A FORGOTTEN PEOPLE
LDS Attitudes Towards Palestine

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In the last half century what many call a "modern miracle" took place: one-fourth of the world's Jewish people returned to Palestine and established an independent state. This event was hailed with rejoicing not only among the Jews but among thousands of Christians who saw the return as literal fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and as a precursor to the second coming of Christ. Today, nearly forty years after Israel became a nation, it is difficult for many in the Church to comprehend this historical event. Israel's birth and history are shrouded in a pall of religious strife that continues today, with one people singled out as "villain"; the Palestinians. While it is common knowledge that the Palestinians have perpetrated terrorist acts against Israel, few Americans, especially Latter-day Saints, are aware of Israel's unjust treatment of the Palestinians. In our ignorance, we favor those we know are deserving of our sympathy—the Jews—but we slight a people less familiar to us yet also deserving—the Palestinians.

I first became aware of a strong bias in favor of Israel when I was in high school. At that time Israel bombed a nuclear reactor in Iraq in fear that the Iraqis might later use it to produce nuclear weapons. I was horrified at this brand of aggressive defense, and I complained of Prime Minister Menachem Begin's tactics to a relative, suggesting that the United States should not support Israel in such actions. To my surprise, she defended Israel and Begin vehemently, justifying the bombing because of the Arab nation's known evil intentions against Israel. She further insisted that as Latter-day Saints it was our duty to support and defend Israel. As I reflect on what I have learned about the Middle East, I realize I have not been as well informed as I should have been concerning the Middle East. I believe, from my reading and conversations with friends, that in my attempts to receive a single positive impression of the Palestinians, I have been misled by the media's willingness to place them. Neither in church nor at school was I ever given reason to believe otherwise. I have heard of Jewish history and current problems, however, and naturally sympathized. Thus, incomplete information led me to accept as truth what little information was offered.

It is likely that this same lack of information is a major reason for the Church's perceived lack of support for the Palestinian cause. A brief look at church publications on the colonization of Palestine illustrates the one-sided view presented to us for nearly a century and a half. Though the Church has never officially supported Zionist policies or denounced Arab aims, its silence on the subject of the Palestinians and enthusiasm for fulfillment of scripture through the Jewish gathering to the Holy Land has given tacit encouragement to the pro-Israeli stance of many church members. In the early church publications, such as The Millenial Star, regular notices of events relating to the Jewish return to Palestine can be found. In 1840, the magazine announced that Jews were making plans to establish factories in Palestine (1:46), and later that year the magazine urged the overthrow of the Turkish Empire, the "one grand impediment in the way of the gathering of Israel" (1:74-75). Symptomatic reports detailing how inspiring progress in Russia and Eastern Europe appear often, as well as reprinted articles from national and international magazines calling for "colonization of Palestine by the Jews" and urging "all Christian societies who take an interest in the fate of Israel, to assist in their restoration." (10:44-45, 11:330-31).

Israel has repeatedly violated international law and their actions have been called "undeveloped wilderness" and "malarial swamps" productive (Skousen 53-57). Skousen's article also lamented the fact that the United Nations Charter had "greatly restricted the area for the settling of the thousands of refugees from Europe," although the Jews, with one-third of the population of Palestine at the time of the charter, had received 54% of the land, and that percentage included the most productive agricultural areas (Murray 23).

For many of us, the only exposure we have had to the Palestinians are our memories of the Munich tragedy in 1972 and sporadic news flashes about Yasser Arafat's terrorist expeditions. Knowing these terrible events, we may feel justified in supporting the state of Israel. How-
ever, national and Church sentiment have so long been pro-Israeli that our judgements fail to take into account factors that explain, even if they do not excuse, Palestinian action.

The seeds of the conflict can be found in the organization of the Zionist movement, a political rather than religious effort dedicated to creating a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. As already noted, this movement was applauded by publications, national and international media also supported it with enthusiastic press reports and fundraisers ranging from subscriptions to Zionist musical plays. Theodor Herzl began the movement in the late nineteenth century as a response to anti-Semitism throughout Europe. He felt that the only solution to the problem would be the establishment of an independent Jewish state, and, though uninhabited locations in Africa were proposed, his preference for location was Palestine. He and other Zionists publicly expressed peaceful means to accomplish their ends, but in Herzl's diary he spoke of "armed conquest" of Palestine and deportation of its "penless population" (Hirst 15-18). In order to assuage fears in the Jewish community that Palestine was already inhabited, and thus not an appropriate homeland, Zionists introduced the slogan "[Palestine is a] land without a people, waiting for a people without a land" (Hirst 19).

