



U.S. POLICY AND THE PALESTINIANS: BOUND BY A FRAME OF REFERENCE

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From the era of Woodrow Wilson, when the United States committed itself to support the Zionist program in Palestine, American public opinion on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been formed and policy has been made from a restricted, generally Israel-centered vantage point. This frame of reference has excluded the Palestinian perspective and, in the struggle for Palestine that culminated in the Palestinians' dispossession in 1948, has made it impossible for U.S. policymakers to take this seminal episode into account in shaping Middle East policy.

THE LATE SCHOLAR MALCOLM KERR, COMMENTING IN A 1980 MONOGRAPH ON THE body of assumptions and misconceptions in the United States that surround the Arab-Israeli conflict, maintained that these assumptions were so seldom challenged that serious discourse on the conflict effectively had ceased, even among statesmen and diplomats. As a rule, policymakers try to avoid controversy, Kerr said, and therefore, with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, it has become the natural inclination of the very people inside government whose job it is to know the issues to fall back on the analysis prevailing in Congress, the press, and among the general public.¹ Despite movement toward resolving the conflict, Kerr's observations still are widely applicable.

Two of the elements that Kerr identified as constituting the conventional wisdom relate specifically to the Palestinian-Israeli issue. These include the notions that, first, Palestinian national claims are "artificially and mischievously inspired" and thus may be ignored; and, second, that the only real issue in the conflict is an unreasonable Arab refusal to accept Israel's existence—not a grievance arising from the Palestinians' displacement.² For the half century before the 1993 Palestinian-Israeli agreement, and in large measure since then, the assumption in the United States that the Palestinian position was "mischievously inspired" has constituted what might be called a frame of reference within which the conflict has been contained in public and diplomatic discourse.

It always has been the case that, as Malcolm Kerr noted, the dispossession and dispersal of the Palestinians in 1948 constitute "an unrecognizable episode" even for most informed Americans³—unrecognizable in the sense not

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only that the dispossession has been forgotten but also that it seldom is recognized as the ultimate cause of the conflict. As a result, Palestinian opposition to Israel comes across as unreasoned hatred.

Even policymakers have paid little heed to the Palestinian viewpoint on the conflict. The United States' emotional bond with Israel; the perception that has prevailed to one degree or another throughout every administration since Harry Truman's that Israel is not only emotionally close but strategically important to the United States; a strong and ingrained reluctance among policymakers to challenge the conventional wisdom or upset the status quo; and the militancy and uncompromising nature of the Arab and Palestinian reaction to Israel's creation and the Palestinians' dispossession—all these factors have combined to give Israel overwhelming predominance in U.S. policy considerations and to push any examination of the legitimacy of Palestinian claims to the background.

This article traces how the frame of reference in which the Palestinians have been viewed in the United States evolved from the nineteenth century through Harry Truman's presidency and how it influenced decision making. The three years between Truman's assumption of the presidency in 1945 and Israel's creation in 1948 mark the most critical stage in the development of the American public and policy-making mind-set on the Palestinians and Israel. Most of America literally fell in love with Israel in this period, and the Palestinians dropped into total political obscurity. History, Israeli historian Avi Shlaim has written, is in a very real sense "the propaganda of the victors."⁴ And to the victor in the first Arab-Israeli war belonged not only the actual spoils of war but the very history of it and much that came after.

PALESTINIANS IN THE NINETEENTH- AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY MIND

The frame of reference within which Palestinian-Israeli issues are perceived today in the United States actually began forming not when Israel was created or even when Zionism became a force in Palestine, but in the mid-nineteenth century when Western orientalist historians, geographers, and ethnographers, as well as Western Christian missionaries, religious pilgrims, and ordinary travelers began visiting Palestine and conveying their impressions of the land and its peoples to readers and congregations in Europe and America. Interest in all parts of the Orient, especially the Middle East and most especially Palestine, flourished in this era. Travel writers and missionaries had the greatest impact on American audiences. Their books describing every aspect of the biblical history, the terrain, even the flora and fauna of the Holy Land, were long-running best-sellers.⁵ Satirist Mark Twain familiarized thousands with his biting critical version of Palestine and its Arabs when his popular travelogue, *The Innocents Abroad*, was published in 1869. Missionaries impressed their views on a generation of American young people in Sunday school lectures throughout the country.⁶

