

BACKGROUND FOR THE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

by Barry Zuckerman

This article is being written on the third day of the fourth Arab-Israeli war in the past 25 years. The obvious question is: Why are the nations of the Middle East in continuous conflict? In this article, I will attempt to shed some light on the series of events that have led to the tragic events of the present.

Zionism

In 1917, as the First World War was coming to an end, the British issued what has come to be known as the *Balfour Declaration*. This was given in recognition of Zionist assistance to the Allies in the defeat of Turkey and Germany, and said, "...His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish homeland."

As Britain was about to inherit the colonial reins to Palestine, this could be considered a meaningful and significant statement of policy. However, worried about the potential importance of Arab oil and not wanting to compromise her own portion of this oil, Britain issued a similar statement of intent to the Arabs in Palestine. A new Arab nationalism had emerged and Britain felt that it would be to her own advantage to have millions of Arabs on friendly terms with Britain.

In 1929, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, spiritual leader to Moslems of Palestine, saw an opportunity to further his own power and wealth in making himself the leader and chief defender of Arab nationalism.

For those who might doubt that the foregoing statement is fact, it should be noted that the Mufti spent the last two years of the Second World War as a guest of Adolf Hitler in Berlin, for services rendered in the field of espionage, only to return after Israeli independence to attempt to reassert his claims to spiritual leadership of the Moslem people in the Middle East.

The Mufti incited Arabs to riot and attack the Jews, telling the peasants that the Jews planned to burn their places of worship and usurp them of their homes. This was partially a defensive action on the part of Arab aristocracy.

Promises and riots

The driving force behind the creation of the State of Israel was the Zionist movement created in 1897 as a response to the persecution of Jews in Europe. The Zionists set as their objective the creation of an independent Jewish state in their ancestral home, Palestine.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's there was a fairly large immigration of Jews into Palestine. These people were motivated by the idea of rebuilding their lives in their own country. At that time Palestine was under the control of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. There had not been an independent state in Palestine since the Jews had been exiled from their homeland almost 2,000 years ago.

The indigenous Arab population of Palestine at first welcomed the Jews as partners in emancipation from colonial rule.

The Jewish pioneers found a land barren from centuries of neglect. Swamps were drained; the desert was irrigated; schools and hospitals were built. Arab and Jew alike benefitted from this change. These early Zionists built cities where previously sand dunes were the only remains of long abuse.

The formation of a modern European-inspired society in Palestine was bound to have a traumatic effect on the semi-feudalistic system then in existence in Arab society in Palestine as well as in the surrounding Arab states. The wealthy elite in the Arab world feared that their people would begin to follow the revolutionary (for then) Zionist ideas.

Thus guerilla warfare spread. Arab and Jew became caught in a circle of conflict that could have been avoided had there not existed the type of distrust created in the colony. It should be noted that Britain did almost nothing at that time to resolve the problem. Britain was actually quite happy. So long as Arabs and Jews fought each other, their energy was diverted from the emancipation of both peoples.

War and independence

The Second World War came and the Arabs demanded and received a promise from Britain that no more Jews would be allowed into Palestine. The underground *Hagana* organized escapes of Jewish refugees from the Nazis only to find the door to Palestine closed under Arab pressure.

Illegal immigration flourished in spite of this and at the end of 1945, there were some 600,000 Jews and 850,000 Arabs in Palestine.

When fighting increased on all sides, the United Nations was called in to find some solution. In November, 1947, the General Assembly voted by a two-thirds majority to partition Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab.

The Jews accepted the decision even though it excluded much of the land on which they were living. The Arabs unanimously rejected the decision and vowed to destroy the Jews in Palestine.

The day Israel declared her independence, the armies of seven Arab countries violated the borders of the new state and attempted to make their threat reality. After months of fierce fighting, Israel prevailed and had even extended her borders to include the Negev Desert. The country now encompassed an area of 8,000 square miles, about the size of Banff and Jasper national parks combined.

She asked that all Arabs within her boundaries remain and that they would be given full citizenship. Arab radio broadcasts told the Palestinians that if they remained they would be considered traitors to their Arab brethren. In any case, they were also told that Israel intended to kill them and take their homes for the new Jewish immigrants.

Despite assurances to the contrary by the Israeli government, approximately 600,000 Palestinians left during the fighting, and became the Palestine Refugees. No Arab country was prepared to absorb them and they have become a monument to human misery. The Arabs who remained in Israel did in fact receive full citizenship and full benefits of the Israeli parliamentary system.

1949 to 1967

The years from 1949 to 1956 were marked by sporadic border incidents on both sides. The Israelis claimed that Egypt was waging a war of terror against her citizens and that she had every right to strike back. Egypt still refused to recognize Israel's right to existence. This situation resulted in the 1956 occupation of Sinai by Israel. Israel agreed to withdraw only after a UN peacekeeping force was established in the Sinai along Israel's border.

The period from the 1956 war until 1967 was again a period of no peace and no full-scale conflict. Border incidents and accusations came from both sides and the beginning of 1967 was marked by an increase in military activity between Israel and Syria, her northern neighbour.

Syrian radio broadcasts portrayed serious border incidents as full-scale battles with Arab victories. President Nasser of Egypt felt that the only way he could maintain leadership of the Arab world was by some dramatic military gesture against Israel.

Six day war

In May, 1967, Nasser ordered the UN presence out of Sinai and proclaimed a blockade against Israeli ships in the Gulf of Akaba, an international waterway and the only maritime link Israel has with Africa and southeast Asia.

After exploring every alternative in the United Nations, Israel struck against the forces of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq on June 5. At the end of six days the Arabs were defeated and Israeli forces occupied positions along the Suez Canal, the Golan Heights and the west bank of the Jordan River.