Small numbers of Jews, mostly poor and aged, had been coming to Palestine since the early 1800s. As the Zionist fervor escalated, however, larger groups began arriving, buying land from the foreign owners, and evicting the Palestinian peasants. The homeless peasants were resentful, and their resentment increased when the Jews began establishing kibbutzim, "agricultural compounds founded on exclusively Jewish labour" (Hirst 26). Even those Palestinians who had formerly worked for the immigrant Jews were now denied jobs on the principle that exclusively Hebrew labor would eliminate "exploitation" of Arab labor and thereby avoid conflict. As soon as the Jews were able to produce their own goods, Arab goods were boycotted. This closing of ranks began "a process of economic, political, cultural and psychological self-segregation which the Arabs reciprocated with a vengeance" (Hirst 26).

The two most important documents affecting the future of Palestine came about during and shortly after World War I. Since Arabs had aided in the war effort, Britain had promised to "recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, and Iraq" (Hirst 37). At the overthrow of the Ottoman empire following the war, the Palestinians eagerly awaited the fulfillment of this promise, but were met instead with the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, in which Palestine was placed under international administration. With the Palestinians' hopes for independence dashed, the Zionists moved in to propose a Jewish state, and Britain's response came in the Balfour agreement of 1917, which declared "sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations." It further declared that the British government viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country (Hirst 38).

In the process of time, each of these contingencies occurred, an understandable eventuality in the light of Balfour's later statement that in Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country.... The Four Great Powers are committed to Zionism. And Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land.... In short, so far as Palestine is concerned, the Powers have made no statement of fact which is not admittedly wrong, and no declaration of policy which, at least in the letter, they have not always intended to violate (Ingrams 146).

Denied of land, labor, and independence, the Palestinians were understandably resentful of the immigrant Jews. They were also suspicious of the "premise that underlay the whole Zionist enterprise. The Jews were not only introducing an alien culture, they planned to make it the only one in the country" (Hirst 50). By 1937 it was apparent that both Jewish and Palestinian rights could not be met as stipulated in the Balfour declaration, and Arab rights were going by the wayside. Riots broke out often, especially in ports where shiploads of Jews entered the country. By the late 1940s the situation had become unbearable for both sides, and Zionists began lobbying in America and Britain, quite successfully, for a "transfer" of the Arab population to some other country. The United Nations met and decided on a partition plan, a solution that most who were familiar with the situation advised against. The United States, however, went to extraordinary lengths to coerce other countries to vote in favor of the plan. President Truman "warned one of his secretaries that he would demand a full explanation if nations which normally lined up with the United States failed to do so on Palestine" (Fliest 131).

The partition plan was strongly biased in favor of the Zionists. Of the 10,000 square miles in Palestine, the Arabs, who represented two-thirds of the population, were assigned 4,300 square miles, while the Jews, with one-third of the population and ownership of 6% of the land, were given 5,700 square miles. One of the biggest blows to the Palestinians was that the Jews, the majority of whom had been there less than thirty years, were granted sovereignty in a state with an Arab majority.

The Arabs did not accept the partition plan for obvious reasons and began a series of invasions to which the Jews responded militarily by expanding the borders granted under the U.N. charter. As Mid-east violence made Israel more and more antagonistic to the Palestinians and as it

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came more pressed for room for immigrants, the Israelis
began systematically razing Arab villages. Elias Chacour, a
Palestinian Christian, describes one of these incidents in
his book Blood Brothers. As a child, he and his family were
asked to leave their city of Biram while it was "protected"
by Jewish soldiers. After months they attempted to return,
and the soldiers opened fire and destroyed their homes
before their eyes. In this and similar cases, no compensa-
tion was given and villagers were left to fend for them-
se l or enter refugee camps in neighboring countries.
The educational and work systems for Arabs remaining
under Israeli jurisdiction were extremely poor. Palestinian
children forced to study Israeli curricula did poorly, and in
1966 there were only 17 Arab university students com-
pared to 14,000 Jewish students (Hirst 238). Uneducated
Palestinians were forced into menial work and earned only
40% of Jewish wages in the same jobs. (Hirst 246)

In the last thirty years, Israel has repeatedly violated
ternational law, mounting two military attacks despite
the U.N. charter forbidding it, ignoring Geneva Conven-
tion rulings on the administration of occupied territory
and protection of civilians, and refusing to withdraw from
Arab territory after conflicts. President Eisenhower forced
a withdrawal after the 1956 war, during which he asked,
"Should a nation which attacks and occupies foreign terri-
tory in the face of United Nations disapproval be allowed
to impose conditions of its own withdrawal?" (Parker 4–5).