The image of the Arabs of Palestine conveyed by these scholars and adventurers was almost without exception derogatory, for Arabs and Muslims did not fit in the Holy Land of the Western imagination. The long legacy of deep enmity between Western Christianity and Islam built up since the rise of Islam and particularly since the Crusades still stood in the nineteenth century as a barrier to understanding or sympathy between the West and Palestine's Arabs. That Palestine lay in the hands of infidel Muslims horrified many Americans. Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, no doubt typical of many men of his social class, recalled in a speech on the Senate floor in 1922 that as a boy in the nineteenth century he had come away from reading Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* with an admiration for the Crusaders and a strong "hostility to the Mohammadan."⁷ Although Americans probably did not have a clearly defined perception of Arabs, everything they were exposed to in books and Sunday school classes gave them at least a vague sense of Arabs as distasteful. Arabs in general were viewed as "wild, cruel, savages or robbers,"⁸ and many of the exotic stereotypes of the Orient that mark the image of the Arab today—the lascivious pasha, the harem girl, the devious merchant—arose in this period.⁹ Palestinian intellectual Edward Said notes in his classic *Orientalism* that orientalism distilled certain ideas about the Orient—"its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and unchallenged coherence," so that the mere mention of the word "Oriental" came instantly to convey an impression needing no elaboration.¹⁰

Because the Holy Land had special significance for Western Christians, Palestinians were represented, uniquely among Oriental peoples, as aliens in their own land. If they were not vilified directly, they often were ignored altogether by those who traveled to Palestine attempting to "reclaim" it for Christianity or Judaism and "restore" it to their preconceptions of its biblical state. Sometimes they were romanticized in illustrated religious books and postcards as quaint evidence of Palestine's biblical aspect—something that made them appear to be mere props, a bit unreal, and above all very different from the American audiences at whom these portrayals were directed.¹¹

The assumption that the *real* Palestine was not Muslim or Arab but Christian and/or Jewish constituted a symbolic dispossession of the Palestinians and gained hold of the Western imagination well before the first Zionist settlers ever conceived of migrating to Palestine in the 1880s. The assumption fit perfectly with the prevailing colonialist notion that backward non-Western lands everywhere lay ready for the taking by more capable Western peoples, as well as with the notion soon promoted by Zionist intellectuals that Palestine was a "land without people for a people without land." By contrast, the Palestinians, having no sense of what was about to befall them, lacked any awareness that they should defend their place in Palestine or intellectualize their right to remain there. Whereas Zionists expressed a very conscious love of the land precisely because they did not possess it, the Arabs of

Palestine as possessors felt no need at this point to give expression to their attachment to the land.¹²

To the extent, then, that early twentieth-century policymakers in the United States thought about the Palestine situation at all, it was within a frame of reference in which Palestine stood forth as a biblical land destined for reclamation by Christians and Jews and in which the native Arab inhabitants were unimportant. For the first United States president who took a policy stance on the Palestine issue, Woodrow Wilson—a man steeped in the biblical history of Christians and Jews in the Holy Land—the notion of a Jewish return to Palestine seemed a fulfillment of biblical prophecies.

Notwithstanding his concept of self-determination, Wilson actually did not care deeply about the political fate of Palestine. His endorsement of Britain's 1917 Balfour Declaration promising support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was a gesture made without a great deal of thought; it was the easy choice. The endorsement supported Britain's objectives in World War I, and the gesture showed Wilson to be responsive to his American Zionist friends.¹³ He certainly did not care about the impact of Zionist plans on the Palestinians or know anything about Palestine's Arab and Muslim history. He did receive evidence of Palestinian opposition to the Zionist program when the King-Crane Commission concluded in 1919 that the full Zionist program would be a "gross violation" of the principle of self-determination and should be modified, but the commission's conclusions had no impact on Wilson administration policy.¹⁴

Wilson's friendship with Louis Brandeis, who was the leading American Zionist activist at the time and whom Wilson had appointed to the Supreme Court in 1916, was probably what most heavily influenced his support for Zionism. Wilson endorsed the Balfour Declaration at Zionist request and, having done so, regarded the endorsement as a solemn United States commitment. Using Brandeis as an entrée, world Zionist leaders abroad and prominent American Jews had ready access to Wilson on matters regarding Palestine.¹⁵ There were no significant countervailing influences on Wilson, not even from missionaries in the Arab world.

