



## **An Introduction to the Palestinian Question**

It is impossible to deal with the struggle that is taking place over the occupied Palestinian territory as a model of a normal human struggle. It is also impossible to consider this struggle as a continuation of the struggles that have not stopped between different powers to control the Palestinian territory for economic, military, or even religious reasons.

The struggle between the Arab Nations--on various levels--and Israel forms a struggle that involves historical and political situations, economic and religious factors, and even the civilized view of the Arab-Islamic region and its role in the procession of human civilization.

It would be enough to examine the stages of history that the Palestinian Problem went through to explain this fact. As the European colonialist competition arose at the end of the eighteenth century to succeed the Ottoman Empire in order to control the strategic Indian passageway and to form a major factor to outline the politics of the European countries, the Jewish activists, with European support in which Germany and England participated, tried to force the Ottoman Caliphate to make an agreement with Sultan Abd Al Hameed the Second that would give the Jews the right to settle in Palestine and the permission to emigrate to it. However, Sultan Abd Al Hameed refused to submit to either the European pressure or to the temptations offered by the Jews.



In the period between 1900 and 1901, Sultan Abd Al Hameed issued a statement forbidding the Jewish travelers from settling in Palestine for more than three months. Furthermore, he ordered that the Jews be prevented from buying any Palestinian land, for he feared that this would turn the land into a foundation that would enable them to separate Palestine from the Islamic world.

In 1902, the Jews proposed a tempting offer to Sultan Abd Al Hameed in which the rich Jews would promise to pay all the debts of the Ottoman State, to build a squadron to defend it, and to offer a loan of 35 million gold dinars for the Ottoman's run-down public treasury. However, Sultan Abd Al Hameed refused all offers. His reply to the offer, which came via a memorandum sent to Theodor Herzl, was "Advise Doctor Herzl not to take serious steps in this matter because I cannot give up one foot of the land for it is not my personal property; it is the property of my people. My people fought for the sake of this land and their blood was shed. Let the Jews save their millions. If my empire is torn apart one day, the Jews can separate Palestine without any cost. However, as long as I am alive, dissecting my body with a knife is easier for me than to see Palestine separated away from the Islamic State. And this will not be. I cannot agree with dissecting our bodies as long as we are living."

When the Jews became certain of the failure of all possible attempts, they began working on the declination of the Ottoman Empire. They were able to creep in through the Donma Jewish Sect, the people of which pretended to be Muslims and carried Turkish names and entered the "Union and Progress Society", thus they were able to seize the power in 1907. The Jews increased their activities in Palestine with the support of the followers of the "Union and Progress Society." The Jews of Donma seized the reigns of



government in Asetana because the new Ottoman ruler had allowed them to immigrate to Palestine and to buy Palestinian land. This was what paved the way for the Zionist organizations to start practicing their activities on wide scale until the Caliphate was declined formally in 1924. Then, the British military forces occupied Palestine.

The advantages of colonization in taking Palestine away from the Arab world met with those of the Jews in establishing a national homeland. Actually, it was the European rulers who offered a national home on Palestinian land for the Jews long before the Jews themselves suggested it. In particular, the offer came from France and Britain in an attempt to get rid of the Jewish problem in Europe and to achieve colonial gains from the Jewish State.

The colonialist competition between France and Britain was obvious in the Middle East even before the establishment of the Zionist Movement. The aims of both were to defend their benefits in the area, to cause harm to it or to compete with it regarding those benefits, and to find different ways to defend these benefits. Britain thought that after the failure of Napoleon Bonaparte in Egypt and Bilad Al-Sham, it would be useful to look for other alternatives in the Middle East for the continuation of its superiority over France. She found Palestine a suitable place to spread her authority because of its geographical location-that being the centre of the Arab region and because it is considered the gateway between Asia and Africa. Therefore, it is for the benefit of the European and British colonialists, in particular, to separate the Asian part from the African part of the Arab Region and to create situations that do not allow the two to establish a union in the future. The British stand became obvious after the expedition of Mohammed Basha, the ruler of Egypt, to Syria when he sent his son,



Abraham Basha, to the area. This was what caused tension for Britain because she feared that Egypt and Bilad Al-Sham would unite and become one country. Thus, Britain participated in making sure the expedition to Bilad Al-Sham of Abraham Basha failed.

