

# **The Rise of Israel**

A history of a revolutionary state

**Jonathan Adelman**

# Contents

<i>List of tables</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xii

<b>PART I</b>	
<b>The rise of Israel</b>	<b>1</b>
1 Introduction	3
2 Controversy over Israel	15
3 The rise of Israel in comparative perspective	27
<b>PART II</b>	
<b>Obstacles to the rise of Israel</b>	<b>43</b>
4 Jewish issues	45
5 Hostility of the major powers	57
6 Enmity of the Arab world and Iran	73
7 Major international and religious organizations	91
8 Western unwillingness to help Israel in crises	102
9 Israeli issues	110
<b>PART III</b>	
<b>Revolutions and the rise of Israel</b>	<b>119</b>
10 Historical roots of the revolutions	121
11 Two modern Zionist revolutions	131

x	<i>Contents</i>	
12	Revolutionary military-security factors	144
13	Revolutionary factors: aliyah, education, government and party	166
14	International factors	179
15	Conclusions	198
	<i>Notes</i>	207
	<i>Bibliography</i>	243
	<i>Index</i>	257

# 1 Introduction

In the post-modern world we have lost our sense of wonder and awe at those once seemingly improbable events that have become our current prosaic reality. Who ever thought that small, ragtag, poorly armed bands of a few tens of thousands of men in the American colonies in 1775, in Russia in 1917 and in China in 1935 would amount to much? Yet they launched the American Revolution, the Russian Revolution and the Chinese Revolution that became world historical events that shook the world.<sup>1</sup> And who in 1900, when there were 50,000 largely religious and poor Jews in Ottoman Turkish Palestine, would have imagined that by 1948 a Jewish state would win the War of Independence and by 2007 become a regional First World power?

An analyst in 1900, asked about the likelihood of a Jewish state, would have replied: “Don’t be absurd! Even Herzl admitted that the idea of a Jewish state, if proclaimed publicly, would be met with ‘universal laughter.’<sup>2</sup> The Arabs derisively call the Jews ‘the penniless of the weakest of people, whom all governments are expelling.’<sup>3</sup> The Jews, without a state in over 1,800 years, have no idea how to be soldiers, farmers or government officials. Lacking any international power, they think the idea is a mirage.<sup>4</sup> Over 99 percent of them don’t live in Palestine or want to live in such a backwater. Those few who live there are dependent on *halukah* [foreign charity].<sup>5</sup> They are a drop in the sea of 600,000 Palestinian Arabs and 20 million Arabs.”<sup>6</sup>

The analyst in 1916, when the expulsion of thousands of Palestinian Jews by Ottoman Turkey and war depredations left the community on the verge of destruction, would have exclaimed, “Don’t be crazy! The Jews dream of settling the land but their two socialist parties have fewer than 2,000 agricultural workers and they own 2 percent of the land. Either the Germans will win the war and the Ottoman Turks will drive out the Jews (as they did the Armenians) or the British will win and create an empire. Over 300 million Muslims and 390 million Christians will never let tens of thousands of Jews control their Holy Places!”<sup>7</sup>

The analyst in 1942 would have exploded, “Nazi Germany is exterminating most of the Jews in the world at Auschwitz. The British Empire, enforcing the 1939 White Paper, is banning the survivors from Palestine and planning an independent Palestinian state in 1949. The Soviet Union supports the Arabs

#### 4 *The rise of Israel*

and persecutes the Zionists. The world is indifferent to their fate. The 500,000 Jews in Palestine will be destroyed, if not by the Nazi panzer divisions closing in on Palestine, then by tens of millions of Arabs, led by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al-Hussein.”<sup>8</sup>

When the state of Israel was proclaimed in May 1948, the aged analyst would have proclaimed, “There are 650,000 Jews against 50 million Arabs. The Jews have no strategic depth, heavy weapons, American help or professional officers. They’ve done poorly so far and have an amateur underground army arrayed against five professional armies. Field Marshal Montgomery gives them three weeks, General George Marshall thinks they are doomed, British senior intelligence officers think the Arabs will win handily, the CIA gives them two years at the best and even Yigal Yadin gives them only a 50:50 chance of survival. Their situation is hopeless.”<sup>9</sup>

This very elderly analyst would have been tasked with similar questions in 1967, when the ring of Arab enemies had tightened around Israel, and in 1973, when on the third day of the war Defense Minister Moshe Dayan said that “The Third Temple is falling.”<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps Chaim Weizmann, Israel’s first president, put it best when he declared that “To be a Zionist it is not perhaps absolutely necessary to be slightly mad but it helps.”<sup>11</sup>

#### **Weakness of the Jews**

Given the often dismal history of the Jews in over 1,800 years in the Diaspora (forced conversions, massacres, pogroms, expulsions and the Holocaust), the analyst was reasonable. Two thousand years ago, 8 million Jews made up 20 percent of the population of the eastern Mediterranean and 10 percent of the Roman world. By the twenty-first century there should have been more than 100 million Jews in the world: there are but 13 million.<sup>12</sup>

Even many Zionists were dubious that a traumatized people could achieve nationhood. Leo Pinsker in *Autoemancipation* in 1882 derisively declared that “For the living, the Jew is a dead man; for the nations an alien and a vagrant; for property holders a beggar; for the poor an exploiter and a millionaire; for patriots a man without a country; for all classes, a hated rival.”<sup>13</sup> In 1900 most Jews in the Russian Pale of Settlement were *luftmenschen* without a definite occupation, debarred from most government and professional positions. An 1892 American commission found their health and misery to be worse than those of the poorest Russian peasants and workers. Theodor Herzl confided in his diary that “We are a nation of *shnorrers* and beggars.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1900 the small, largely religious Palestinian Jewish community seemed a weak reed for creating a Jewish state. Nor did the 10 million Jews in Europe, North America, the Middle East and North Africa seem more promising. For, as David Vital described their situation in 1900:

A pervading feature of the life of the Jews in their Exile has been their

weakness; a permanent and notorious inability ever (and anywhere) to match strength for strength, pressure for pressure, or even benevolence for benevolence. Weakness was at the very foundation of their relations with the people among whom they lived and the alien rulers to whom they were subject . . . Nowhere were they masters, not even – in the final analysis – in their own homes . . . Herzl . . . sought . . . to reverse the course of Jewish history – in effect, to overcome the tremendous disparity between the splendid aims of Zionism and the pitiful means available to it.<sup>15</sup>

In November 1947 the new CIA in a report on “The Consequences of the Partition of Palestine” warned that, after initial successes the Jews, without strong and unlikely outside assistance, would probably be defeated within two years.<sup>16</sup>

Even after victory in 1948, Israel was still weak. Israel in the 1948 war lost East Jerusalem, the Etzion Bloc, Latrun, the Dead Sea potash works and 1 percent of its population. It had over 400 miles of narrow borders, with hostile neighbors and no natural barriers of protection. Syrian planes taking off from Damascus were 46 miles from the Galilee, and Saudi planes taking off from Guruet were 87 miles from Dimona. Israel had a Third World economy with \$43 million in exports (led by Jaffa oranges). Israel was an educational backwater with some areas of excellence, only 700 university students and a weak health care system. Many Israelis and most new immigrants spoke poor Hebrew.<sup>17</sup>

