab stance for the CBC and *The Globe and Mail* respectively in recent years. The bias of the U.S. media is well-established (Said, 1981; Chomsky, 1984, 1988, 1991, 1993b):

In the occupied territories, officially authorized beatings, large scale administrative detentions, the destruction of thousands of homes and numerous orchards, and systematic torture, have been almost entirely ignored ...

The more than one thousand killings of *intifada* protesters have been reported on the back pages as impersonal happenings like traffic death numbers. The violations of UN resolutions and international law on occupation policies have been almost entirely ignored ... (Herman, 1994: 6).

Conclusion

Ismael sub-titles his work “The Foreign Policy of a Client State,” referring to Canada’s relationship to the United States. He argues that the loss of independence and the adoption of a client role in the matter of Canada’s relationship with the Middle East really got under way in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis, and came to fruition with Canada’s participation as a belligerent in the Gulf War of 1991. Any pretension to an independent peacekeeping role in the Middle East was lost with that submission to American design. As he says, Canada gave up an independent political role to concentrate on “economic and social questions,” questions, that is, of “development.” “Development” is a very Canadian concept. It’s polite, industrious, almost Methodist, and vaguely progressive. It sounds good. I’m sure it has been deconstructed often enough. My take on it is that it is an ideological device in a liberal-pragmatist tool-kit that can be used to keep profits flowing to the good ol’ boys, by seducing good men and women to put a good face on a set of interests that, as Chomsky says, do not treat human beings as ends but only as means. Disposable means. We are intellectual collaborators in too many deaths (Said and Hitchens, 1988). It’s got to stop.

Peter Eglin

Wilfrid Laurier University