There is also little evidence in this period of strong resistance to Zionist plans from any level of the U.S. bureaucracy. Despite its later opposition to the Zionist enterprise, the State Department did nothing to counterbalance Wilson's tilt toward Zionism.¹⁶ By the end of Wilson's term in 1920, the frame of reference already had become firmly established. Palestine, which at the time had a Jewish population of less than 10 percent, had begun to be considered a Jewish land. The United States was committed to supporting Zionism, and Wilson's successors in the 1920s were more tied to Zionism than he had been.¹⁷

By the end of Wilson's term, Palestine, with a Jewish population of less than 10 percent, had begun to be considered a Jewish land.

Although still a small minority among U.S. Jews, American Zionists were skilled and well organized even in this early period and were the prime

movers not only in shaping official United States policy on Palestine but in molding the public view. Membership in Zionist organizations ebbed and flowed, ranging from 20,000 before World War I to almost 200,000 during the war and back down to about 18,000 by 1929.¹⁸ But the Zionist groups' strength and organizational skill were at a peak precisely when they needed to be—during the war and immediately after when the United States was making crucial decisions. Zionist activists worked with Congress even at this stage. Several organizations initiated a joint congressional resolution passed in 1922 favoring establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The new young lobby already was strong enough to make support for the resolution an election issue for many congressmen throughout the country.¹⁹

Although the American public at large undoubtedly had no knowledge of the political issues surrounding the Palestine question, that small segment of the population who read the major newspapers learned what they knew about the subject from a Zionist perspective. One study of articles on Palestine in four leading American papers in 1917 shows that coverage was relatively heavy throughout the year.²⁰ The *New York Times* carried an average of two articles a week. Almost all *Times* coverage dealt with Zionism and the situation of Palestine's Jews, and editorial opinion in all four papers consistently favored the Zionist project, condemning rule by Muslims and making heavy use of the Crusader analogy in describing Britain's November 1917 capture of Jerusalem from the "infidels."²¹ Despite considerable overt and latent anti-Semitism in the United States at the time, overwhelming sympathy with Zionism continued in the media throughout the 1920s.²²

Because they reached a broader spectrum of Americans, movies, which came into their own in this decade, undoubtedly had an even greater impact than the written word in shaping the popular image of Arabs. Almost ninety American films were produced during the 1920s in which Arabs figured. Some of the Arabs in these movies were charming rogues or romantic swashbucklers, but most were violent, oversexed, and without honor.²³ The movies, taking up where nineteenth-century travel books left off, capitalized on an American fascination with foreign villains and carried the dark image of Arabs to a much wider audience than print media.

The Zionist activists who tried to influence public and policymaker opinion in this era would have had a relatively easy sell even without their organizational strength, for they were building on a longstanding base of ignorance and even disdain for Arabs. When politics entered the picture, the Palestinians emerged as political ciphers—something strikingly demonstrated by the Balfour Declaration's reference to them as one of the "existing non-Jewish communities" at a time when they made up over 90 percent of Palestine's population. It hardly bears mentioning that no Palestinian lobbyists in this era attempted to counter the sophisticated intercessions of Zionist lobbyists, no bloc of Palestinian voters influenced American politicians, no articles or books juxtaposed favorable images of Palestinians with the in-

creasingly common images of pioneering Zionists in Palestine, and no one ever thought it necessary to take the Arabs seriously.

FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT: LOCKED IN TO A POLICY

Franklin Roosevelt made no major policy decisions on Palestine, but, because he perpetuated what already had become a firmly set frame of reference at a critical time in the history of Palestine, his tenure was pivotal. Elected in 1932, he was in office during the period of vastly increased Jewish immigration to Palestine prompted by Hitler's rise, through the Holocaust, to the beginning of serious discussion of Jewish statehood in Palestine.

Roosevelt was not a religious man but, like many of his contemporaries, he had a knowledge of the Bible, a fascination with biblical lands, and a sense of the appropriateness of a Jewish presence there.²⁴ Roosevelt was not entirely free of anti-Jewish bigotry and has been criticized sharply for doing little to help the Jews during the Holocaust. He was unusual, however, for the degree to which he sought out Jewish colleagues and supporters.²⁵ American Zionist leaders had ready access to him in the 1930s and 1940s and exerted considerable influence, using their access to keep the issue of Palestine always before him.²⁶