After the interference of Britain, Palmerstone, the Prime Minister of Britain, sent a letter to the ambassador in Istanbul in the year 1840. In that letter he explained the advantages that the Ottoman Sultan would achieve by encouraging the immigration of the Jews to Palestine. He said, "The return of the Jewish people to Palestine according to an invitation from him and under his defense forms a wall that will stand in the face of evil plans that are being planned by Mohammed Ali or any of his successors."

In March/April of 1840, the Jewish Baron, Rothschild, directed a speech to Palmerstone in which he said, "The defeat of Mohammed Ali and the limitation of his power in Egypt are not enough because there is an attraction between Arabs, and they do realize that the return of their old glory is associated with the possibilities of their connections and union. If we take a look at the map of this spot of earth, we will find out that Palestine is the bridge that connects Egypt with the Arabs in Asia. Palestine has been the gateway to the West. The only solution is to put different forces on that bridge in order for this force to be as a wall that prevents the Arab dangers. The Jewish immigration to Palestine is able to play that role. This would not only be a favour by which the Jewish people are returned back to the Promised Land, but it will also serve the British empire and its plans. To go through the experience of Mohammed Ali, whether in establishing a strong State or in building up communications between Egypt and the other Arabs, again will not be for the benefit of the empire."



The two documents that were issued, one by Britain and the other by one of the Jewish leaders, showed that they both have interests in fighting against establishing a united Arab State. This would only be accomplished by establishing an intruding State in the centre/heart of the Arab region. A report completed by the committee formed by the British Prime Minister, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in 1907 called for "working for the sake of keeping the Arab region divided and undeveloped and for fighting against the union of the Arab people and any kind of intellectual, spiritual and historical relationships among them. This would be done by working on separating the African part of this area from its Asian part by establishing a strong, strange-human barrier on the land bridge that connects Asia and Africa. This, in turn, will form, near the Swiss Canal, a friendly force for us and an enemy for the inhabitants of the area."

This was part of what was possible to achieve through the Sykes and Picot agreement (1916). By this agreement, France got part of Syria, the southern part of Al-Anadhol, and Al-Mousel from Iraq. All these parts were coloured blue. Britain got the land of southern Syria extending to Iraq, including Baghdad, Basra, other areas between the Arab Gulf and the land that was given to France, the two parts of Akka and Haifa. These parts were coloured red. As for the rest of Palestine, it was agreed to be an international area. Consequently, the British and the French colonialists made their plan a reality against the establishment of a union between the two parts of the Arab region.

After this agreement, the leaders in charge of the Zionist Movement, Lord Rothschild and Weisman, aimed at making some connections with Britain--the very thing that led to the establishment of the "Promise of Balfour". One of the main reasons that encouraged



Britain to agree to this Promise was that the Jewish State would be the main line of defense for the Swiss Channel and the continuation of separating the Arab region. The decision was declared on 2 November 1917 by the Prime Minister of that time, Arthur Balfour. The Promise that was in letter form to Rothschild read, "The government of His Majesty intends with sympathy to establish a homeland for the Jewish People in Palestine. It will give its utmost effort to achieving this goal. However, it is to be understood clearly that there will be nothing done in order to reduce any of the civil or religious rights of the non-Jewish organizations that are now inhabiting Palestine, in addition to the rights or the political status of the Jews in other countries. I will be grateful if you would notify the Zionist Union of this declaration."

On 11 December 1917, the British armies entered Jerusalem under the leadership of General Allenby and started the actual implementation of the Balfour Promise; consequently, confrontations between the Arabs and the Jews took place. In addition, Arab committees were established against the Zionist Project, which was their desire to celebrate the first birthday of the Balfour Promise. This matter made the Arabs threaten to make a public demonstration, but the British High Commissioner, Herbert Somail, threatened to arrest every Arab that participated in the demonstrations.

As a consequence of this declaration, Palestinians and some other Arab countries raised their objections to it. It became clear to them that Britain was insisting on separating them from each other, especially after the League of the United Nations imposed the British mandate over Palestine in 1919. Britain tried to relieve the Arabs at the time in which she was working to separate Palestine from Bilad Al-sham. However,



Britain did not succeed, for the Palestinians initiated their first national revolution in 1920.