Israel has been involved in several defensive wars since
that time and has continued to expand her borders, justifi-
able, many argue. Whether justifiable or not, the Palestini-
ans are taking the brunt of the punishment for the Arab-Is-
raeli conflict. Israel has refused to consider returning the
West Bank or other lands granted to the Palestinians. At
present the land still occupied by Israel and are being
actively colonized, and nearly 70% of Palestinian Arabs
have been deported. Many of these are now in refugee
camps in neighboring countries, where they have been
subject to wretched conditions and liable to such events
as the massacre of Sabra and Shatila, in which 3,000 men,
women, and children were killed by antagonistic Arab
Philistines (Hirst 422–23). Deprived of a homeland, Palestin-
ians have been herded from one country to an-
other, resettled and persecuted by both the Israelis and
their own Arab brothers.

There have, of course, been outrages, tragedies, and
endless reprisals on both sides of this terrible conflict, but
it cannot be forgotten that the Palestinians, who dwelled
in the land for hundreds of years, are now a dis-
possessed people—dispossessed by a nation that, no matter
its ancient history, has held the Holy Land for less than
forty years. One of the major reasons this tragedy has been
allowed to occur can be found in the attitude of the United
States toward the conflict. The U.S. government has
steadily supported the state of Israel since its beginning.
It is likely that a significant reason for America's
perpetual sympathy with people striving for independ-
ence. The Jews were very prominent in the world picture
when they made their bid for the Holy Land. World War II
had just ended and feelings of patriotism and the superior-
ity of democracy filled the nation. Since Hitler, the enemy,
had persecuted the Jews, Americans were eager to cham-
ploy the Jews and give them the same rights of indepen-
dence enjoyed in the U.S. The Palestinians were not
prominent in the world scene, and their hopes for inde-
pendence were not taken under consideration. An even
more compelling reason for U.S. support for the state of
Israel was a powerful lobbying group in Washington, D.C.
Even today Jewish lobby groups, such as the Anti-
Defamation League, are among the largest in the nation
and exercise tremendous influence over lawmakers.

Prominent Jews in the United States were able to exert
their influence in 1947, leading President Truman to say to
ambassadors to the Arab nations "I am sorry, gentlemen,
but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are
anxious for the success of Zionism; I do not have hundreds
of thousands of Arabs answering to me." (Eddy 36)

With the sympathy of the government with the establish-
ment of Israel, especially in patriotic times, the sympathy
of the people quickly followed. America enjoyed her role
of champion to people oppressed by totalitarianism, but,
ironically, this noble rule itself led our nation to ignore the
rights of the Palestinians, who neither had the money nor
the leadership to make an outcry.

American members of the Church readily adopted their
government's bias because of the lack of information al-
ready noted and for several other reasons. First, dozens of
prophecies in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Do-
ctrine and Covenants refer to the return of the Jews to their
"land of inheritance" and indicate that this event will
signal the imminence of Christ's second coming. Many of
these prophecies remarkably parallel developments in the
establishment of the State of Israel. For instance, Jeremiah
30:21 indicates that when the Jews return they will be
self-governed; in Jeremiah 32:36–44 the Lord declares that
he will "cause their captivity to return" as "men...buy
fields for money." (The returning Jews bought large tracts
of land in Palestine from Lebanese and Turkish landown-
ers before and after the state was established.) Other scrip-
tures speak of the gold of nations aiding the Jews to re-
establish their land. (Many nations have aided Israel
in implementing new agricultural methods, bringing Jews
to Palestine, etc.)

We see these events as fulfillments of prophecies, as
they very well may be, and unhappily assume that,
therefore, they must fulfill God's will. As God forges he must approve. The fallacy in this kind of think-
ing is pointed out in a statement by Orin Parker, vice-presi-
dent of American Friends of the Middle East: "Since my
belief in the prophecy that there will be evil in the last days
does not require me to be evil so the prophecy will come to
pass, my belief in the prophecy that Jews will return to
Palestine in the last days does not require me to lend
support, approval, or loyalty to the illegal actions of the
civil state they have established." (Parker 5)