Probably the most notable feature of Roosevelt administration policy on Palestine was the widespread ignorance about the complexities of the Palestine situation. Even Zionist leaders were confounded by how little anyone knew about Zionism,²⁷ and it is clear that politicians knew nothing about the Palestinians or their concerns. Because the prevailing assumption was that Palestine would be a Jewish land, Roosevelt had come to believe that, rather than promising support for a Jewish homeland only in some part of Palestine, Britain had "promised Palestine to the Jews" and intended that the country ultimately would have a majority Jewish population.²⁸ He also believed that Arab immigrants to Palestine had "vastly exceeded" Jewish immigrants during the 1920s and 1930s,²⁹ when in fact Arab immigration was minuscule and Jewish immigration was high enough to alter the population balance drastically, reducing the Arab majority from 90 percent in 1920 to 69 percent by 1939.³⁰

Roosevelt's failure to understand this meant that he could not have understood Palestinian fears of being made a minority in their own land. Without any consideration for the justice or injustice of forcibly expelling an entire population, he devoted much thought during World War II to the possibility of accommodating Jewish control of Palestine by transferring the Palestinians elsewhere. Several times over the years, he wondered aloud to political colleagues, Zionists, and the British whether Palestine might be made mostly Jewish by moving a few hundred thousand Arabs to other Arab countries.³¹

Zionist organizations in the United States grew exponentially in this period, their influence spreading from the White House and Congress to the media and increasingly to the general public as the extent of the Holocaust in Europe became known.³² This new Zionist activism produced a far more

widespread impression, among the public and in political circles, that Palestine should be Jewish. Polls after the war generally indicated that fully 80 percent of Americans had heard or read something about the Palestine situation and that as many as half had begun to follow developments there.³³

In contrast to the Zionists' heavy lobbying and grass-roots organizing, the Arabs did little to bring their perspective to American attention. It was 1945 before an Arab Information Office was opened in Washington³⁴ and before any Arab leader argued the Palestinian case at high levels of the U.S. government. Palestinian society was unskilled in the ways of international diplomacy in those days, and any expectation of sophisticated diplomatic or public relations maneuvering from this quarter was completely outside the realm of possibility. But the absence of any clear and organized way to bring themselves to world attention guaranteed that the Palestinians remained outside the frame of reference in which policy on Palestine was formed. Their lack of effective leadership and the absence of credible political institutions at a time when issues of statehood and local self-governance were at the top of the agenda and the Zionists' local leadership was so highly organized reinforced the tendency to overlook the Palestinians as a factor in determining Palestine's political fate. Their heavy dependence on the Arab states for a political voice to the outside world also reinforced the notion, widely promoted by the Zionists, that Palestine was not a distinct political entity and that Palestinians could easily be absorbed elsewhere in the Arab world, leaving the small piece of land that was Palestine to the Jews.

Despite these problems, it is doubtful that a concerted effort by Palestinians to bring their position to American attention could have made a significant difference as World War II ended and the drive for Jewish statehood gathered steam. Everything militated against the Palestinians obtaining a hearing: The frame of reference that assumed a Jewish right to possess Palestine was so deeply rooted that little could have altered it; each succeeding administration took Woodrow Wilson's endorsement of the Balfour Declaration as a solemn and irrevocable pledge that served to justify, if justification were necessary, the inclination to ignore Arab interests; Europe's Jews had suffered horrific persecution and urgently needed a refuge somewhere; the American Zionists who essentially determined what the public and policy-makers thought about Palestine were skilled, well-connected at high levels of the policy-making establishment and the Congress, and representative of a segment of the American population several times the size of the small Arab-American population; even the Arab states, particularly Transjordan, were conspiring to undercut Palestinian nationalist aims. It is difficult to imagine that, against this combination, a more charismatic Palestinian leader or a more clever public relations effort, even if either could have been conjured up, would have had a significant impact.

HARRY TRUMAN: A SENSE OF INEVITABILITY

By giving U.S. support to the partition of Palestine in 1947 and immediately extending diplomatic recognition to the new state of Israel in May 1948,

President Harry Truman presided over the most critical period in the development of a policy-making frame of reference that would be centered almost totally on Israel, to the exclusion of the Palestinians, well into the future.