During the session of the Versailles conference in January 1919, the Zionist Movement proposed to the conference a well-studied plan of clear characteristics in order to implement its project. This plan called for:

The establishment of a British mandate over Palestine to implement Balfour's Promise.

The borders of Palestine to include the surroundings of Saydah, the springs of the Litani River, the River Jordan, Horan, east of Jordan, Al-Aqaba and parts of the Egyptian Sinai Desert.

In this conference, the mandate policy was imposed on the settlement that belonged to Germany and Turkey before the war. The conference also called for forming a League for the United Nations so that Britain and France could be deputies for the League.

In May 1920, the declaration of the mandate over Palestine was issued during the San Remo Conference. The British Zionist, Herbert Somail, was assigned as High Commissioner in Jerusalem. He used to be the Minister of the Interior of Britain so he is sympathetic with the Zionists.

Only three days after the declaration of the British mandate contract over Palestine, Britain revealed the contents of Balfour's Promise. The Palestinians protested against this and confrontations between the British guards and the Arabs took place for the first time. Furthermore, Britain forbade the session of the second Palestinian conference in Jericho in 1920. After Churchill became a minister for settlements, he held a conference in Cairo for military men and the



British employees to review the status of the British in the region. The conference recommended the following:

Continuing the implementation of Balfour's Promise because Britain is bound to establish a homeland for the Jews.

Establishing an Arab district in the east of Jordan under the leadership of Prince Abdullah, who would be responsible for it before the British deputy without it being included in the administrative system of Palestine and without applying the mandate's conditions on it. East Jordan should be ready to welcome those Palestinians who will have to leave Palestine.

The characteristics of the British-Zionist plan have become clear in Palestine since the beginning of the twentieth century. The Palestinians declared their rejection to it. They raised the issue of the danger to Arabs and Palestinians of the Jews moving to Palestine. They warned from the silence towards the continuation of this immigration to their country.

It was recognized that the Palestinians at that time insisted on considering Palestine as part of Bilad Al-Sham. Moreover, they rejected the divisions as a result of the fight and any regional special demands for them despite the uniqueness of their matter. The danger that surrounded them differed from that surrounding the rest of the people of Bilad Al-sham because Palestinians were threatened by the Jewish immigration to their country with the encouragement of the British mandate. However, other Arab countries were suffering from the British or French colonialists without having the additional threat of Jewish immigration against it.

Therefore, the matter was developed in the twentieth century. Voices from within Palestine began to ask for the independence of





Palestine. This was after each Arab country had raised its own problems and desires of its respective national independence. And this was exactly what France and Britain were longing for in the area; to have each country face its own special problems. Thus, the concept of 'United Arab Countries', the promise that Britain kept for Al-Shareef Hussein Bin Ali, began to disappear from the existence of European colonialism. Each one of the Great Syrian people paid attention to itself; each was working on its own against colonialism in its country. This influenced the Palestinian Problem, which also went along in the same direction. Some Palestinians started to ask for Palestine's independence without considering it part of southern Syria. At the same time that the people of Palestine were fighting against Balfour's Promise and the increasing immigration via the connivance of the British Mandate, the other Arab people were busy working against the existence of colonialism in their own land. Therefore, the Zionist Movement increased its power in the 1930s and 1940s, with the help of Britain and during the absence of the Arab and Islamic Nations that were going through a battle. When the Arab countries achieved their independence at the beginning of the 1940s, it was too late for those people to participate with the Palestinians in their battle against the Zionist Movement and Britain. Zionism had been declared, and the result was the loss of Palestine in the war of 1948. Since then, the Palestinian Problem has entered the Arab policy. Still, the Zionists believed that their existence that was declared over the occupied territory in 1948 did not contain all the land that they considered Israeli land. So the Zionists made use of the following years to declare their existence in order to support their military force and to drive many of the Arab citizens away from their lands. In 1956 the Jewish State participated with France and Britain in the attack on Egypt. David Ben Gurion informed the Synagogue that "one of the aims of this participation of the Zionist



State in the attack on Egypt is the liberation of that part of the homeland (the Sinai Dese) that is occupied by the intruders." The strategic dimension of occupying the Sinai was to move the Egyptian army away from the borders of the Jewish State and to keep it from crossing the Swiss channel, the point that enabled it to attack the Zionist State and to reach Al Nakkab. The Zionists saw that Al Nakkab's desert was an active goal that must be defended no matter what the cost because it divides the Arab region into two parts and it creates a natural barrier to land communication between them.

