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THE HONEST ZIONISTS

In June 1922, Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, issued a White Paper that seemed to suggest the British government shared Ahad Ha-am's interpretation of the meaning of the Balfour Declaration for Jews.

In one part, however, the White Paper added insult to Arab injury. "It is not as has been represented by the Arab delegation that during this war His Majesty's Government gave an undertaking that an independent national government should be at once established in Palestine."¹ That statement was literally true but somewhat disingenuous in all the circumstances. To those with suspicious minds it indicated that when Britain had obtained the League of Nation's endorsement of its Mandate to rule Palestine, the British were intending to stay in Palestine as the rulers for quite some time and by force if necessary.

That aside, Churchill's White Paper was a disappointing document for Zionism. One passage explicitly rubbished a statement Weizmann had made during the Paris Peace Conference. In a reference to it the White Paper said: "Unauthorised statements have been made to the effect that the purpose in view is to create a wholly Jewish Palestine. Phrases have been used such as 'Palestine is to become as Jewish as England is English.' (That was Weizmann's statement). His Majesty's Government regard any such expectation as impracticable and have no such aim in view. Nor have they at any time contemplated... the disappearance or the subordination of the Arabic population, language or culture in Palestine. They would draw attention to the fact that the terms of the (Balfour) Declaration referred to do not contemplate that Palestine as a whole should be converted into a Jewish National Home, but that such a Home should be founded in Palestine."²

In a statement to the House of Commons, Churchill said: "At the same time as this pledge was made to the Zionists, an equally important promise was made to the Arab inhabitants in Palestine—that their civil and religious rights would be effectively safeguarded, and that they should not be turned out to make room for newcomers."³

Churchill also assured a deputation of Arabs that a Jewish national home did "not mean a Jewish government to dominate Arabs." He added, "We cannot tolerate the expropriation of one set of people by another."⁴

The White Paper also said: "It is contemplated that the status of all citizens of Palestine in the eyes of the law shall be Palestinian, and it has never been intended that they or any section of them should possess any other juridical status."⁵

Despite the various assurances to them, the Arabs, all Arabs, remained deeply suspicious of Britain's real intentions. And not without reason. On the subject of Jewish immigration the White Paper said the Jewish community in Palestine should be allowed to grow. There was the caveat that the rate of increase in the numbers of new Jewish immigrants should "not exceed whatever may be the economic capacity of the country at the time to absorb new arrivals."⁶ But that did not allay Arab alarm.

Weizmann also was far from happy. He had confessed to his WZO leadership colleagues that the final wording of the Balfour Declaration represented a "painful recession", this because there was nothing in the final text to so much as hint at the prospect of the Jewish national home being allowed to become, one day, with Britain's blessing, a Jewish state. But because of its commitment to continuing Jewish immigration, the 1922 White Paper was not completely without comfort for the Zionists.

Ahad Ha'am said that Zionism's leaders ought to have told their people that the Balfour Declaration had not opened the way to a Jewish state.

Weizmann's public position was that Zionism's political work was far from finished. He was later to write: "The Balfour Declaration and the San Remo decision were the beginning of a new era in the political struggle, and the Zionist organisation was our instrument of political action."⁷

There were, it is usually said, two streams of Jewish nationalism under the one Zionist banner. One stream, the *mainstream*, was that founded by Herzl and now led by Weizmann.

The other, the so-called *revisionist current*, was that founded and led by Vladimir Jabotinsky, the mentor of Menachem Begin. In the sound-bite terminology of the present day, the mainstream Zionists could have been called the moderates and the revisionist Zionists the extremists.

In reality, and as we shall see in a moment, there was only one thing that made the revisionists different from the mainstream.

From its beginning in 1897 mainstream Zionism had lied about its true purpose and the implications of it for two main reasons.

One was the need to avoid provoking too much Arab hostility too soon. After the Balfour Declaration, Weizmann himself led a campaign to try to dispel Arab suspicion of Zionism's real intentions. He said that Arab fears about being ousted from their present position indicated "either a fundamental misconception of Zionist aims or the malicious activities of our common enemies."⁸ Weizmann even visited Hussein's son Faysal in his camp near Aqaba to give the Arab leader assurance that Zionism was "not working for

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the establishment of a Jewish government in Palestine.”⁹

The other and more important reason for mainstream Zionism’s tactical lie was to do with the need to mislead and deceive Jews, in Western Europe and North America especially, about Zionism’s real intentions.

If from the beginning the Zionists had publicly declared that their real intention was to create a Jewish state in Arab Palestine, they might well have failed to sustain enough momentum in the pre-holocaust period to keep their cause alive. Most if not all the Jews who had taken the Haskala route to security and settled in Western Europe and North America were not remotely interested in the idea of uprooting themselves again and resettling anywhere, not even in Palestine. And most, if they had been aware of Zionism’s true intention and the implications of it, would have said something like the following to themselves: “We Jews, because of our history of persecution, are the very last people on earth who ought to become the persecutors of others. What the political Zionists are proposing is immoral. We want no part of it.”

