

Israel ? an oppressor settler state

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Zionism, as a colonial settler movement during the first part of the 20th century, had to be strategically allied to one imperialist power or another. Not only did these powers provide the funds for settlement but more importantly they controlled the Middle East. British imperialism was hegemonic there from 1918 until 1947-53 when it was supplanted by the USA.

The conflict between Zionism and Britain was not an anti-imperialist struggle by the former. Rather, it was a conflict provoked by a switch of policy by Britain in 1939.

By then British imperialism accepted that in order to maintain control over strategic resources, such as the Suez canal, rail and air routes and the oil fields of Iraq and the Gulf, it would have to oversee the creation of pliant Arab semi-colonial regimes.

This involved propping up the monarchies of Egypt, Iran, Transjordan, Iraq and the Gulf states. But this in turn meant scaling down Britain's commitment to the Zionists.

This change was evident from 1936, when the Palestinian uprising indicated the threat of Arab nationalism. But it was retarded by the outbreak of World War Two and the support for Britain given by the Zionists. But during the war the Zionist right prepared for the eventual conflict with Britain.

While the Irgun guerrilla group suspended operations against the British in the war the 'Stern Gang' (LEHY) did not and even tried to make contacts with the fascists.

While the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem helped the SS in the war, Irgun and Haganah fought with the British. This helped transform Haganah into a professional armed force. Meanwhile the British disarmed and crushed the organisations of the Arabs in Palestine.

With the end of the war the conflict between Britain and Zionism resumed. The Zionists lobbied hard with US imperialism to get immediate permission for 100,000 survivors of the holocaust to be allowed into Palestine.

But the dominant Arabist faction within the British ruling class aimed to block this and negotiate a partition of Palestine between the Zionists and Transjordan, which would allow a strategic military presence for Britain.

But Britain both underestimated the strength of the new US-Zionist alliance and the resistance of the Palestinians to this plan. Three years of struggle to stop 'illegal' immigration, to suppress both Arab and Zionist 'terrorism' failed completely.

In February 1947 Britain announced it would end its mandate by August 1948. In fact, it did withdraw unilaterally in May 1948 in order to try and realise their plans by proxy, by co-ordinating an invasion of the so-called 'Arab armies'. In truth the only force capable of fighting the Haganah was the Arab Legion, led,

trained and armed by Britain.

No serious threat was posed by the Arab forces (e.g. Egypt, Syria and Lebanon), partly because they were undertrained and underarmed as a result of previous British policy; partly because the Transjordan monarchy was only interested in a deal with the Zionists for partition around the UN proposed borders which would allow Britain a role.

But the USA was opposed to any British presence and rushed to aid the newly founded state of Israel. Stalinism too rushed to aid Israel. The Kremlin supported the creation of the state of Israel because it believed that it may have been able to exert political influence over the Zionists and so fill the vacuum created by the departure of British imperialism. In the face of this balance of forces the Palestinians suffered a historic catastrophe.

They were brutally driven out of their towns and villages throughout the area that the Zionists decided was militarily conquerable and holdable. Jaffa was attacked by Haganah and Irgun and its Arab population of 100,000 was reduced in days to 5,000. Atrocities such as Dir Yassin (250 murdered) were calculated acts of barbarity designed to spread panic and induce the Palestinians to flee.

Why did the Zionists not settle for the UN plan which the USA and Britain were happy to see? In essence because even the undemocratic UN planned partition (which awarded 54% of the area to 33% of its population that was Jewish) still left the Arabs as a bare majority in the proposed Jewish state, where they would own three-quarters of the land.

The pogroms and 1948-49 war was conducted to carry out a radical extension of the area under the control of Israel and a much reduced presence of Arabs within it. In the war the Arab states cynically grabbed what they could (e.g. Egypt, the Gaza Strip, Transjordan, East Jerusalem) but the Palestinians were left with nothing.

Israel finished with 73% of the area (including the mineral rich Negev desert) and in the process 750,000 Palestinians were driven off their land and from their homes in the wretched refugee camps into the surrounding pro-British semi-colonial Arab states.

In the conflict between the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionists it was necessary to have been defeatist in relation to the Zionists and militarily supported the resistance of the Arabs. The 'War of Independence' was in fact a war to establish a pro-imperialist colonial-settler state in the Middle East, under the dominance of the USA. It was a war which denied the right of the Palestinian Arabs to self-determination.

It was correct to be defeatist in relation to the struggle waged by Transjordan and later Egypt in the War of Independence. The defeat of Israel was a Lesser evil as it would have seriously disrupted the attempt of Israel to establish a stable pro-imperialist regime in the region, and one based on the expulsion of the mass of Palestinians from their land. However, we would not have supported the war aims of the Arab League which were annexationist.

We would have fought the Arab League's attempt to enforce its own version of partition, exposed the attempted deals struck with Israel against the interests of the Palestinians and been intransigent foes of the Arab League's anti-Semitism.