Another reason we may favor the Jewish state is because
of a world sense of guilt over the Holocaust. In our horror
over Hitler's treatment of the Jews, compounded with
knowledge of the persecution they have endured for cen-
turies, we rushed to give the Jews a homeland, ignoring
the fact that Palestine is already served as a home to millions
of non-Jews. Our sympathy was undoubtedly strengthened
by a sense of brotherhood with the Jewish people. As
Latter-day Saints, we consider ourselves members of the
House of Israel, just as the Jews are. Like theirs, our
history is rife with religious persecution. Because of this,
we identify with the Jews and champion their cause as we
would our own.
A final reason for our bias may be that there exists an anti-Arab sentiment in the Church, as in the nation. Recent advertisements in national magazines, telling of cultural and technological advances of Saudi Arabia, speak for an American bias against the Arab, a bias against them in America and are seeking to alleviate it. J. Bonner Ritchie, BYU professor of Organizational Behavior, suggests that the anti-Arab bias arises from cultural and racial differences. The Arab culture contains "metaphors of violence" that make the western culture suspicious. For instance, Christians are inspired by Christ's teachings of peace and turning the other cheek, but many Arabs are inspired by Mohammed's cry for jihad or holy war. Many desert Arabs lead a nomadic lifestyle that time-oriented Americans find incomprehensible. The dark skin of the Arabs also gives them a disadvantage with many Americans; the fact that most Arabs descend from Ishmael rather than Isaac may cause some Christians to consider them an "inferior" race. Unfortunately, members of the Church are not immune to the factors mentioned as well as resentment for Arab actions against Israel. Omar Kader, current head of the American Arab Anti-discrimination Commission and LDS convert, migrated from Palestine to Provo as a child. Several years ago when Kader was made a bishop, the stake president received several angry letters demanding that the "Arab" be released. Indirect discrimination also exists. We unintentionally slight the Arab world through our ignorance of its culture and history and through our common assumption that the Jews, since they are the chosen people, are justified in reclaiming the Holy Land.

The lack of awareness of and sympathy towards the Palestinian problem continues in the Church today, as evidenced by a survey taken by James Mayfield. Mayfield polled three groups, BYU students, University of Utah students, and LDS ward members. The vast majority of all three groups saw the establishment of the state of Israel as fulfillment of prophecy, and well over half of the BYU ward groups saw Israel's present policies as fulfillment of prophecy. Over 75% percent of the total group felt that Israel was justified in keeping the Arab territories acquired in the 1967 war, and, in response to the question "Do you think that Israel should be forced to withdraw from its most recent acquisition of Arab territory if this would bring stability and peace to the Middle East?" over half said "No." These responses indicate either ignorance of the violation of international law and morality inherent in Israel's expansionist policies, or a belief that Israel has somehow a greater "right" to defend itself than the Arabs do to own and live on their native land.

Recently, more articles have been appearing in church magazines advocating neutral stances towards the conflict, indicating a turn towards greater understanding. For instance, a very objective account of the Middle-east conflict appeared in the Ensign in January 1971 which recounted the tragedies on both sides. In 1979 the Ensign printed an article called "Ishmael, Our Brother" by James Mayfield, which described the Islamic religion and Arab contributions to medicine, mathematics, and culture, as well as introducing two intriguing interpretations of scripture: In Gen. 17:8 Abraham's seed is promised the land of Canaan (present-day Israel) for "an everlasting possession"; and in Gen. 16:12 it is said Ishmael, "he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." According to Mayfield, since Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arab nations, is also of Abraham's seed, he may also be heir to the promise of the land of Canaan, an idea corroborated by the second prophecy, which states that Ishmael (the Arabs) shall dwell in the presence of his brethren (the Jews).

In the same issue of the Ensign, a talk by Howard W. Hunter appeared, entitled "All Are Alike Unto God." In it, Elder Hunter chastised members of the church for their "exclusive"ness in favoring Israel, saying: "As members of the Lord's church, we need to lift our vision beyond personal prejudices. We need to discover the supreme truth that indeed our Father is no respecter of persons... Both the Jews and the Arabs are children of our Father. They are both children of promise, and as a church we do not take sides. We have love for and an interest in each. The purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to bring about love, unity, and brotherhood of the highest order. Like Nephi of old, may we be able to say, 'I have charity for the Jews... I also have charity for the Gentiles'" (2 Nephi 33:9) (Hunter 72-74). Evidently, Elder Hunter recognized a bias in the church and sought to remove it as inappropriate to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If all members of the Church recognized and followed the principle of "brotherhood of the highest order," no one would ask how an Arab or a worker for Arab rights could reconcile his work with his membership in the church" (Parker 4).

Admittedly, blindness to the Palestinian dilemma is a world problem, particularly an American problem, not just a Church problem. As members of the Church, however, we may be uniquely guilty of equating support of Israel with being Mormon, and therefore giving Israel our loyalty in the face of evidence suggesting that the Palestinians are due a good share of our sympathy, support and action. Such belief does not arise from church doctrine or policy, but from misinterpretation of silence on the Arab issue, misapplication of the slight amount of information we have received, and over-zealous championing of specific scriptural notions at the expense of the commandment to love all men. As Latter-day Saints, committed to the teachings of Christ and possessors of a heritage of persecution, we should be acutely sensitive to injustice and suffering wherever it occurs. If Israel is to survive as a state, she must be respected not only by Western nations, but by her closest neighbors. While international laws and human rights are violated, respect cannot exist, and our tolerance of such actions poorly serves the long-term interests of Israel. By recognizing and demanding redress on both sides, however, we will be supporting standards that are an international conduct crucial for respect and peace. Becoming aware of conflict and seeking justice surely befit the conduct of a Christian and a Latter-day Saint.

