

# Getting the facts right on Palestine

**Israel's occupation of Palestine is an injustice that Christians must condemn, argues George Browning.**

**BOB FLAVELL'S LETTER** *Giving all the facts on Palestine* (TMA April) begs an outline of history.

Prior to World War I the Middle East was part of the Ottoman Empire. The Arabs who lived in this region were tribal and came under the patronage or tutelage of various tribal leaders; one of the most dominant being the Saud family who went on to create Arabia into a family Nation State, ultimately to include Mecca and Medina. National boundaries as we now understand them did not then exist.

To assist the overthrow of the Ottomans, the Allies encouraged the 'Arab uprising' with a promise that, post the war, the Arabs would enjoy a measureable sense of their own autonomy. The uprising greatly assisted the allied advance, of which the battle of Beersheba in October 1917 is perhaps the most well-known achievement. The Zionist narrative has recently tried to claim that this battle was a significant contribution by Australian Forces toward the establishment of a Jewish State. It was nothing of the kind; it was part of the war against the Ottoman Empire which delivered a measure of freedom to the Arabs, (and European access to oil).

However, to the west Britain was also desperate to draw America into the war. Even then Jewish influence and wealth in American politics was known to be significant and to tap into this influence the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Balfour, wrote to Baron Rothschild with the following declaration:

*His Majesty's Government view 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 may be done to prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*

Clearly the portion of land we know of as 'Palestine' was recognised by that name at the commencement of the 20th Century and the existence of an Arab population in this territory acknowledged.

In his most recent book, *The Churchill Factor*, Boris Johnston, the flamboyant Mayor of London, writes that "Churchill sold the same camel three times" for he also made a commitment to the French.

Following the war, nation states were established with boundaries largely determined to suit the European powers. Britain wanted energy security as she converted her navy from coal to oil and the age of motorised vehicles was beginning to explode. Boundaries were set for modern Iraq, under British patronage, inclusive of what were known to be three quite different peoples who had no reason to share

the same governance: the Kurds, the Sunnis and the Shia. Iraq was established like most countries in the Middle East, with combinations of peoples for whom 'democratic' government was not possible then, and remains impossible now. Is that the fault of the people, or the fault

claim the whole territory. In 1948 the Security Council resolved the establishment of the State of Israel on 61% of historic Palestine; this became 78% following the Arab Israeli war of 1948.

Following the 1967 war Israel has occupied the rest of Palestine. While Ariel Sharon affected a withdrawal from Gaza, in reality it is still controlled by Israel. This control is most easily demonstrated by the lack of attention being given to rebuilding

lasting peace agreement, the most recent under the mediation of US Secretary of State John Kerry. The pretence that Israel now enters these discussions with good will has been blown away by the recent Israeli election at which Prime Minister Netanyahu made it clear there will never be a Palestinian State on his watch, while his Likud party's charter confirms the same stance.

Now we come to Australian politics. Both sides of Australian

claim 'unoccupied land' as legitimate spoils upon which to move one's own citizens.

There are approximately 11 million people living in Israel and Palestine with the Arab population probably being a small majority. 1.4 million Arabs live in Gaza, arguably the largest open prison on earth. 2.4 million Arabs live on the West Bank. Approximately 20% of the citizens of Israel are Arabs.

This whole area cannot simply be called a greater "Jewish State" for this would give effect to apartheid. The international community cannot and must not tolerate such a situation. Above all Christians should not and must not tolerate this situation. Injustice is a permanent stumbling block to peace and an affront to all humanity. There are many other injustices in the world, but there are two factors that make this situation unique. First, that it was created by boundaries established and agreed to by the western world, boundaries that caused approximately 750,000 Palestinians to become refugees and for the remainder to subsequently experience intergenerational occupation. It is not possible for the parties to negotiate their own solution for they do not negotiate as equals; they meet as conqueror and conquered. The international community must be proactive in the solution.