The views of historians and biographers on what primarily influenced Truman in his decisions on Palestine run the gamut, from the view that he was motivated almost solely by domestic political considerations to the loyalist view that crass politics played no part at all.³⁵ In fact, policy was less coherent, and Truman's role more complex, than can be captured by an easy label. Truman remained concerned throughout the Palestine debate about the possibly harmful impact on U.S. national interests of creating a Jewish state in Palestine, and therefore he did take to heart the strong anti-Zionist advice of several of his cabinet secretaries and much of the government bureaucracy, particularly the State Department. At the same time, Truman was committed emotionally from the day he took office to the humanitarian effort to secure a Jewish haven in Palestine, and, facing an election with an abysmal popularity rating, he was acutely attuned to the importance of accommodating the key Jewish vote. This tended to give the pro-Zionist advice of his own aides, of Congress, and of the pro-Zionist lobby considerable weight. The important element here is that, whatever his openness to both sides of the debate, Truman never had much interest in Arab concerns or a very clear understanding of all the issues involved. Truman was a product of the frame of reference—an intense reader of the Bible³⁶ and a man like others of his generation for whom a Jewish presence in Palestine seemed more fitting than an Arab or Muslim presence.

For Truman, like others of his generation, a Jewish presence in Palestine seemed more fitting than an Arab presence.

Truman inserted the United States into the Palestine debate almost immediately upon taking office in 1945 when, deeply affected by descriptions of the misery of Jews in Europe's displaced persons camps, he recommended to Britain that 100,000 Jews be admitted to Palestine.³⁷ Truman saw this as a humanitarian gesture and apparently believed that he was not delving into political issues—not understanding that, in a country whose political fate depended directly on the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs, admitting 100,000 Jewish immigrants was the height of politics. He attached no importance to the Palestinians' fear of being made a minority. Even years later, he brushed off Palestinian concerns by referring in his memoirs to Arab "rights" in quotation marks,³⁸ and his frame of reference was so centered on the Zionists that he even saw the issue of self-determination as a principle that benefited only the Jews.³⁹

Although he listened throughout the Palestine debate to the anti-Zionist arguments of Secretary of State George Marshall and other State Department officials, particularly Director of Near East Affairs Loy Henderson (who feared that creation of a Jewish state would gravely endanger U.S. interests in the Middle East), Truman's decision making ultimately was influenced di-

rectly by the pro-Zionists in his immediate entourage. Eddie Jacobson, a devout Jew with whom Truman had a decades-long friendship, played a role on a personal level that Truman himself regarded as critical.⁴⁰ In terms of overall influence on the President's thinking, no one had a more profound impact than his pro-Zionist White House advisers: Clark Clifford, a key domestic adviser; David Niles, a holdover from the Roosevelt administration who was Truman's adviser for minority affairs; and Max Lowenthal, a political crony of Truman who acted as Clifford's unofficial legal adviser on Palestine. All three of these men had easy access to Truman throughout the Palestine debate, meeting regularly with him for informal briefings and also communicating by written memoranda.⁴¹ The trio helped shape Truman's thinking, in part by feeding him a steady diet of memoranda designed to play on his emotions and influence his view of Arabs as fanatical and backward.⁴² They enabled Truman to believe, quite sincerely, that in making policy on Palestine he was not bowing to electoral pressure but was doing the right thing.⁴³

Niles and Lowenthal had extensive contacts among Zionist organizations and served as conduits for information going into and out of the White House, passing on to the Zionists most State Department memoranda opposing partition. Jewish Agency officials in Palestine regarded Niles as a contact they could use to influence Truman. Clifford himself often functioned as much like a Zionist activist as a presidential adviser. During the partition debate at the UN, for instance, he exerted pressure on delegates from undecided nations, apparently unbeknownst to Truman. In May 1948, before Truman had decided whether to recognize the soon-to-be-declared state of Israel, Clifford wrote both the Zionists' request for recognition and the president's response, also without Truman's knowledge.⁴⁴ The fact that Clifford could get away with what in other circumstances would be considered a rogue operation, and boast about it later, is an indication of how thoroughly the Zionist-centered frame of reference had taken hold.

Outside the White House, American Zionist organizations played a decisive part between 1945 and 1948 in creating a body of opinion favoring the Zionist program in Palestine and ignoring the reasons for Arab opposition. Effective though it had been in the past, the pro-Zionist lobby truly "came into its own" during the Truman presidency,⁴⁵ growing to one million members who lobbied and won support from national and local politicians, as well as newspaper editors and radio broadcasters, business leaders, labor leaders, writers, and movie stars.⁴⁶ The lobby "set a tone for public discussion," as one popular historian has noted.⁴⁷

