

Essay 2 - Zionism and the foundation of the State of Israel

- **Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people.**
- **The Zionists came to Palestine as legal and peaceful immigrants to their ancestral homeland.**
- **The League of Nations gave international legal recognition to the Jewish national home.**
- **Jewish immigration was given a new impetus by the rise of Nazi Germany.**
- **The United Nations recognised Israel as an independent state.**

Zionism is the national liberation movement of the Jewish people.

Zionism emerged in the mid to late 19th century as a nationalist movement among Jews in Europe. The Zionists believed that the oppression and discrimination faced by Jews in Europe and elsewhere arose from their lack of a homeland of their own. Only in their historic homeland, it was argued, could Jews enjoy not only physical security, but also a full flowering of their culture.

The founder of Zionism as a political movement was Theodore Herzl, an assimilated Austrian journalist who became shocked at the anti-semitism he encountered both at the University of Vienna and later while covering the Dreyfus trial in Paris. (Dreyfus was a French Jewish army officer who was falsely accused of treason and spent years in prison before finally being cleared.) Herzl articulated a vision of a sovereign Jewish state, and founded and became the first leader of the Zionist Organisation.

Although predominantly a secular movement, with liberal, social democratic and Marxist strands, Zionism gained traction from the Jewish people's strong emotional *and religious* attachment – to its historic homeland in the biblical Land of Israel, then part of the Ottoman empire (the geographical area was known to Europeans as Palestine), a connection which survived over two thousand years of dispersion.

The Zionists came to Palestine as legal and peaceful immigrants.

At this time Palestine was relatively sparsely populated and economically stagnant. On the eve of the first Zionist influx in 1881, its population was around half a million, with Jews numbering in the low tens of thousands, some of whose ancestors had lived in the land for many generations.

The Zionist Organisation encouraged immigration to Palestine. This immigration took place legally with the permission of the Ottoman authorities.

Zionists were aware of the existing population, but believed that there was plenty of room in the land to absorb everybody. They also believed that Jewish immigration and investment in the land would boost the economy and benefit the existing population. The Zionists purchased land for agricultural settlements (often from Arab absentee landlords), and in the early years of the twentieth century the first kibbutzim (collective farms) were developed as a means of creating a viable agriculture and also as an expression of the socialist values of many of the early pioneers. Many other Jews settled in the towns, such as Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem.

The Arab population grew considerably during the period of Jewish immigration. While the causes of the increase (immigration versus natural increase) are a matter of dispute, it is clear that the net flow of Arab migration during the late Ottoman and British Mandate (1922-1948) periods was into rather than out of Palestine.

The League of Nations gave international legal recognition to the Jewish national home.

During the First World War Britain conquered Palestine from the Ottoman Empire. In 1917, in the Balfour Declaration, the British government adopted a policy to support a Jewish national home in Palestine.

In 1922 Britain received the Mandate to govern Palestine on behalf of the League of Nations. The wording of the Balfour Declaration was included in the Mandate, along with a recognition of the

Jewish historic attachment to the area, thus giving the seal of international law to the Jewish homeland.

'Palestine' as defined in the mandate included the present-day state of Jordan as well as Israel and the Palestinian Territories. However, Britain subsequently partitioned Palestine, with the land east of the River Jordan becoming the Emirate of Transjordan (now the Kingdom of Jordan).

Jewish immigration was given a new impetus by the rise of Nazi Germany.

The demand for a Jewish state was given added urgency by the events of the Holocaust in Europe.

From the early 1930s onwards, until flight became impossible, Jews sought desperately to escape the Nazi regime. The fact that most other states closed their borders to refugees swelled the number of immigrants to Palestine, until the British all but barred Jewish immigration to Palestine in 1939.

After the war, many of the survivors of the Holocaust, unable or unwilling to return to their homes, clamoured for admission to Palestine. The British authorities, by now hostile to Jewish immigration, refused entry to all but a tiny proportion of these would-be migrants. What the British termed as illegal immigration flourished, and was met with a brutal response. The British interned many of these survivors in camps in Cyprus. This response inflamed relations between the British and the Palestinian Jewish community, as well as provoking widespread international condemnation.

The United Nations recognised Israel as an independent state.

In 1947 Britain determined to relinquish the mandate, and the United Nations approved a plan drawn up by an independent UN commission to partition the land between a Jewish and an Arab state. The Jews accepted the partition plan but the Arabs did not and immediately launched a war against the Yishuv (as the Jewish community in Palestine was known). After initial reverses during which their survival was in serious doubt, the Jews turned the tide and on 14 May 1948, following the ending of the Mandate, declared an independent state, to be known as the State of Israel.

The UN subsequently agreed to admit Israel as a full member.

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