Secondly no other place on earth reflects such a crossroads of religions, civilisations, ethnicities and histories. No one group has exclusive rights based on their history. This conflict has the power, like none other, to ignite global passions of both conflict and of unity. While the situation remains unresolved it will be forever a significant ember in a global fire which lights extremist passions of one kind or another.

In conclusion let me reflect upon a strange marriage of religion and politics. In Australia, as in the US, the most vociferous defenders of Israel and its abuse of human rights are conservative Christians. In America, more than Australia, this is in part due to a strange piece of biblical homiletics which deduces that Christ's return is predicated on Israel's boundaries once more being aligned with 'biblical boundaries'. This matter aside, there is residual guilt felt that the worst aspects of anti-Semitism need to be corrected with a Jewish State and an assumption that God gave this land to the Israeli people. It is important to understand that in the contemporary world Jewishness is not a religious but an ethnic or cultural identity. A significant percentage of Jews are non-religious.

In the Kingdom that Jesus came to inaugurate we cannot accept that God gives something to one group of people at the expense of another, or worse, that one group are to be the scapegoat for the mistakes or failures of others.

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See letters on opposing page.



The Separation Wall which divides Israel from the West Bank.

of those who established embryo Nation States for the purpose of commercial self-interest?

Faisal was appointed King of Syria but was not wanted by the French at the end of the war and was subsequently appointed by the British as King Faisal I of Iraq. It is important to understand that the vast majority of land was not privately owned in the early 20th Century in the way that we now understand 'ownership'. That is not to say it was empty, any more than Australia was 'Terra Nullius' in 1788. The lands were tribal lands. It is entirely wrong to say that most of Palestine was empty or that it was 'Crown Land'. What a strange thing to say: whose 'crown'? The Zionist slogan that "Palestine was a land without a people for a people without a land" is simply untrue, but we will come back to that in a moment.

At the end of the Great War, the Middle East was divided between Russian, French and British influence. Palestine was part of the designated area of British influence. The League of Nations Mandate for Palestine came into effect in 1923 and lasted until Partition in 1948. During the period of the Mandate it is estimated that a little over 350,000 Jews migrated into Palestine and in 1948 owned 5.23% of the land.

In 1947 the United Nations General Assembly voted for partition into Arab and Jewish States of approximately equal size, ideally with shared economies and equal rights afforded to each other's citizens in the other State. The General Assembly can only recommend; the resolution was neither accepted by the Arabs nor by the militant Zionists who then, as now, wish to

following the recent Gazan conflict. All reconstruction monies, including Australia's gift are channelled through Israel and rebuilding of infrastructure, or domestic homes, must have Israeli permission. Israeli

politics support a two-State solution. The recent Israeli election provides a watershed for both Labour and the Conservative Coalition. Either they must abandon the two-state policy and insist on one state

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occupation of Palestine was condemned by resolution of the United Nations Security Council following the 1967 war, a resolution which has been ignored for 48 years. Under international law:

1. The occupier must not move its own civilian population into the occupied land. (There are now more than 600,000 illegal settlers on Palestinian land).
2. The Occupier must care for and nurture the civil infrastructure of the people occupied. (Quite the reverse is true on the ground; Israeli forces subjugate Palestinians keeping them under military law while the settlers enjoy the benefits of civil law).
3. Occupying forces must withdraw as soon as possible.

Over the years there have been several attempts at achieving a

with equal rights of citizenship for all (this of course could not be a Jewish State); or they must vote at the United Nations in support of a Palestinian State, giving teeth to policy which now must demand Israeli withdrawal from the occupation within a specific timeframe; cessation of all settlement building and transition to a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital on 1967 borders. This should not be unreasonable to Israel; they would still hold 78% of historic Palestine. The current Australian government consistently votes with Israel and the US and a few micro-nations against the rest of the world when motions are put to the UN which give support to Palestine and Palestinian ambitions.

Maintaining the status quo suits Israel for time allows the continual building of 'facts on the ground'. Israel will only admit that unsanctioned outposts are illegal. All settlements are illegal under international law. It is illegal to