By late 1947 when partition was voted at the UN, there was a pervasive sense of inevitability throughout the United States that molded thinking and made it almost impossible for the Arab viewpoint to penetrate. One newspaper editor captured the feeling of inevitability immediately after the partition vote in a private letter expressing his "thrill" over the vote. "Regardless of the relative merits of the Jewish and Arab claims," he wrote, in a remark that

reflects the widespread disregard for Palestinian concerns, "here's something portentous [*sic*] and exhilarating—'manifest destiny,' 'the inevitability of history,' a conflict between the traditional East and the progressive West."⁴⁸

It already had been a part of the conventional wisdom for so long that Jews should and would find a home in Palestine that the question now on all minds was how—no longer whether—this could be accomplished. The Palestinians, for so long ignored as a political factor in their own homeland, now became an obstacle in the way of everyone who wanted the Palestine situation resolved. What was politically possible in the atmosphere prevailing in the United States and throughout the international community by late 1947 no longer had any relation to what the Palestinians believed was fair or logical, and the Palestinians' refusal to compromise helped assure their complete exclusion from the frame of reference.

The press played a considerable part in conveying to both the public and the administration the sense that partition in Palestine and the creation and survival of a Jewish state were inevitable. Although leading commentators did not initially push any particular course of action in the Palestine debate, when the UN Special Committee on Palestine recommended partition in mid-1947, the press treated this as an expression of world public opinion that should be supported because the survival of the UN was so vital, and thus it began to reflect the Zionist position. The *New York Times*, heretofore opposed to establishing any state based on a religious faith, now saw partition as the will of the world and declared its readiness actively to "work for the success of it." The widespread view among correspondents and commentators, well before Israel's creation was announced in May 1948, was that nothing could stop the Zionists.⁴⁹

Press coverage of the Palestine situation was intensive, and completely pro-Israeli—something that itself helped create a mind-set. Every day saw multiple articles on Palestine in each of the leading newspapers,⁵⁰ and after Israel's creation papers featured long articles on its accomplishments in state-building, touting its triumph over adversity and headlining its dreams.⁵¹ Press stories concentrated on the "unbelievable courage and persistence" of the Israelis, the "superhuman effort" going into building the "romantic little state of Israel, created on the basis of determination and a dream."⁵² The picture conveyed in newspapers, books, and radio and television coverage was always of a Palestine minus its Arabs.

It was not long before even the State Department, which had strongly opposed partition and extending diplomatic recognition to Israel, accepted the inevitable. By June 1948, the State Department was putting it about that because the United States officially had recognized Israel, its policy was "postulated upon the continuing existence of the State of Israel." The State Department also made the assumption that the independent Palestinian state called for by the partition resolution never would come into being and that therefore what remained of the Arab parts of Palestine should be given to Transjordan.⁵³ It soon became the official United States position that "Arab

Palestine standing alone could not constitute a viable independent state"⁵⁴—a formulation that was to remain a tenet of policy at least through the Bush administration. The Palestinians had by this time ceased to be part of the official frame of reference in the United States.

United States policy had reached this point by a gradual evolution. Policy was neither coherent nor well thought out, but merely a reaction to events as they unfolded. Israel had come into being, and the State Department was merely reacting to that reality. Contrary to the popular view, the State Department had not advocated the position of the Palestinians when it was opposing partition. Indeed, when it came around to accepting Israel, it quickly lost patience with the Arabs for not following suit. One State Department assessment lamented that the Arabs had regarded Jews for so long "as the root of all evil that it is difficult for them to see contributions for good that Jews might make politically, economically, and culturally to [the] welfare of Arabs."⁵⁵ It is a measure of U.S. policymakers' ignorance of Palestinian concerns that few realized the utter futility of asking Palestinians being uprooted from their homes to recognize that they could benefit from Jewish contributions to their political and cultural life.

Policymakers treated the Palestinians simply as refugees—a problem without political context.

The United States did show some concern for the refugees displaced by the 1948 war and for years made desultory and ultimately unsuccessful efforts to induce Israel to accept their repatriation and to devise schemes for their resettlement in the Arab countries. Having assumed early on, however, that the Jewish state would survive as a sovereign nation and that the Palestinian state never would exist, policymakers treated the Palestinians simply as refugees—as a problem, without a political or national context, that had to be gotten around somehow.