### **The power and perseverance of their enemies**

The Jews were well aware of their desperate situation. In two speeches in 1937 and 1939, David Ben Gurion analyzed the international balance of power:

Great dangers await us on every front . . . Worldwide our strength is next to nothing alongside the mighty powers contending . . . What is our strength against gigantic powers . . . against the Arabs in their Arab countries . . . against the mightiest empire in history . . . the British Empire?<sup>18</sup> . . . [The Jewish people] stand powerless and defenseless. It has no navy, no army, no government, not even a tiny strip of land of its own. The world’s rulers seem to believe that anything can be foisted on this helpless people.<sup>19</sup>

Their enemies then and later were numerous, powerful and often determined. These included great powers (the Tsarist Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, the British Empire 1937–49, the Ottoman Turkish Empire), regional powers (the Arab states), strong transnational religious movements (the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, Islam), international organizations (the United Nations after 1951), most

## 6 *The rise of Israel*

Third World states after 1967 and global anti-Semitism. Walter Laqueur observed that “Zionism faced gigantic obstacles [and] had to fight for the realization of its aims in the most adverse conditions.”<sup>20</sup>

Their enemies often acted with strength, power and persistence. Nazi Germany exterminated 6 million Jews (the reservoir of the future state), spread massive anti-Semitic propaganda and threatened to destroy the Palestinian Jewish homeland in 1941 and 1942. The Soviet Union, from 1924 to 1984 (save for 1948 and 1949), eliminated powerful Zionist organizations, destroyed the fabric of Jewish life, massively armed the Arabs against Israel and spread anti-Israel propaganda. Once supportive of Zionism (from 1917 to 1929), the British Empire barred hundreds of thousands or even millions of Jews looking to immigrate to Palestine in the late 1930s and in the 1940s and backed Arab nations in 1948. The Ottoman Turkish Empire limited Jewish immigration and investment in Palestine and threatened to annihilate the community during World War I.

Most of the Arab world, with its oil wealth, large populations and strong ties to both Western powers and the Soviet Union, opposed Israel in eight wars and two intifadas. Global religious movements, including Islam, the World Council of Churches and often the Roman Catholic Church, as well as various international organizations and the bulk of the new Third World states, also were hostile, especially after 1967. The correlation of forces was strongly negative for the Jews striving to create and develop a Jewish state.

### **The unlikely Israeli story**

And yet, despite all this, Israel survived and did well. It won six wars and defeated the second intifada. It is one of the world’s leading countries in ABM systems (Arrow), satellite systems, foreign intelligence services (Mossad), military power (Zahal), R&D (4.7 percent of GNP), high-tech (4,000) and biotech (1,500) startups, companies on the NASDAQ (80) and arms exports (\$4 billion).<sup>21</sup> More Israeli patents (1,188) were granted in the United States in 2006 than Chinese (366), Indian (354) and Russian (268) combined.<sup>22</sup> Israel is a First World country with a \$140 billion economy and \$46.5 billion in exports (including \$15 billion hi-tech). In 2005 Israel’s foreign direct investment (FDI) was \$5.6 billion and in 2006 \$13.2 billion.<sup>23</sup>

Israel pioneered in new social forms such as the kibbutz, moshav, youth aliyah village, Nahal military settlements and mechina program for the disadvantaged. Hebrew University, Technion and Weizmann Institute are in the top ten universities in Asia, and there are over 150,000 students in higher education.<sup>24</sup> After immigration of 2.5 million Jews and rapid growth of its Arab population, Israel has 7 million people, a population equal to that of almost half the world’s nations. Israeli Jewish males, with life expectancy of 76 years, had the world’s third highest life expectancy, a year greater than American males. By 2007 the vast majority of Israelis spoke excellent Hebrew and created an authentic Hebrew culture.

Table 1.1 shows how the Israeli economy is competitive with that of leading First World countries.<sup>25</sup> Table 1.2 shows the strong scientific capabilities of Israel.

### **Difficult questions: How was Israel created and why did it flourish against all odds?**

Only 5 percent of 4,000 peoples in the world have achieved statehood in the last several centuries. Most successful states had millions of people forming a demographic majority with a common culture, language, history, religion and power predominating in a single area for many centuries and controlling significant resources. Quebec, Scotland, Bavaria, Wales, the Basque land and Catalonia have shown that even possession of all or nearly all these attributes has been no guarantee of statehood. But the Jews in 1881 and even 1947, dispersed all over the world, lacked nearly all of the basic attributes of statehood.

In most Third World countries, nationalism was a mass reaction to alien European rule led by intellectuals. An early intellectual revolt led to a mass

*Table 1.1* The economy of Israel, 2005, compared to that of more than 100 new nations created since 1945

<i>Nation</i>	<i>GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) \$</i>
Singapore	28,100
Israel	24,600
South Korea	20,400
China	6,800
Jordan	4,700
India	3,300

*Source:* Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, Washington, D.C.: CIA, 2006.

*Table 1.2* Scientific capabilities of Israel and selected countries, 2005–06

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Scientific papers citations (per million)</i>
Israel	3,330
Singapore	3,075
Canada	2,890
Russia	299
Iran	142
Egypt	79
Syria	16
Saudi Arabia	1

*Source:* *Scientific Citation Index*, 2005–06.



## 8 *The rise of Israel*

revolt against the aliens. The intellectuals absorbed the frustration, resentment, impulses and experiences of the masses and expressed them in political form. As Ben Halpern has explained:

But, for Diaspora Jews, not oppressed in their own country by a foreign garrison or administration or by landlords and nobles garnering the fruits of conquest, their mass response was not revolt but emigration. Their oppressors were not foreigners but the majority of the population or foreign rulers with majority support for oppressing Jews. The Jews lacked any control over the means of production for they were an exiled people without a strategic base. They needed a strategic base in a homeland to create Jewish workers or peasants. The Zionist task was to change the historic responses of emigration to better countries or passivity and to impose a new pattern. Nationalism, then, for the Jews, meant a revival of national culture and sovereignty, a reconstruction of a tradition that had faded away. The Zionists needed to change popular ideology.<sup>26</sup>

This leads to a series of difficult questions:

How could the Jews, who were expelled from their homeland over 1,800 years ago and lacked military experience or traditions, achieve statehood and flourish in a hostile environment? How could yeshiva students, ghetto denizens and middlemen from over 100 countries become farmers, soldiers and statesmen?<sup>27</sup> How could they overcome a harsh security environment that for 60 years had meant that a single Israeli defeat would mean the end of the state?<sup>28</sup>

How could the Jews, who merited no entries in the index of a 622-page book on the Ottoman Turkish Empire, create a state in the heart of the Muslim Middle East?<sup>29</sup> How could the Zionist movement, which was a failure in its first 20 years (1897–1916) and smaller than the Bundist movement in the 1920s, succeed when other national movements had floundered? How could a small state (with 5.4 million Jews in 2007) fight more wars than any other country in the last 60 years and not only survive but flourish and maintain a vibrant democracy?