Works Cited
Mayfield, James B. "Ishmael, Our Brother." Ensign. 9 (June 1979): 24-32.
Millenial Star. All citations in this work are listed in the paper.

Several incidents I have cited come from and are attributed to conversations with Dr. J. Bonner Ritchie.

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course of thought at all?

Brian: Course of thought? You mean my cores of thought? No, deep down I’m still a Westernized thinker. Just because I drew that analogy doesn’t mean I’m beginning to think in Zen.

Larry: To change your thought processes so drastically is very difficult. I wasn’t able to do it even after two years in the monastery. Maybe you should give it a try.

Ralph: That would be quite a sight: to see Brian studying at a Zen monastery, thinking Zen all the time!

Brian: Come on, Ralph, you’d look a little out of place yourself—the best part would be to see you with your head shaved.

Larry: It would be worth getting my head shaved again to see that! But back to Zen, I think you need to understand something about the One-mind before you can get a very complete picture of what I’m talking about. This concept is a synthesis of the two basic principles of oneness and nothingness. Oneness we’ve talked about. Nothingness is simply the idea that nothing exists outside your mind.

Ralph: To help clarify this idea, let me read you a quote from another one of these Zen scholars. “There is absolutely No-thing! No particular three-dimensional objects in three-dimensional space exist, have ever existed, will ever exist! There are no acting, knowing, feeling selves; there is no material environment composed of such entities as mountains and elephants and hickory nuts. Everything is No-thing! This is the one fundamental presupposition of Zen.” (Callaway 28).

Brian: Would you mind explaining to me how it is that everything is nothing when I can plainly see, hear, feel and taste these very objects that you say don’t exist?

Larry: One of the first things that you have to recognize, before you will be able to accept this idea of nothingness, is that the mind is everything. According to Zen, you don’t taste grapefruit, hear people, see cars; you just experience sensations in your mind that for some reason you interpret as resulting from actually sensing real objects.

Ralph: Be cool, Brian, because I’m about to throw another curve at you. It’s not just that our minds are everything and there is nothing outside of the mind, but we can’t even speak of separate minds because, as Larry said, there is only One-mind. This is how nothingness and oneness come together in Zen: outside of our minds there is nothing and all our minds are one. This One-mind is also called Only-Mind or Buddha-Mind. We could even call it Brian-Mind. Maybe that would better enable you to come to grips with Zen.

Brian: Enable me to do what? I’m sorry, you lost me.

Larry: In what sense, Ralph, do you think all of our minds are one? Is it that all of our minds share some kind of essence that unites all of us and somehow draws us into one whole entity?

Ralph: Might it be that we really don’t have minds? It doesn’t seem that Zen allows us to speak of our minds individually, even when we recognize that they are all ultimately one. Maybe our sense of selfhood, of an individual existence, is an illusion painted somewhere in that Buddha-Mind. Maybe you and I are merely thoughts, not beings at all.

Larry: Keeping that in mind might help us to really understand our true natures, our Buddha-natures.

Ralph: Analysis of this kind though just seems to make Zen and all of its implications more muddled than ever. All that we’ve said about Zen seems to be full of contradictions. It’s not Buddha-nature that we need; it’s Brian-nature. Look at him; he’s fast asleep.

Larry: With that serene expression on his face, it’s almost as if he’s reached enlightenment. Isn’t it wonderful when you can sleep as peacefully as that?

Ralph: Logical deductions and esoteric generalizations seem to have gotten the better of him. Maybe they’ll get the better of us if we keep trying to apply them to Zen.

Larry: The intellect, as we’ve said more than once, seems not to have a place in Zen, yet it is our only means of understanding anything. How, therefore, do you understand Zen? We seem to be right back where we started.

Ralph: So what do you propose we do?

Larry: Very much the same thing that Brian is doing. He seems to have discovered the real secret of Zen.

Ralph: Zen is sleep?

Larry: Spirit me away to that netherworld of sleep! I want to know Zen! Besides, it’s four o’clock in the morning. Should we call it quits?

Ralph: Of course, Larry.

Works Cited


—Scott Bradford is working towards a double major in physics and philosophy.
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