In the aftermath of Israel's establishment, the story of the Palestinians' dispossession and dispersal—the story of the origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict—became lost somewhere in the press of U.S. efforts to support the new Israeli state and assure calm and stability in a volatile region highly susceptible to cold war tensions. Whether knowing the origins of the conflict from a Palestinian perspective would have changed U.S. policy significantly is a moot point. At a minimum, however, some deeper understanding of the true source of the Palestinians' grievances might have prevented their total exclusion from the frame of reference that was to guide policy-making for the next several decades. The failure to know anything about the Palestinians except their plight as a mass of refugees made them an abstract concept, on which it was difficult to put a human face.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the Palestine debate and the 1948 war, policymakers did not make policy on Palestine; they laid out policy options, they argued, and in the end they reacted. They reacted to their compassionate impulse to rescue

the Jews, to heavy pressures by Zionist activists inside and outside the government, to a strong public information campaign on behalf of Zionist goals and the public support this campaign generated, to a mind-set that painted Arabs in dark colors, and to the Palestinians' refusal to cooperate with the forced partitioning of their land. What is particularly noteworthy is the ease and speed with which the United States, at all levels of the policy-making community and including the anti-Zionist State Department, accepted the inevitable. No longer a political factor, and never the object of sympathy in the bureaucracy in any case, the Palestinians dropped out of the policy-making picture totally.

Because Israel came out of the Palestine debate as a sovereign state, while the Palestinians came up scattered and lacking any of the attributes of a nation, the Palestinians disappeared from the scene. They were not a part of anyone's strategic considerations or of the policy-making milieu. If policymakers in this era quickly forgot them as a political factor, policymakers for decades into the future rarely knew them to have been a political factor and thus never thought to learn their story, the reason for their grievances, or their perspective on the issue.

It was not until the mid-1970s—after the Palestinians had begun to force themselves on the world's attention by launching a series of international terrorist incidents, by beginning to press their national aspirations, and by hinting at a readiness to compromise their maximalist position and live alongside Israel—that the United States began to speak (albeit tentatively) of the Palestinians in a political context for the first time. In congressional testimony in November 1975, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs Harold Saunders noted that "in many ways" the Palestinian issue was the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict and would have to be taken into account. It would be another fifteen years before a United States secretary of state put aside the strictures of the frame of reference enough actually to speak directly to Palestinians about a political settlement and to include Palestinians in formal peace negotiations. The day has yet to come when policymakers regard the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through a prism that is not largely Israel-centered.

NOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, 8.

3. *Ibid.*, 9.

4. Avi Shlaim, "The Debate About 1948," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27 (August 1995), pp. 287–304.

5. See Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, "Introduction," in *Incidents of Travel in*

Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land, John Lloyd Stephens (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), pp. xxxviii, xl; Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810–1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), pp. 38–39.

6. Michael W. Suleiman, "Palestine and the Palestinians in the Mind of America," in *U.S. Policy on Palestine from Wilson to Clinton*, Michael W. Suleiman, ed. (Nor-