As we have seen, the relatively few influential Western Jews who were aware of Zionism’s true intention, and who had thought through for themselves the terrifying implication of it, were initially opposed to there being a Balfour Declaration. They, Montagu especially, feared that whatever it might say, and however much their inputs to the final version might limit Zionism’s ambitions, Zionists would still make use of it to give spurious legitimacy to their unstated state enterprise.

When the possibility of a Balfour Declaration became a real one, and while discussions about what it should say went on, Nahum Sokolow led the Zionist campaign to persuade the most influential anti-Zionist Jews that their fears about Zionism’s intentions were misplaced, and that they should drop, or at least remain silent about, their opposition to a Balfour Declaration. Sokolow, who was later to enjoy a spell as President of the WZO, was Weizmann’s closest collaborator in negotiating the Balfour Declaration. He removed or diluted enough of the doubts of troubled Jewish community leaders to guarantee there would be no unmanageable Jewish opposition to the Declaration; and he did it by lying to them. Pretending that political Zionism was the sinned against party, he told his listeners: “It has been said and is still obstinately being repeated by anti-Zionists again and again, that Zionism aims at the creation of an independent Jewish state. But that is wholly fallacious. The Jewish state was never a part of the Zionist programme.”¹⁰

In the closed Jewish circle in which he was operating, Sokolow felt himself free to indicate that he was prepared to make life difficult for anti-Zionist Jewish leaders who sought to block the issuing of a Balfour Declaration. The truth was that no wealthy and influential Jews, not even the most ardent anti-Zionists, wanted to give Sokolow the opportunity to accuse them, falsely but effectively, of being against a British declaration that would approve the development in Palestine of the sort of Jewish community *Ahad Ha-am* envisaged.

When Weizmann got down to writing his own book, he was unable to resist the temptation to hint at how he, Sokolow and other Zionist leaders,

most of them Eastern European in origin, had exploited non-Zionist wealthy Jews of the West in their political and fundraising activities. Weizmann wrote: “Those wealthy Jews who could not wholly divorce themselves from the feeling of responsibility toward their people, but at the same time could not identify themselves with the hopes of the masses, were prepared to give with a sort of left-handed generosity, on condition that their right hand did not know what their left hand was doing. To them the university-to-be in Jerusalem was philanthropy, which did not compromise them; to us it was nationalist renaissance. They would give—with disclaimers; we would accept—with reservations.”¹¹

The train of thought which leads to the conclusion that Zionism would not have generated a sustainable momentum but for the Nazi holocaust has its starting point in a comment Weizmann made some months before the Balfour Declaration. In April 1917, he said: “The Jews could work (in Palestine) for one or two generations under British protection endeavouring to develop the land as far as possible and counting upon a time when a just tribunal would give them the rest of Palestine to which they have an historical claim.”¹²

If that statement reflected Weizmann’s private as well as his public thinking, he was naïve and unrealistic. The implied expectation was that as Jewish immigration continued, and diaspora philanthropy funded the development of more and more Jewish communities, there would come a time when Imperial Britain would do Zionism’s dirty work—by requiring the Palestinians either to submit to Jewish rule or seek a new life elsewhere in the Arab world. Britain, even perfidious Britain, was never going to do that. (Even if doing so had been Balfour’s personal policy preference and an idea with which the British Labour party would flirt).

After the Balfour Declaration and Churchill’s 1922 White Paper it was the so-called revisionist Zionists, the honest Zionists, who supplied what was necessary for the fulfilment of Zionism’s ambition and the execution of the crime it necessitated.

Jabotinsky saw the Balfour Declaration as providing “a corner of Palestine, a canton.” And he asked mainstream Zionism a question: “How can we promise to be satisfied with it?” His own answer was: “We cannot be satisfied... Never... Should we swear to you that we were satisfied, it would be a lie.”¹³

A Russian Jew, born in Odessa in 1880, Vladimir Jabotinsky was the founding father of Israel’s army. In the beginning it was an underground military organisation formed and led initially by Jabotinsky himself—the Haganah. (The official name of the IDF, Israel Defence Forces, is Tzva Haganah le-Yisra’el. In due course the Haganah would give its allegiance to mainstream Zionism in the shape of Ben-Gurion’s in-Palestine Jewish Agency).

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Like Herzl, Jabotinsky first came to prominence as a journalist, a career he embarked upon in 1898 as a foreign correspondent for a number of Odessa newspapers. He reported from Berne in Switzerland and then Rome where he studied law. By 1901 his popularity on account of his writing was such that he was recalled to Odessa to become an editorial writer. And it was back in Russia that he obtained his law degree. With his pen he was more than successful. His published works included a novel, Russian translations of Poe and Dante and, eventually, an autobiography.

Early in World War I Jabotinsky was convinced that the decomposing Ottoman Empire was doomed and that Britain would end up with Palestine. He believed that if Zionism could demonstrate its usefulness to Britain in the fighting against the Turks, Britain would reward Zionism by allowing it to colonise Palestine—to create a Jewish state that would be committed to serving the cause of an expanded British Empire. As Abba Achier, one of Jabotinsky's top men in Palestine put it, the Zionists would assist the British to expand their empire "even further than intended by the British themselves."¹⁴

With another Zionist leader, Joseph Trumpeldor, Jabotinsky petitioned the British government to allow him to form and lead Jewish military units to fight with British army. When the British said "No thanks", Jabotinsky was not put off. He was still determined to demonstrate Zionism's usefulness to the British in action against the Turks. He organised Jewish mule drivers— "the Zion Mule Corps"—to act as ammunition carriers for the British. Later in the war, when Britain did allow the formation of three Jewish battalions, Jabotinsky enlisted and quickly became a lieutenant.