The Zionists called upon the United Nations in 1948 to get them back Al-Nakkab. When the international mediator Count Bernadette suggested in 1948 returning Al Nakkab back to the Arab citizens, the Zionists assassinated him the day after he made his suggestion.

The colonial efforts did not succeed in achieving the Zionist goals through the attack of 1956; except that the Arab efforts were helpless and hesitant, the very thing that gave the Zionists a golden period to support its military forces and to plan an attack in 1967, the year in which the Zionist Power inundated the West Bank and the Gaza Strip--the area that was left under Arab control after the attack of 1948. Moreover, the Zionists were able to occupy the Egyptian Peninsula of Sinai, the Syrian Golan Heights. The Jewish occupying forces withdrew from Sinai by virtue of a conditional peace agreement with Egypt that virtually leaves the eastern gate of Egypt open to any Jewish attempt at occupation. Ever since, the Zionist State has been occupying the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Lebanese Heights to the border area of South Lebanon.



## The Arab Resistance

Since the beginning of this century, the efforts made by the Palestinians in defending their rights in Palestine continued. In 1918, a secret patriotic committee was formed and included members of the Palestinian Police. This committee played an important role in preparing for the Arab revolution in Palestine and spreading awareness about the Zionist danger among the Bedouin tribes in east Jordan. However, the arrest of its leaders weakened it. The Palestinian struggle against the Zionist schemes continued with the revolution of Prophet Moses from 4 to 10 April 1920, followed by the Jaffa revolution in 1921 and the Al-Buraq revolution in 1929. These confrontations were emotional and unorganized, but they helped by heating up the struggle and thereby delaying the Zionist plans.

The Palestinian fighters organized more forces. One of the most important forces was organized by Ezzul Deen Al Qassam in 1953, who came to Palestine from Syria after the end of the Syrian revolution against France. He started his activities as a teacher and joined the Muslim Chaps Committee in 1926. He was one of the founders of the Haifa Branch in 1928. He won the presidency of that Branch when its elections were made. Then he became a member of the administrative committee in 1930 and afterwards he became the president again in 1933.

Al Qassam wandered in the areas of Palestine as an employee of the court and started forming forces of five people. His movement was based on Islamic principles and adopted the concept of Al Jihad (Islamic concept of fighting against enemies) as the only way of liberating Palestine. His secret movement is considered the most



important secret committee and the greatest Feddayeen movement known in the history of the Arab struggle in Palestine. His main quarters were in Jericho where the poor live, and there he gained enormous popularity in 1935. He formed five more committees, namely Summoning and Publicity, Military Training, Supplying, Electronics and Foreign Relations. Between 200 and 800 followers joined his movement.

In 1935, Al Qassam declared the beginning of the revolution. This revolution came after a series of political fruitless efforts for a peaceful solution. After a number of confrontations between Al Qassam forces and the British army, Al Qassam took refuge in Yahbud with 52 of his men. The British army surrounded him and his men and asked him to surrender but he refused. Unfortunately, he was shot along with two of his followers. The rest of the men were arrested after a brutal fight between the two parties.

The announcement of his martyrdom greatly influenced the Palestinians all over the country. His funeral was an event of national mourning in Palestine. Al Qassam organization is considered the first of its kind in its objectives and motivations. It is a military organization against the Jews and the British. Loyalty to Islam and adherence to its commandments are the key to its membership. Al Qassam was a Syrian scholar and a man of religion who came to settle in Palestine and fight for its freedom. The revolution of Al Qassam and his martyrdom created a national Palestinian and Islamic awareness for the need to use power to fight the Zionist plans in Palestine.