Was the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 inevitable? Far from it. And were its flourishing and transformation into a strong First World state inevitable? Not at all. We need to understand much better why it succeeded and flourished.

### **Importance and neglect of the topic**

Surprisingly, there is not a single work on Israel, by Arabists, post-Zionists or mainstream scholars, that raises and answers our questions. Only Efraim Karsh's edited volumes on Israel's first hundred years and his work on rethinking the Middle East devote any space to this question and this is confined to slightly more than a page. There Efraim Karsh, Mordechai Nisan, David Tal and Sasson Sofer separately speak of "the huge obstacles"

that were overcome and the lacuna in the scholarship about how this came about.<sup>30</sup>

The Arabists, influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism* and anti-Zionism, have not paid serious attention to the creation and rise of Israel.<sup>31</sup> Viewing Israel as a tool of colonialism, racism and imperialism, they see nothing positive in Israel, which is derided as a Western sub-agency. Since its power derives from the West, it is devoid of interest itself. Efraim Karsh has summarized the Arabist position:

Nowhere has this "victimization culture" been more starkly manifest than in the historiography of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Dismissing out of hand the notion of Jewish nationalism and reluctant to acknowledge any wrongdoing on their part, the Arabs have invariably viewed Israel as an artificial neo-crusading entity created by Western imperialism in order to divide and weaken the Arab and Muslim nations. Israel's ability to surmount the sustained assault by the vastly larger and more affluent Arab World has thus been seen not as an indication of its intrinsic strength but as proof of the unwavering Western, particularly American, support; the collapse and dispersion of Palestinian society – as an exclusive result of Israel's imperialist grand designs.<sup>32</sup>

Given the Arabist belief in the power of anti-imperialist movements, this is a striking omission. The same is true of post-Zionism. Leading Israeli scholars (such as Avi Shlaim, Tom Segev, Benny Morris, Baruch Kimmerling and Ilan Pappé), influenced by the failures of Israel from 1973 to 1993 (the Yom Kippur War, Lebanon War and first intifada) and deconstructionism, have focused on Israel's failures, with minimal discussion of its successes.<sup>33</sup> Viewing Israel as morally dubious because it was born with the "original sin" of the expulsion of the Palestinians followed by numerous other failures, they see the Arabs as hapless victims of Zionist and Israeli aggression.<sup>34</sup> As revisionists and debunkers of what they deem to be Zionist "heroic myths," they are not interested in focusing on or understanding Israel's accomplishments.

But, while the scholars of the Arabist and post-Zionist camps refuse to confront this important reality, the mainstream scholars, who do recognize Israeli successes, have not seen them as problematic. There are a number of fine general works on Israeli history (Eban, Sacher, Gilbert, Stein, Bregman) but none see the rise of Israel as problematic.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the rise of Zionism (Reinharz, Laqueur), the idea of the Jewish state (Halpern) and the Six Day War (Oren) are covered in a non-problematic fashion.<sup>36</sup>

### **Need for comparative historical studies**

A useful way to understand the development of a state is to look at it in comparative perspective. Any state, no matter how exceptionalist, has much in common with the 200 states in the world. Israel has conformed to global

trends by creating a socialist and then a semi-capitalist democratic First World society with a strong high-tech sector, extensive educational system and societal integration.

Apart from security studies, studies on nation building, state building, economic development, modernization and nationalism rarely include Israel, which is felt to not fit into accepted conceptual and experiential categories. Israel rarely appears in comparative political or Middle East studies.<sup>37</sup> Israel's rapid economic growth does not draw much scholarly attention.<sup>38</sup> Israel is seen as a country defining and playing by its own rules.<sup>39</sup>

There are comparative studies on Israel that look broadly (Barnett<sup>40</sup>), or show insights into its party system (Hazan and Maor,<sup>41</sup> Burk,<sup>42</sup> Kimmerling<sup>43</sup>), urban planning (Troen<sup>44</sup>) and military (Cohen,<sup>45</sup> Peled,<sup>46</sup> Horowitz,<sup>47</sup> and Maman, Ben-Ari and Rosenhek<sup>48</sup>). Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler have shown that mainstream and revisionist studies overemphasize the role of the individual and often lack comparative historical perspective.<sup>49</sup>

A comparative historical approach to Zionism allows us to set the rise of the Jewish minority against other minorities (Lebanese Christians, Kurds and Armenians) in the Ottoman Turkish Empire who strove for statehood with very different results. The Lebanese Christians (the most promising of the group in 1920) achieved statehood in 1946 but lost dominance owing to the Taif Accords in 1989.<sup>50</sup> The more numerous Kurds (25 million) never achieved statehood despite the potential implied by the Treaty of Sèvres (1920). The Armenians, who suffered enormously from Turkish massacres (1894–95, 1915), failed to achieve statehood after the Paris Peace Conference and had to wait for statehood until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

A comparative historical perspective is valuable in many areas. We can set the creation of Israel in the context of over 100 national liberation movements in the post-World War II era. With the extraordinary role of the military and security issues in Israeli society, we can conceptualize Israel by placing it in the context of comparative civil–military relations. New/old Israel can be profitably compared to other new societies (the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia) or to other rapidly growing Third World states (such as the Four Tigers of Asia).

### **The need for placing Israel in a revolutionary context**

Most of all, we need to place Israel as the fruits of a revolutionary movement in the context of the literature on comparative revolutions. Yehezkel Dror has argued that, “despite pronounced differences, Israel’s main features approximate the original visions of Zionism much more so than in the case of other revolutionary transformations.”<sup>51</sup>

Zionism was both a national liberation movement and a social revolution. The socialist Zionist revolution (1881–1977) had profound goals that reached far beyond the re-creation of a Jewish state to a radically new democratic political, economic and social basis for the Jewish people. Israel can also be

compared to bourgeois revolutions (such as the United States), with powerful similarities in wars of independence, immigrant societies, democracies and lack of externally imposed systems.<sup>52</sup>

Since 1977 Israel has been undergoing another revolution, this time globalizing and semi-capitalist, with a profound impact on the state. Samuel Huntington stated that:

A revolution is a rapid, fundamental and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership and government activity and policies . . . Notable examples are the French, Chinese, Mexican, Russian and Chinese revolutions . . . Revolution is the ultimate expression of the modernizing outlook, the belief that it is within the power of man to control and to change his environment and that he has not only the ability but the right to do so . . . it is most likely to occur in societies which have experienced some social and economic development and where the processes of modernization and political development have lagged behind the processes of social and economic change.<sup>53</sup>

Numerous works on comparative revolution by Crane Brinton, Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, Jack Goldstone, Ted Gurr, Charles Tilly and Nikkie Keddie have advanced understanding of revolutions through comparative analysis of such revolutions as the English, French, American, Russian, Chinese and Iranian revolutions.<sup>54</sup> Works such as the volume by Aviel Roshwald, comparing the disintegration of the Tsarist Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Turkish empires from 1914 to 1923, advance our understanding.<sup>55</sup>

To view Israel as a revolutionary country may surprise some readers. All the great revolutions (England, the United States, France, Russia, China, Iran) were directed against monarchical imperial authority. The first Israeli revolution, in a small dependent former colony rather than a great state, was not against a local, alien, oppressive regime but against those standing in the way of a social and national fulfillment in an ancient homeland. Commonly cited causes of revolution, such as large-scale peasant revolt against an oppressive ancient regime, demographic problems, significant fiscal crisis, division with the elite, desertion of the intellectuals, strong international pressures and failures in war, did not apply here,<sup>56</sup> and nor did the concept of a universalist ideology as an outcome, as Zionism (like Judaism) focused on a single people.