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7. Jack G. Shaheen, "Remembering Both Qana and Oklahoma City Massacres," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 15, no. 2 (July-August 1996), p. 20.
 8. Suleiman, "Palestine," p. 11.
 9. Beshara Doumani, "Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History," *JPS* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1992), p. 8.
 10. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 205.
 11. Sarah Graham-Brown, *Palestinians and Their Society, 1880-1946* (London: Quartet Books, 1980), p. 10; Barbara McKean Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 12-13; Doumani, "Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine," pp. 7-9; Suleiman, "Palestine," pp. 9-14.
 12. Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones*, p. 26.
 13. For a recapitulation of Wilson's views on the Palestine question, see Hisham H. Ahmed, "Roots of Denial: American Stand on Palestinian Self-Determination from the Balfour Declaration to World War Two," in Suleiman, *U.S. Policy*, pp. 27-58.
 14. *Ibid.*, 41-44.
 15. *Ibid.*, 35-36.
 16. Lawrence Davidson, "Press, State Department and Popular Perceptions of Palestinians in the 1920s," unpublished manuscript, 1994. Davidson concluded from a review of State Department memoranda throughout the 1920s that, where they existed, State Department objections to Zionism were low-key and ineffective.
 17. Ahmed, "Roots of Denial," p. 45.
 18. Peter Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), p. 51; Donald Neff, *Fallen Pillars: U.S. Policy towards Palestine and Israel since 1945* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995), p. 18.
 19. Davidson, "Press, State Department and Popular Perceptions."
 20. Lawrence Davidson, "Historical Ignorance and Popular Perception: The Case of U.S. Perceptions of Palestine, 1917," *Middle East Policy* 3, no. 2 (1994), pp. 125-47.
 21. *Ibid.*
 22. Davidson, "Press, State Department and Popular Perceptions."
 23. Laurence Michalek, "The Arab in American Cinema: A Century of Otherness," in *Arab Image in American Film and Television*, a supplement to *Cineaste* 17, no. 1, copublished with the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, no date, pp. 3-9.
 24. Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*, p. 115.
 25. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 102.
 26. See, for instance, Evan M. Wilson, *Decision on Palestine: How the U.S. Came to Recognize Israel* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979), p. 55; Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*, pp. 134, 138-39; Frank E. Manuel, *The Realities of American-Palestine Relations* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1949), p. 312.
 27. Dan Tschirgi, *The Politics of Indecision: Origins and Implications of American Involvement with the Palestine Problem* (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 27.
 28. Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*, p. 134; Tschirgi, *Politics of Indecision*, p. 36. In a memorandum to Secretary of State Cordell Hull complaining about Britain's 1939 White Paper, Roosevelt said he believed that, because the world had understood that the Balfour Declaration looked toward an eventual Jewish majority in Palestine, Britain really could not limit Jewish immigration, as the White Paper proposed to do.
 29. Tschirgi, *Politics of Indecision*, p. 36.
 30. Table 1, "Number of Immigrants Annually by Race. Total Number of Persons Registered as Immigrants," in *A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, Vol. I* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1991), p. 185, shows Jewish immigration for the period 1920 through 1938 totaling 306,049, while Arab immigration in the same period totaled 23,407. For population ratios from 1920 to 1939, see Appendix I, "Population, Immigration, and Land Statistics, 1919-1946," in *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem Until 1948*, Walid Khalidi, ed. (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987), pp. 841-43.

31. See Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*, pp. 138-39; Tschirgi, *Politics of Indecision*, pp. 90-91.
32. Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster Touchstone, 1988), p. 24; Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*, pp. 172-74.
33. Bruce J. Evensen, *Truman, Palestine, and the Press: Shaping Conventional Wisdom at the Beginning of the Cold War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), p. 179.
34. Wilson, *Decision on Palestine*, p. 33.
35. See *Ibid.*, 149, for the first view. For the viewpoint of a defender who gives no credence to the notion that politics were involved at all, see Clark Clifford, with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 25. For other opinions on Truman's motivations, see Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*, p. 294, and Michael J. Cohen, *Truman and Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 27.
36. Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1974), pp. 230-32.
37. Truman, *Memoirs, Vol. II. Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 137, 140.
38. *Ibid.*, 159.
39. *Ibid.*, 133.
40. David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), pp. 599, 608.
41. Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, p. 5; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, pp. 78, 80-81.
42. See, for instance, a Clark Clifford memo in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1948, Vol. 5: The Near East, South Asia, and Africa* (Washington: GPO, 1976), p. 695 (hereinafter *FRUS 1948*). Other examples are cited in Tschirgi, *Politics of Indecision*, p. 184, and Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), p. 316.
43. Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 59.
44. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis*, pp. 321, 329; Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 77; Clifford, *Counsel to the President*, pp. 19-20.
45. Cohen, *Truman and Israel*, p. 59.
46. Wilson, *Decision on Palestine*, p. 17; Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*, p. 207.
47. Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America*, p. 191.
48. Tschirgi, *Politics of Indecision*, p. 299, n. 42.
49. Evensen, *Truman, Palestine, and the Press*, pp. 88-89, 155.
50. For a study of *New York Times* coverage in the seven weeks following the UN partition vote, showing that the *Times* ran an average of over seven articles a day throughout the period, see *Ibid.*, 130.
51. See, for instance, a ten-part series in the *New York Times* in January 1949, followed by a feature article in the *New York Times Magazine* on 13 February 1949. Another series appeared in the *Times Magazine* on 16 October, 20 November, and 18 December 1949, and 19 March 1950.
52. The first quote is from the liberal opinion journal the *Nation*, quoted in Abdelkarim A. Abuelkeshik, "A Portrayal of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Three U.S. Journals of Opinion: 1948-1982" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1985), p. 136. The second is from the *New York Times* (13 March 1949). The third is from the *New York Times* (22 March 1950).
53. *FRUS 1948*, 22 June 1948, pp. 1133-34; and 23 June 1948, pp. 1134-37.
54. *Ibid.*, 15 November 1948, pp. 1595-96.
55. *Ibid.*, 1 July 1948, p. 1184.