The martyrdom of Al Qassam did not cause the revolution to fade. On the contrary, it activated it. As a result, there was the Great Palestinian Revolution in 1936. It was considered one of the longest



revolutions in the history of the Palestinian Problem. Demonstrations and strikes were made throughout Palestine. It was the first comprehensive movement of its kind. They used civilian means for this revolution along with the military processes. The historians indicate that some of the indirect reasons for this revolution were:

### The increasing in unemployment.

The continuous Jewish immigration, in addition to the sympathy of Britain regarding all the Jewish projects.

The land transfers to Jewish owners as a result of the pressure that was imposed on its Arab owners by Britain.

The awful economic crisis in 1953.

The situation in Egypt and Syria when they went against the British and French colonialists.

The Italian attack on Al Habbasheh, the situation that reactivated the hope of having a new war in order to reform new policies in the area. The increasing tension between the Arabs and the Jews.

The events began to unfold on 15 April when the Feddayeen movement killed a Jewish resident and injured another two in the area of Nablus and Tulkarm.

The next night, the Jews killed two Arab citizens north of the public highway of the Ulaibi settlement. During the funeral of the Jewish citizen, confrontations between the Arabs and the Jews took place. The same thing happened on the borders of Jaffa and Tel Aviv.



The British authorities announced a curfew in Jaffa and Tel Aviv. Moreover, it imposed a state of emergency on the rest of the country. An Arab Committee was formed in Nablus on 20 April and declared a public strike.

After the British forces increased to become almost 20,000 soldiers, brutal battles erupted between the revolutionaries on the one hand, and the British and the Jewish forces on the other in November of 1953. Palestinian delegations visited Amman, Al-Riyadh and Baghdad. As a result of British pressure, the Arab Kings and Presidents issued a joint announcement on 10 October 1953, in which they called for "the cessation of the revolution and dependence on the nice intentions of our friend, Great Britain, that declared that it would practice justice."

As a result, the Higher Arab Committee called for the ending of the strike, for the canceling of the Arab organizations, and for the returning of the Arab revolutionaries to their countries.

The results of this revolution were the murder of 16 policemen and 22 British men, injuring 104 policemen and 148 military men, the murder of 80 Jewish residents, and the injuring of 308 Jewish residents. As for the Arabs, the results were the martyrdom of 145 men and the injury of another 804 men.

Britain sent the Royal Committee to Palestine to discuss the facts, but the Palestinians refused to meet them. So the Arab Kings threatened the Palestinians and asked them to agree on meeting the Committee.

The revolutions did not stop. They began again after the murder of Andrews, the British ruler of Al Jaleel. The British wanted to take



revenge against the Arab leaders in Palestine. This is what started new revolutions in Palestine.

Revolutions spread throughout Palestine and forced Britain to retreat from a number of political stands by virtue of which they intended to impose the divisions of Palestine between the Arabs and the Zionists.

The strongest stab that the Arab resistance (Jihad) got in Palestine was the defeat of the Arab armies in the war of 1948. It caused big changes in the building up of the resistance and Al-Jihad, taking with it the ability to initiate from the people. The Palestinians were referred to an official affair that was ruled by internal balanced policies and systems.

However, the existence of the Feddayeen organization gave the public role of confronting the Zionist Project back its consideration. They brought the Palestinian population in as a basic side of the equation. It is the side that forced the official organization to adopt certain stands that contributed to keeping the Zionist State from expanding and, sometimes putting down its projects.

Because of the faults that were committed by the organizations of resistance, the role of the people was decreased. The Palestinian Liberation Organization became the authority over the people and their movements. This situation limited so much movement of the people. It seemed as if there were some special common benefits between this authority and its leaders, on the one hand, and the Arab systems and regional and internal forces on the other hand.

The nature of the Zionist Project and its dimensions stood as a motivation for the people of Palestine to participate against this Project and to come up with new suitable ways for resisting it.



Therefore, public revolutions that were directed by the Palestinians through its glorious intifadah in 1987 and the existence of the Islamic Resistance Movement ( Hamas ) were established outside the Palestinian Authority. They both were the first targets of the Zionist project-the first line of defense that would not break down in confronting the Zionist Project. Organizations and systems may fade away, but the people will never die. No matter how serious its injuries, it will always be able to get up again and fight until victory is achieved.