Israel stated at that time that she would be prepared to withdraw from the occupied territories as part of a general negotiated peace treaty with all the countries involved. All of the Arab states refused to sit at any direct negotiations with Israel and continued to express their desire to achieve their objectives by military force.

As time went by and Palestinian terrorists exerted more and more influence on the imagination of the Arab people, the prospects for a negotiated peace faded. Again border incidents proliferated and the stage was set for another war.

Latest conflict

On October 6, 1973, frustrated by their inability to force Israeli withdrawal without a peace treaty, the armed forces of Egypt and Syria launched an invasion of Israeli occupied territories.

Judging by the last news reports, the invasion is turning into a bloody and futile endeavour. Bloody for all involved and futile for the Arab side because it is extremely unlikely that their objectives will be attained.

Surely there are other, more effective methods of problem solving instead of war.

Arab-Israeli war

Saturday's invasion of Israel by the Arabs has illustrated that the show in the middle east has taken on most of the unreasoning aspects of the old Hatfield-McCoy feud.

Representatives of both sides would probably be hard-pressed if they were asked what started this whole mess. They are creating phantoms to fight in hopes that one side or the other will win a war that is as senseless and vicious as the Viet Nam war although the Viet Cong and US managed to contain their conflict to home ground.

It is difficult to fathom the reasoning that goes into a conflict of this sort. What is it

that causes their hatred to take on such proportions and express itself in so many unthinking ways?

What excuse can Israel offer that will explain defending oneself by taking over extra territory in the Six Day War of 1967?

How can the Arab guerilla forces call letter bombs, the Munich murders and this recent invasion "glorious" and still sleep at night?

The leaders of these countries are padding their own positions of power by continuing this conflict. Golda Meir and Moyshe Dayan are safe enough. They aren't out in the field watching their friends and children getting their guts ripped out by shrapnel.

The leaders of the Arab states don't have too many worries about spending the rest of their lives paralysed from the neck down after being on the wrong side of a wall that has been hit by some artillery shell.

The people and soldiers seem to be getting taken for a ride that can kill them all, and perhaps the most terrible thing about it is that they believe they are right. They support this madness with clear consciences as they wallow in the uplift that hardship brings.

I can't offer any solution myself; I am not a student of such things. I have seen the results of war, though. There is a special hospital in Ontario where veterans of World War II and Korea are cared for. There is a man whose plane was brought down who suffered burns that are still causing him severe pain. He spends his life in a bath of oil and has done so for over thirty years. There are thousands of amputees, widows and children who never knew their fathers.

Oscar Wilde once said that war will continue so long as society considers it glamorous or naughty; when it is considered vulgar, war will end. How much more killing, maiming and deprivation will it take before people manage to arrive at that conclusion for themselves?

Paul Cadogan
Arts I

Chile

Since the reactionary military coup that overturned the elected Allende government, massive arrests, murders and victimizations have been unleashed by the junta. There have been reports of as many as 25,000 arrests in Santiago alone. Thousands have already been killed by the military as it attempts to eliminate all potential armed resistance to its Sept. 11 coup. On Sept. 17 it was reported that already a total of 5200 civilians are slated for court martial. For most their only "crime" is to have been supporters of the Allende government. All political parties on the left have been banned. The central trade union federation has been outlawed. The estimated 13,000 political refugees in Chile are all under immediate threat of death. The blanket of censorship imposed by the junta indicates that the full scope of the repression is only beginning to become clear.

Already there have been world-wide protests against the military junta and its campaign of repression. In Mexico 25,000 demonstrated. There have been demonstrations and actions in all major centers across Canada. In Edmonton over 200 people participated in a "candle-light rally" at the Cenotaph.

It is necessary to plan further actions to broaden the defense campaign and involve ever wider layers of people. To be most effective the campaign must unite all those who oppose the repression, whatever their views may be on other questions.

On Monday night a meeting of the "Edmonton Committee to Defend Chilean Democracy" was held "to finalize the structure and program" of the Committee. The meeting was publicized in the October 1-7 *Poundmaker*. Betty Mardiros, whose name and phone number were published a number of times "for those interested in working with the committee," told at least one person who phoned her about working with the committee that he could attend the meeting and bring friends.

However, when a number of people, including members of the Young Socialists, turned up at the Mardiros residence where the meeting was scheduled to take place they were not allowed in. They were told that it was a private meeting "by invitation only." One person in the meeting who voiced objection to the exclusion of members of the Young Socialists and others was physically removed.

This behavior on the part of people who are purportedly interested in defending the Chilean people against the repression is scandalous. The most effective way to build a campaign to defend the victims of the repression is to unite all those who agree on that aim, whatever their differences may be on Allende or other

questions. These undemocratic actions seriously divide groups and individuals who all agree that the repression in Chile must be ended.

It is clear from the actions of Monday that the people representing the so-called "Committee to Defend Chilean Democracy" are not interested in building a campaign which can effectively defend the Chilean people.

What is needed is a public and non-exclusionary committee. Decisions must be made democratically. Actions must be organized which can involve large numbers of people, and which can bring public pressure on the Chilean and Canadian governments.

A meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 9 at 8 pm. in SUB 142 of all those who oppose the repression in Chile. Speakers will deal with the nature of the repression, and program, action proposals, and organizational structure will be discussed. For further information phone Don Wiley at 433-2844 or Carl Austin at 433-8998.

End the terror of the Chilean military junta!

Stop the arrests and reprisals!

Open Canada's doors to the refugees!

Free all political prisoners!

For more information, call Carl at 433-8998 or Don at 433-2844.

Don Wiley