Yet the Jews were a different people. For almost 2,000 years the Jews lacked a state, peasantry, nobility, monarchy, army, elite or intellectual class. The task was to transform a relatively traditional, religious and passive people accustomed to hardships, repression and autonomy into one prepared to fight for and acquire a nation far away from their current state. The revolutionary impulse came not from a foreign oppressor but from the conditions under which European Jews lived from 1840 to 1945. Jonathan Frankel has commented that:

events such as the Damascus blood libel of 1840, the Mortara case of 1858, the recurring anti-Jewish excesses in Rumania during the 1870s, the pogroms of 1881–82, the expulsion from Moscow ten years later and the Dreyfus Affair involved the Jews, first and foremost, precisely as Jews, as a collective entity . . . these crises in Jewish life were the nearest equivalent to war and revolution in the history of a state, a sovereign society. At such a juncture, every assumption, however time-honored, may be called into question and ideas normally too utopian to voice, can enter the discourse of the everyday. This is the extraordinary moment in the outward flow of time.<sup>57</sup>

And if these were the equivalents of war and revolution in pushing the Jews towards a Zionist revolution in the nineteenth century, then how much more so were the pogroms of 1903 in Kishinev and 1905 across Russia, the expulsion of Jews in 1915 from the western border towns of Russia, the killing of upwards of 100,000 Ukrainian Jews in the Russian civil war, rising anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe in the interwar period and the Holocaust that massacred 6 million Jews?

The Zionist socialist revolution shared a series of features with other revolutions – a strong ideological fervor, the sense of a life-and-death struggle, a chiliastic sense of optimism about the creation of a new society and new man, a stress on justice and egalitarianism, the need to create a new party, government, army and secret police on a new more modern basis, and intense demographic pressures.

In the end, as in the other revolutions, state power would be centralized, enhanced and bureaucratized, a more egalitarian society would emerge in the short run and one party would dominate for a generation. The international environment would be a powerful factor, the revolution would be led by a small intellectual group who would build a version of a brave new world, and other countries would feel threatened. A strong modernization thrust would be evident and open, and the winning revolutionaries would emerge victorious but weak. Even the loss of life (22,000 dead, 70,000 injured) in Israel would be comparable to that suffered by the English in the 1640s civil war (100,000 fatalities), and less than the millions suffered in the Russian and Chinese civil wars.<sup>58</sup>

The second, semi-capitalist revolution would also promote a powerful role for Israel in the world as its economy boomed and its values aligned with the New World Order, and aspects of socialism would continue to be a part of the Israeli social and economic structure.

### **Israeli success: Palestinian failure**

The success of the Jews, despite enormous obstacles, in creating and developing a strong state of Israel obviously raises a related question: why did the Palestinians, also (and often forgotten in the rhetorical battle) granted a state

in United Nations Resolution 181 in November 1947, fail to create their own state and make it flourish? The numerically superior Palestinians with support from a number of other Arab states and foreign powers were as advanced as any of their neighbors in the Arab world and possessed a strong national identity by 1948.

Rashid Khalidi in *The Iron Cage* delineated their numerous failings, particularly “a striking lack of organization, cohesion and unanimity in the Palestinian polity” and the “frequent incapacity and weakness” of Palestinian leaders in dealing with outside forces before 1948. Khalidi depicts the “less than successful state building” of the PLO and Palestinian Authority, marred by poor leadership, autocracy, corruption, lack of foreign investment, failure to develop the rule of law, establishment of a patronage machine and rule by external Tunis returnees not relating to the local population. He also bemoans today “the almost criminal level of irresponsibility for Palestinian factions to fight one another in such circumstances.”<sup>59</sup>

The numerous failures of the Palestinians highlight the importance of the factors present in Israeli success and absent in Palestinian failure: socialist and capitalist revolutions, alliance with the democratic West, building new societies, creation of strong modern organizations, a strong will to fight, and pragmatic and realistic leadership. The failure to mobilize voluntarist factors and international support doomed the Palestinians as it allowed the Israelis to overcome stronger obstacles and achieve a seemingly unlikely statehood and then regional power.

### **Structure of the book**

Both hostile and friendly scholars rarely contemplate the unlikely nature of the rise and flourishing of Israel and how conditional its rise was on a series of forces that need to be delineated. The rise and the flourishing of Israel were both historically highly problematic. By looking at the obstacles and advantages possessed by the Zionist movement, by the view from 1900 and 1948, we gain a strong vantage point to understand this phenomenon.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I after this introduction looks at the literature on Israel and the value of seeing Israel through comparative eyes. Part II deals with the huge obstacles facing the creation and developing of the state of Israel. In addition to looking at internal obstacles in the Jewish and Israeli worlds, we examine such powerful external obstacles as the role of international and religious communities, the major powers and the unwillingness of the West to help in times of crisis. Part III seeks to understand the rise of Zionism through an examination of its historical roots and the nature of the two revolutions. Then it turns to understanding the power of revolutionary and international factors in the rise of Israel. The book provides in the conclusion an overview of the interaction of these factors in producing such a “unique” state.

The book has deliberately chosen to eschew the usual chronological and

linear view that treats each topic in a clearly defined space and time. Rather it has chosen the thematic approach to avoid chopping up the book. At times, the reader needs to keep in mind the particular time and space under discussion. But, given that Israeli Jews, through the last 125 years (1882–2007), have faced a hostile international and regional environment (with shifting characters) with small numbers, limited resources, aid from the Diaspora and some help from the democratic West, this approach seems worthwhile. Despite all its successes, Israel's security dilemmas and threats today (a possible nuclear Iran, its Syrian ally and Islamic fundamentalist Hamas and Hezbollah on its borders) remain serious. Israeli leaders themselves draw such analogies. Only such a thematic approach can highlight the overall obstacles that have been overcome and revolutionary methods that have been employed to make this possible.

### **Limitations of the volume**

This book has only a limited mission. It does not seek to provide a comprehensive history of Zionism or Israel. It does not provide a history of Zionist foreign policy, religion, Likud or the Labor Party; nor does it seek to provide an examination of Zionist or Israeli political theory. It does not focus, like so much other work, on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which has produced over 400 volumes.

The book is not based on original research but rather represents an attempt to better understand the rise of Israel through a synthetic, comparative political and revolutionary examination of Israel. There is an abundance, even plethora, of secondary material which is used for this purpose in the volume. The volume also does not mine any new ground in primary sources. Rather, like most volumes of its kind, it extensively utilizes secondary works in a comparative framework to bring up hopefully new and interesting ways to examine familiar subjects. The comparative method allows us to move away from philosophically charged views of Israel and to compare Israel with similar countries.

