CHAPTER 5

The Growth of Anti-Israeli Sentiment in the American Intellectual Community: Some Cautionary Tales

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Doomed To Repeat the Past

Harry Truman once said that the only new history is the history that we have forgotten. This is especially true of the Palestinians, whose history has been forgotten by many. When the 1948 war between Israelis and Arabs is bathed in the color of a Palestinian “nakba” (catastrophe), few remember that the United Nations in November 1947 by a 33–12 vote adopted Resolution 181 that called for the creation of a Jewish state and a Palestinian state. The 650,000 Jews in British Palestine declared independence in May 1948 and won their battle for statehood. The United States and the Soviet Union immediately recognized Israel, followed by leading European countries. In 1949, Israel—by an even larger 37–12 vote—was admitted to the UN General Assembly, and in 1950 Muslim Turkey and largely Hindu India recognized Israel. Today 160 states recognize Israel. By contrast, the Palestinians were the only people who ever turned down statehood. They joined with five Arab states to try to destroy the new Jewish state. Why did they do this? Lacking a strong national consciousness, they followed the Arab League. As the Jews lacked an army, tanks, airplanes or cadre of professional officers, had a vulnerable 9-mile waist and no history of martial valor, this seemed to be a safe bet. The victories of the Arab forces from December 1947 to March 1948, the numerous British bases handed over to Arab forces as the British evacuated Palestine, British weapons sold to Jordan and Iraq and professional British military leadership of the Jordanian Legion reinforced these notions. Too, 1.2 million Palestinian Arabs greatly outnumbered 650,000 Jews. The Arabs also knew that most experts (including Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery) believed that Arab victory was inevitable. Arab rejectionism, long a part of Palestinian identity before 1948, was reinforced by the refugee camps after the defeat in 1948. During the fall of

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1949 an American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) staffer reported a large sign in a refugee camp that read: “1. Send us back home. 2. compensate us. 3. Maintain us until we are refreshed.” This is the epitome of Palestinianism at large. From 1948 to 1967, during Egyptian rule of Gaza and Jordanian rule of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, there was no serious Arab effort to create a Palestinian state. Except for Jordan, the Palestinians were denied citizenship, discriminated against by Arab states and often maltreated in the refugee camps. After the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War, up to 150,000 Palestinians in the occupied territories crossed the border to work and traveled freely in Israel. This ended with the first intifada (1987–1991) and second intifada (2000–2005). By 2005 the Israelis withdrew from Gaza, which two years later came under the control of radical Hamas.

The Arab world, seeing Palestinians as potentially disruptive of their political order, has done little for the Palestinians. Egypt and Jordan, which signed peace treaties with Israel in 1979 and 1994 respectively, saw national concerns trumping political concerns. Most aid for the Palestinians has come from the European Union and the United States, not the Arab states.

And what about the Palestinians who remained in Israel after 1948? During the first period of Israeli rule (1948–1965), the Palestinians were not treated well under military rule. Freed from military rule in 1965, there remains significant job discrimination and a condescending Israeli attitude. But there has also been significant progress. The 156,000 Israeli Palestinians of 1948 have grown to 1.6 million people. The average Palestinian, who had two years of education in 1948, today has 11 years of education. Fully 12% of Israeli university students are Palestinians. Israeli Palestinians are Israeli citizens with passports, access to Israeli hospitals, schools, social welfare and courts. Palestinian life expectancy of 79 years is almost 10 years higher than life expectancy in the Arab world while Palestinian income per capita ($15,000/capita) is 50% higher than in the Arab world. There are a dozen Palestinians in the 120-seat Knesset (Israeli parliament), several in the Israeli foreign service and one on the Israeli Supreme Court. Progress has been slow but real. Polls show that most Israeli Palestinians, like East Jerusalem Palestinians, would stay in Israel rather than move to a Palestinian state once created. The reality, both good and bad, turns out to be much more complex than the simple picture often posited as the history of the Palestinians.

**Biased Scholars and the Study of Israel**

The eminent doyen of Middle East Studies Bernard Lewis noted that the success of Edward Said’s book, *Orientalism*, was in being able to transform a