We address two interrelated questions: how, against all obstacles, was the state of the Jews created, and how and why did it flourish? We seek to understand the profound process of the creation and flourishing of the state of Israel. In that process we will learn much about the Jews and Israel, as well as the modern international political system.

Even many in the post-Zionist camp have conceded the “stunning . . . brilliant success” and “miracle” of Israel, truly in the words of Amos Oz “a dream come true.”<sup>60</sup> From a Third World backwater in 1948, modern Israel has developed a First World economy, a progressive education and health system, a high-tech powerhouse and a home for Jews scattered and persecuted all over the world.<sup>61</sup> We need to understand how this “miracle” was created and sustained against enormous odds and at what cost. Let us begin.

## 2 Controversy over Israel

As its sixtieth anniversary nears, Israel remains one of the most controversial countries in the world. For every person pleased or thrilled by the seemingly miraculous rise of Israel, there have been far more people distressed, puzzled or angry at its success. Arab nationalist, Third World, Western leftist and even religious scholars and leaders have been particularly vexed by the success of Israel, which stands out against the failures of pan-Arabism, Arab nationalism, Third World socialism, Communism and Islamic fundamentalism and their foreign patrons (Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union).<sup>1</sup>

Israel's success in becoming a First World power has highlighted the failures of Middle Eastern authoritarian powers to catch up with the old European periphery (Greece, Spain, Portugal), the new European periphery (Central Europe) and the rising great powers of Asia (China, India) and Eurasia (Russia). As billions of people have adopted aspects of the New World Order values of democracy, export-led capitalism, the rule of law, the Internet, gender equality, tolerance for minorities, and free speech and press, the grave failures of most Middle Eastern regimes have led many to scapegoat Israel. While Israel is far from blameless, the explanations are often lacking in comparative or historical depth.<sup>2</sup>

### **Israel as a racist, colonialist state**

Many scholars, such as Rashid Khalidi and Joel Kovel, have seen Israel as a foreign, colonial imperialist enterprise foisted on the region by Europe and the United States. They have spoken in terms of “ethnic cleansing,” “South African-like apartheid,” “subjugation and denial of rights,” and “terrorization and subsequent flight of about 750,000 Palestinians from 1947 until 1949.”<sup>3</sup> They have focused on the security barrier, settlements and numerous checkpoints as indicative of the colonial enterprise. Former President Jimmy Carter, in his book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, has asserted that Israeli total domination and suppression of violence have deprived the Palestinians of their basic human rights in a way not dissimilar to South African apartheid.<sup>4</sup>

Yet there are serious problems in seeing Israel as a rapacious colonial



enterprise. Settlers usually went to colonies with which they had no emotional connection, while the Jews were returning to their ancestral homeland and rediscovering their past.<sup>5</sup> The Jews, with their religion, culture and history rooted in the land of Israel, were not alien to Jerusalem, Hebron, Safed or Tiberias, their four holy cities. They are integrally connected to the region. Half of all Israelis are Arabs or Sephardi Jews from North Africa and the Middle East and the majority of the rest (Ashkenazim) were born in the Middle East (Israel).

Many Palestinians, both today and before 1936, far from fighting the Jews, collaborated with them on grounds of personal or group benefit, opposition to Arab violence or belief that the Zionists were too strong to be opposed.<sup>6</sup> Even some scholars who are sympathetic to the notion of Israel having colonial aspects, like Gershon Shafir, acknowledge that Israel lacked many of the core aspects of European colonialism.<sup>7</sup>

Before 1918 the European powers, far from seeking to overthrow the Ottoman Turkish Empire and colonize the region, tried to prop it up. If the Ottoman Turks had stayed out of World War I, they would probably have survived. Even after the war, the British and French accepted mandates from the League of Nations that specifically envisioned their ultimate independence.<sup>8</sup> Hence, without the British and French trying to colonize the region after 1918, the Zionists could not have been colonial agents.

Colonies were usually run and directed by European great powers, while the Jews lacked a colonial Great Power or metropole to sponsor them or take them back if they wished to return. The Jews lacked a mother country to provide protection, investment and guidance. The Jews were largely at the beck and whim of two often hostile empires (the British and the Ottoman Turkish empires). The Ottoman Turkish Empire favored fellow Muslims (Arabs) from 1881 to 1918, and Great Britain favored the Arabs strongly from 1939 to 1948. Only from 1922 to 1929 was there mild and declining British support for their cause. A predominantly leftist Jewish Yishuv was not a natural ally for the British Empire, which eventually preferred the far more numerous Arabs.

Until 1948 the bulk of Jewish immigrants to Palestine came from Nazi Germany, Tsarist Russia (before 1917) and republican Poland (1920–40). None of these countries held the mandate for Palestine or were protectors of the Jews.<sup>9</sup> To the contrary, the Nazis were trying to exterminate all Jews, Tsarist Russia was trying to forcibly convert, repress or expel its Jews and Poland practiced extensive anti-Semitic discrimination against the Jews. When the Jews arrived in Turkish or British Palestine, they arrived with great difficulty, as local authorities tried to prevent their arrival, kept them from buying land and hindered them after they arrived.

From 1937 to 1948, the British Empire tried to prevent the creation of a state and severely restricted Jewish immigration. At a time when several million Jews might have tried to reach its shores, Palestine was largely closed to legal Jewish immigration.<sup>10</sup> The British repressed Jewish state-building

activity. As the British withdrew from Palestine, they tried to turn positions over to the Arabs, actively sold weapons to Iraq and Jordan and refused to sell to the Jews.

Colonial powers generally provided safe passage for their citizens, a favored position in the colony, guaranteed trade and markets and protection from natives and rivals in the region. None of this existed for the Jews, who lacked imperial protection.

Settlers generally migrated to colonies for their economic potential. But Palestine was very poor and backward and the Jews came for ideological or religious, not economic, reasons. Economic prospects were far better in the United States or the West.

While most settlers built private estates and plantations for profit and gain, the Jews created hundreds of villages on a collective communal basis without exploitation. They bought the land from the Arabs at exorbitant prices rather than pushing them off the land. They did not use native Arab labor, preferring to use their own. They reclaimed the ancient language of Hebrew rather than using more familiar European languages.

Most settlers arriving in the colonies found predominantly nomadic or unsettled people, while the Jews found a largely settled population controlling and tilling the land. While settlers were lured to colonies by the prospects of free land, the Jews had to pay dearly for poor-quality semi-desert land. While most settlers relied heavily on local menial labor provided by native slaves and servants or imported indentured servants, the Jews relied on themselves or labor hired in the free market. Most settlers came to colonies with at least some means, while most Jewish refugees were poorer than the typical European settler.

The vast majority of colonies were abolished in the 1950s and 1960s. By contrast, Israel flourished and boomed only after the British colonial rulers, who favored the Arabs, left in 1948. And, while most settlers came to the colonies to settle the land, in Israel over 90 percent of the Jews settled in the new Jewish towns.

To the extent that Israel had colonial-like aspects as a settler colony of people coming to Israel from other lands, it mainly resembled the British settler colonies which gave birth to the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

There have been four major types of colonies: British pure settlement, Portuguese plantation, Spanish occupation and Spanish mixed colonies. The latter two, popular in Southeast Asia, coastal Africa and Latin America, were impossible for the Jews without the backing of a Great Power.<sup>11</sup>

From 1882 to 1900, under the tutelage of Baron Rothschild's French North African colonial experts and the failure of Jewish immigrants to strike roots in the soil, the rural model was that of a Portuguese plantation system. This system, with overseers, a small settler workforce and heavy use of local Palestinian labor, was tried and abandoned by 1900 as an economic failure that failed to attract Jewish labor.

But the British pure settlement model, which loosely seemed to fit the Israeli model after 1900, suffered not only from the numerous deficiencies listed above but one more critical difference: it rested on the removal and neutralizing or eliminating of the local native population. With the support of the British imperial power, the Indians in Canada and the United States and the Aborigines in Australia could be pushed aside. After independence, Americans forcibly removed the American Indians to reservations.<sup>12</sup>

The Jews, always an urban people, had under the Ottoman Turks and the British rule to pay large sums for poor native land. By 1947 they had acquired 260,000 acres (350 square miles), less than a good-sized ranch in Texas, in over 50 years of buying less than 5 percent of Arab land.<sup>13</sup>

There could be no exploitation of the local Palestinian population. Mostly rich absentee landlords prospered from the Jewish immigration. With largely remote and often alien Ottoman Turkish and British rule (1881–1948), the Jews had no enforcement power and after 1905 pushed for the “conquest of labor.” This meant two economies, a Jewish self-contained economy and an Arab economy.<sup>14</sup> The Zionist socialist immigrants, opposing the use of cheap local labor which they saw as a moral threat, were interested in nation building, not exploitation.<sup>15</sup>

There has been no elimination of the local population on the British and American models. Indeed, there has been just the opposite. In 1910 there were 425,000 Palestinians from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>16</sup> Almost a century later the Palestinian population has soared to 4,200,000.<sup>17</sup> In Jerusalem, under Israeli rule since 1967, the Arab population has soared from 65,000 Arabs in 1967 to 235,000 Arabs by 2007.

Zionism, far from being an adjunct or servant of colonialism, successfully fought and overthrew British colonial rule in Palestine, which deployed close to 100,000 soldiers and paramilitary forces to maintain its rule in Palestine in the late 1940s. Zionism was diametrically opposed to traditional European colonialism. For, as Derek Penslar has observed:

the Zionist movement sought to create a society *ex nihilo*, thereby allowing social reformist ideologies to cement themselves in the very foundations of the Yishuv. As colonial models, there was a qualitative difference between the imperialist power’s system of controlling and exploiting colonies for the benefit of the metropolitan government and the Zionist goal of using an international organization to create an autonomous homeland. There took place a wide-ranging transfer of technology from Europe to Palestine . . . This process was quite different from normal imperialist practice where a mere geographic relocation of technology was the rule and only the colonial rulers had access to sophisticated technical knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

## **Israel as an American/Western implant or offshoot**

Arabists, leftist scholars and some neo-realist scholars often argue that the success of Israel has been due to massive Western and American support. John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt have asserted that the power of the Israel lobby has tilted American foreign policy towards Israel and allowed it to succeed.<sup>19</sup> John Kovel has argued that Israel is a “junior partner” of the United States and Great Britain and Israelis serve as “courtiers of the empire that is destroying the planet itself.”<sup>20</sup>

Western sympathies for several decades were clearly on the side of the Jews, with their democracy and Western orientation, rather than the Arabs, with their autocracies and Islamic orientation. In 1947 Americans by two to one favored a Jewish state.<sup>21</sup> The United States has provided almost \$100 billion in foreign aid to Israel since 1970, an impressive sum. It has given economic, military, political, diplomatic and technical support that has been invaluable to Israel. This has reflected, in Bernard Reich’s words, “remarkable parallelism and congruence of broad policy goals,” including preventing war, cooling down the Arab–Israeli dispute and supporting Israel’s existence. There has never been a formal legal alliance, mutual security pacts, formal alliance or merging of armies.<sup>22</sup>

The impact of this aid was limited, less than the GNP of Israel in 2007 alone. The \$2 billion to \$3 billion in largely military aid given yearly by the United States to Israel pales in comparison to the several hundred billion dollars that the Arab oil states and Iran receive yearly for their export of oil and gas. The American aid is less than 1 percent of yearly American military spending and was minor compared to the \$250 billion a year spent by the United States during the Cold War in Central Europe and Northeast Asia.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, American help, while important, is only part of the story. Presidents, as Steven Spiegel and William Quandt have reminded us, play a critical role in Middle East decision making.<sup>24</sup> The United States under President Roosevelt refused to try to save millions of Jews during the Holocaust. While President Truman provided crucial recognition of Israel in May 1948, he imposed an arms embargo on Israel and in December 1948 forced Israel not to take the Gaza Strip and withdraw from El Arish in the Sinai.<sup>25</sup> As Bernard Reich has indicated, “At Israel’s birth, the United States seemed to be a dispassionate, almost uninterested midwife – its role was essential but also unpredictable and hotly debated in U.S. policy circles.”<sup>26</sup>

In 1957 President Eisenhower forced Israel to withdraw from the Sinai and Gaza without any compensation. In the 1967 war President Johnson, personally sympathetic to Israel, told Foreign Minister Eban that “Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go it alone,” while Secretary of State Dean Rusk told him, “If Israel fires first, it’ll have to forget the United States.” President Gerald Ford in 1977 had his famous “reappraisal” that for more than six months froze new military supplies to Israel. In the 1973 Yom Kippur War

the United States prevented an Israeli preemptive strike at the start of the war and delayed arms shipments to Israel as massive Soviet arms shipments were on their way to the Arabs. In 1979 at Camp David President Carter threatened to cut off American aid to Israel and in 1981 President Reagan sold AWACS to Saudi Arabia. In 1982 the United States distanced itself from Begin's war in Lebanon and in 1991 prevented Israeli retaliation against Iraq for Scud missile attacks. President Bush withheld loan guarantees to Prime Minister Shamir over settlement policy in the West Bank. In more recent years there were disagreements over Israeli reaction to the two intifadas and settlement activities.<sup>27</sup>

France, which helped Israel from 1955 to 1967, then sided with the Arabs. Germany, Italy and Britain provided almost no military or economic aid to Israel, save for Germany's one-time 1957 payment of \$900 million for Holocaust restitution and the sale at reduced rates of five Dolphin class submarines in the early 1990s and 2007.

Overall, then, while benefiting greatly from Western help, Israel has been far from the favored stepchild of the West or the United States.

### **Israel as a stepchild of the Holocaust**

Many scholars have argued that the main reason for the creation of Israel was the feeling of sympathy of Western powers for Jews after the Holocaust. Walter Laqueur declared that "the state owed its existence to the disaster."<sup>28</sup> Ben-Yehuda and Sandler felt that the Holocaust created "immense momentum" for the creation of the state of Israel.<sup>29</sup> Those hostile to Israel take the view of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who in his September 2007 speech to the United Nations General Assembly asserted that "For more than 60 years Palestine, as compensation for the loss they occurred during the war in Europe, has been under occupation of the illegal Zionist regime."<sup>30</sup>

Especially in the United States and at the United Nations the Holocaust did build strong momentum for the creation of the state of Israel. Yet it was far from decisive. Anti-Semitism was quite strong in both the British and the American elites after the Holocaust. The Holocaust did not prevent the British Empire from openly siding with the Arabs during the Holocaust (1939–45) and afterwards (1945–48) arming the Arabs against the Jews. The Holocaust did not trump the European interest in oil or push the United States to revoke its ban on selling weapons to the Jews. Even the brief (1948–51) Soviet honeymoon with the Jews did not see open emigration to Israel and was caused not by the Holocaust but mainly by a desire to destroy British power in the Middle East.

In a deeper sense the Jewish state was created despite the Holocaust rather than because of it. The destruction of 6 million predominantly East European Jews destroyed the great reservoir of future immigrants to Israel from the main bastion of Zionism for the past three generations. Israel's

population, as Efraim Karsh has pointed out, would likely be several times larger had there been no Holocaust.<sup>31</sup> Also, if the Holocaust was such a powerful force in the creation of a state, then why did the 1915 Armenian genocide, which killed 40 percent of all Armenians and created strong Western sympathy, not lead to an Armenian state in 1919 but only in 1991 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union?

### **Israel as a stepchild of the Diaspora**

Many would stress the powerful role of a wealthy Jewish Diaspora. No doubt the Diaspora has played a significant part in the rise and flourishing of Israel, especially in the creation and early development of Israel after 1948. It has provided tens of billions of dollars of economic aid, worked diligently to obtain political support for Israel and shown a major interest in Israel. Yet, 99 percent of American Jews failed to immigrate to Israel, fight in the Israeli army or give major funds for economic development (a mere \$2 billion of FDI from 1948 to 1988). In the last decade wealthy American Jews gave 94 percent of their mega-gifts to non-Jewish causes, and even then heavily to non-Israeli causes.<sup>32</sup> Seven times as many Israelis immigrated to the United States as American Jews immigrated to Israel. Diaspora pressure did not prevent a number of American presidents acting against Israeli interests.

Over time Diaspora aid has declined greatly as a percentage of the growing Israeli economy. Today, it accounts for no more than 1–2 percent of Israeli GNP. In the 1990s some leaders, such as Yossi Beilin, even thought Israelis should forgo it altogether. As the Israeli economy has been transformed from a Third World economy of a few billion dollars to a First World economy of \$120 billion, the contribution of Diaspora Jews has inevitably declined. Diaspora Jewry (with a 50 percent intermarriage rate in the United States and 70 percent in Europe) has been shrinking in both absolute and relative size to an Israel that has grown from 650,000 Jews in 1948 to 5,200,000 Jews today. The American Jewish community, although wealthy, now devotes 80 percent of its charitable giving to non-Jewish causes (compared to 50 percent a generation ago) – and most of that does not go to Israel. Many American communities in the United Jewish Federation, facing an aging population, slow growth or demographic decline, Russian immigration and increasing need for social services, have substantially cut back their contributions to Israel. Israel typically receives less than one-third of all contributions made to Jewish federations across the country.

Finally, in the last 20 years, as Israel has gained broad international recognition and integrated into the global economy, it no longer needs to rely predominantly on its Diaspora Jewish base. The biggest investors in the Israeli economy are the decidedly non-Jewish “Oracle of Omaha” Warren Buffett, with his \$4 billion investment in Iscar Metals, and Hewlett-Packard,

with a \$4 billion takeover of Mercury. The billions of dollars invested by such Silicon Valley titans as Intel and IBM have no ethnic base, and nor does the multibillion-dollar yearly trade with Russia, China and India.

Under these conditions the Diaspora, while still of value and rebounding somewhat during the second intifada, has faded significantly in importance, with fewer than 150,000 Western Jews in Israel constituting barely 3 percent of the local Jewish population and the Diaspora shrinking in size and Jewish identity.

### **Israel as a brutalizer of the Arabs**

Many writers argue that Israel's success was caused by a willingness to use extreme brutality against local Arabs and the Arab world. John Kovel has spoken of the Israeli "python that is squeezing Palestine to death."<sup>33</sup> The post-Zionist Avi Shalim, echoing Ilan Pappé and others, has spoken of the "massive injustice" done to the Palestinians.<sup>34</sup> And, certainly, as seen in the imposition of military rule on Israeli Arabs from 1948 to 1965, discrimination against the local Arabs and at times harsh policies in the territories, there is some basis for this argument.

But international affairs have been remarkably brutal. For centuries, there was, in that famous phase, scarcely a year when there was not a war somewhere in Europe. Russian expansion to the east and American expansion to the west often entailed considerable brutality. Germany was created by Prussia after three wars from 1862 to 1870. The United States preserved its unity through a grinding civil war that took 600,000 lives and is remembered in the South for Sherman's march to the sea. Charles Tilly has coined a remarkable aphorism that "War makes the state and the state makes war."<sup>35</sup> The core of the neo-realist argument is that war (and its sub-agent brutality) has been a powerful and integral part of international affairs, showing no signs of disappearing in the new century.<sup>36</sup>

The creation and maintenance of Israel left the bulk of Palestinians (with the considerable majority having fled of their own accord) not only alive but living within the definition of historically mandated Palestine so defined in 1922.<sup>37</sup> In 1947 there were 1.2 million Arabs west of the Jordan River. Today, in 2007 there are 4.7 million Arabs west of the Jordan River (1.3 million in Israel and 3.4 million in the West Bank and Gaza Strip). The majority of the remaining Palestinians live adjacent to Palestine in Jordan (over 2 million), Lebanon (300,000) and Syria (200,000). Thus, the Palestinian population has grown almost sixfold since 1948, hardly a sign of excessive brutality. In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Arab population has soared from 1.0 million in 1950 to a projected 4.2 million in 2010 and will likely reach 6.0 million in 2025.<sup>38</sup>

The argument presupposes a peaceful growing over of national states that does not accord with the historical record. The Palestinians, resorting to violence in 1948 to try to throttle the state of Israel and two intifadas, and the

Arab involvement in six offensive wars with Israel (1948, 1967, 1969–70, 1973, 1991, 2006) show a strong record of Arab proclivity to violence.<sup>39</sup> As Walter Laqueur argued in his classic history of Zionism:

Zionists are guilty of having behaved like other peoples – only with some delay due to historical circumstances. Throughout history nation-states have not come into existence as a result of peaceful developments and legal contracts. They developed from invasions, colonization, and violence and amid struggle.<sup>40</sup>

Although Israel has acted at times with great force to maintain peace and avoid terrorism in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it has also shown an enlightened attitude towards the Arabs and Palestinians. If it were only a brutal repressive force, why would it voluntarily first occupy Gaza in the 1948, 1956 and 1967 wars and then leave it in 1949, 1957, 1994 and 2005? Israel withdrew from the territory on which 98 percent of Palestinians lived in 1994, and by 2000 60 percent of Palestinians lived under full Palestinian control. Israel offered at Camp David II in 2000 to leave 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, 95 percent of the West Bank, and East Jerusalem neighborhoods, and even territorial compensation for the annexed areas.<sup>41</sup> Even after the failure of Camp David II in July 2000 and the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000, the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak still went to Sharm el Sheikh (October 2000) and Taba (January 2001) to continue the negotiations, discuss a non-paper and make more concessions, even to the point of offering to absorb some refugees.<sup>42</sup> In August 2007 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert floated a withdrawal plan that was remarkably similar to that Ehud Barak offered in 2000.

From 1967 to 1991 Israel, while cracking down hard on terrorism, provided an unusually progressive occupation regime. From 1967 to 1987 Palestinians were given open access to Israel, and 140,000 of them worked in Israel. There were open bridges between Israel, Jordan and the West Bank. During the 1967–87 period the West Bank and Gaza Strip were among the fastest growing economies in the world. The Gaza Strip saw its income per capita soar from \$80 in 1967 to \$1,706 in 1987. The West Bank saw its GDP more than triple in the same period as one-third of its workforce worked in Israel in agriculture, building or services. By 1987, 120,000 workers a day were crossing into Israel. Israel allowed the creation of 6 universities and 14 vocational colleges where there were none before 1967. Infant mortality dropped from 86/1,000 in 1967 to 20/1,000 in 1989. In 1967, fewer than 20 villages were hooked up to communal water mains: in 1989, 200 villages were hooked up. In 1967 there were 113 clinics and hospitals in the territories: in 1989 there were over 378. Average life expectancy rose from 48 years in 1967 to 73 years in 1989. The Israeli economy, oil booms, capital inflows and Jordanian payments of Palestinian salaries fueled the boom.<sup>43</sup>



Finally, as a nation state Israel had a legitimate right to self-defense against terrorism directed at its citizens, especially within the Green Line.

### **Israel as a sub-agent of imperialism**

Dependency theorists, such as Immanuel Wallerstein, L. S. Stavrianos and Andre Gunder Frank, argued that Zionism was an agent of imperialism in establishing a white settler state in Palestine, serving faithfully the interests of international capitalism and imperialism while oppressing the native Palestinian population.<sup>44</sup> Yet Zionism, far from being a reactionary movement, is, as Eyal Chowder has observed, a revolutionary ideology that mixes Marxist and Nietzschean themes. It is a “novel fusion of a creative notion of self with the quest for collective therapy, upon presenting normative metamorphosis as an individual achievement that also fosters grand collective action.” The power of will and individuals is decisive with this modernist movement.<sup>45</sup>

Michael Barnett has shown that the anti-Zionist argument has logical and historical faults.<sup>46</sup> The Zionists were frequently at odds with the core imperialist powers, who often abandoned them because their cause did not serve the Great Power economic or strategic interest. This focus on capitalism is odd because Israel built up one of the few successful socialist movements in the Third World and did not fight on the side of the United States in either the Korean War or the Vietnam War.

If Israel was a sub-agent of imperialism, it seems odd that it did not receive strong backing from the United States during the first 20 years of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. It had to navigate this dangerous period replete with the help of a middling power (France), with the often open enmity of another middling power (Great Britain) and the at best benign neutrality of the United States. In its first 40 years it received a meager \$2 billion of foreign direct investment from the international capitalist community, which was wary of socialist Israel and its precarious future.

It was also the socialist power (the Soviet Union) that saved it in 1948 with a supply of weapons from Czechoslovakia. Many American and British leaders (including President Truman) saw Labor Party Israel in its early days not as a sub-agent of imperialism but as a possible agent of Moscow, not Washington or London.

Can Israel, as Wallerstein implied, be located on the semi-periphery of global capitalism? Yet its high-tech industries are in the core of modern international capitalism. Was it, as Frank saw, a sub-imperialist country? Yet it has been often snubbed by major core powers. Israel until 1977 used its capital imports to build a socialist state and developed without substantial capital inflows from the core states.

## **Israeli intransigence**

A common criticism has been that Israel is the enemy of peace, that it is Israeli intransigence, its “Holocaust mentality,” its devotion to settlements, its repression in the territories and powerful military machine and secret police that have triumphed over the peace-loving attitude of the Arabs.<sup>47</sup> The flight of over 500,000 Palestinian refugees during the 1948 war (some of which was forced), its sometimes aggressive settlement policies, voluntary war in Lebanon in 1982, and the harder-line policies of Likud leaders (Begin, Shamir, Netanyahu, Sharon) have given some credence to these views.

But, while Israel has undoubtedly missed opportunities for peace, two facts need to be remembered. Middle Eastern leaders and Islamic fundamentalist groups, calling for the elimination of Israel, have launched or supported eight wars and two intifadas in the last 60 years. The 1948 calls for “driving the Jews into the sea” were echoed in 1964 by the Arab League summit in Cairo calling for the “final liquidation of Israel” and the 1967 calls by Nasser to put an end to the Zionist regime and liberate Palestine.<sup>48</sup> The massive terrorism of the Palestinians against civilian targets since 1967, the bloodbath of the second intifada, the nihilist rejection of Israel by Hamas and Hezbollah and their frequent rocket attacks on Israel and Iran’s strident calls (as well as building of nuclear weapons) in 2005–07 for the liquidation of Israel have reinforced Israeli fears that the end could be in sight.

Yet Israel has been far from intransigent. The 1937 Peel plan, which envisioned a tiny Jewish state of 1,940 square miles (20 percent of Palestine) and no Jerusalem, was approved by David Ben Gurion and Chaim Weizmann and a vote of 299–160–6 in the 20th Zionist Congress. After the 1948 war Israel took back 30,000 refugees and offered to take back 70,000 more. In 1949 the three left-wing parties devoted to peace (Mapai, Mapam, Communists) gained 55 percent of the votes for the first Knesset compared to Herut with 12 percent. After the 1967 Six Day War, Levi Eshkol offered to return the Sinai to Egypt and a demilitarized Golan Heights to Syria for peace. Even the Likud leader Menachem Begin in 1978 returned the entire Sinai to Egypt, a position supported by 82 percent of the population and a Knesset vote of 84–19–17.<sup>49</sup> Labor Party Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1992–95), backed by a popular majority, pushed through the Oslo I (1993) and Oslo II (1995) agreements withdrawing from the territories and signed a peace agreement with Jordan (1994). Likud Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu signed the Hebron Accord (1997) withdrawing from 80 percent of Hebron and initialed the Wye River Accord (1998). A weakened Labor Prime Minister Ehud Barak (1999–2001) made major concessions for peace at Camp David II (2000) and pursued negotiations at Sharm el Sheikh (2000) and Taba (2001). In 2007, after the second intifada (2000–05) and Lebanese War (2006), over 60 percent of the population continued to support peace talks.

As with all such criticisms, there is an element of truth in much of them. Israel has been far from perfect. But it has been much further from the racist,

colonialist, repressive, brutal society, created only because of the Holocaust or the Diaspora, that its critics have depicted. In a virtual stage of siege, it has maintained a democratic, modern, progressive, high-technology society, with 30 political parties, free press and assembly, gender equality and the rule of law, elevating even its minority Arab population. In the coming chapters we will understand how this was accomplished through two revolutions that overcame massive obstacles and created the modern state of Israel.