In Hebrew Haganah means defence. When Jabotinsky brought the Haganah into being in 1920, its declared purpose was to defend newly established Zionist settlements. The British army was responsible for that task and Britain-in-Palestine was not prepared to tolerate private armies. The Haganah was outlawed and Jabotinsky was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment with hard labour. But that provoked an outcry and he was quickly reprieved.

Jabotinsky had been developing his own ideas about Zionism for more than two decades. In his analysis the source of Jewish suffering was not merely anti-Semitism but the diaspora (dispersion) itself. The suffering of the Jews could not be relieved until their statelessness was ended. He seems to have assumed that most if not all the Jews in the world would wish to live in a state of their own. The size it had to be in order to accommodate them all or most of them was therefore a major factor in the equation. The Zionist state Jabotinsky favoured was one that would occupy the whole of Palestine on both sides of the river Jordan, with a Jewish army efficient enough to take and keep more Arab land if necessary.

It was Jabotinsky who wrote with brilliant and brutal frankness *The Iron Wall*, the bible of so-called revisionist Zionism and, actually, the main inspirational text for all Jewish nationalists who became Israelis, including those who would not have considered themselves to be revisionists. I am quoting immediately below nine paragraphs from *The Iron Wall* because to

understand Jabotinsky's mindset is to understand how Israel became the arrogant, aggressive and oppressive state it is today (emphasis added):

There can be no discussion of voluntary reconciliation between the Arabs, not now and not in the foreseeable future. All well-meaning people, with the exception of those blind from birth, understood long ago the complete impossibility of arriving at a voluntary agreement with the Arabs of Palestine for **the transformation of Palestine from an Arab country to a country with a Jewish majority.**

Any native people view their country as their national home, of which they will be the complete masters. They will never voluntarily allow a new master. So it is for the Arabs. **Compromisers among us try to convince us that the Arabs are some kind of fools who can be tricked with hidden formulations of our basic goals. I flatly refuse to accept this view of the Palestinian Arabs.**

They have the precise psychology that we have. They look upon Palestine with the same instinctive love and true fervour that any Aztec looked upon his Mexico or any Sioux upon his prairie. Each people will struggle against colonizers until the last spark of hope that they can avoid the dangers of colonization and conquest is extinguished. The Palestinians will struggle in this way until there is hardly a spark of hope.

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It matters not what kind of words we use to explain our colonization. Colonization has its own integral and inescapable meaning understood by every Jew and every Arab. Colonization has only one goal. This is in the nature of things. To change that nature is impossible. It has been necessary to carry on colonization against the will of the Palestinian Arabs and the same condition exists now.

Even an agreement with non-Palestinians (other Arabs) represents the same kind of fantasy. In order for Arab nationalists of Baghdad and Mecca and Damascus to agree to pay so serious a price they would have to refuse

to maintain the Arab character of Palestine.

We cannot give any compensation for Palestine, neither to the Palestinians nor to other Arabs. Therefore, a voluntary agreement is inconceivable. **All colonization, even the most restricted, must continue in defiance of the will of the native population. Therefore, it can continue and develop only under the shield of force which comprises an Iron Wall which the local population can never break through. This is our Arab policy. To formulate it any other way would be hypocrisy.**

Whether through the Balfour Declaration or the Mandate, external force is a necessity for establishing in the country conditions of rule and defence **through which the local population, regardless of what it wishes, will be deprived of the possibility of impeding our colonization, administratively or physically. Force must play its role—with strength and without indulgence.** In this, there are no meaningful differences between our militarists and our vegetarians. One prefers an Iron Wall of Jewish bayonets; the other an Iron Wall of English bayonets.

If you wish to colonize a land in which people are already living, you must provide a garrison for that land, or find some rich man or benefactor who will provide a garrison on your behalf. Or else? Or else, give up your colonization, **for without an armed force which will render physically impossible any attempt to destroy or prevent this colonization, colonization is impossible—not difficult, not dangerous but IMPOSSIBLE! Zionism is a colonizing adventure and therefore it stands or it falls by the question of armed force.** It is important to speak Hebrew but, unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot—or else I am through with playing at colonization.

To the hackneyed reproach that this point of view is unethical, I answer—absolutely untrue. This is our ethic. There is no other ethic. As long as there is the faintest spark of hope for the Arabs to impede us, they will not sell these hopes—not for any sweet words nor for any tasty morsel, because this (the Palestinians) is not a rabble but a people, a living people. And no people makes such enormous concessions on such fateful

questions, except when there is no hope left, until we have removed every opening visible in the Iron Wall.¹⁵

That, a decade before the Nazis came to power in Germany, was the ideology of what was called revisionist Zionism. Its Big Idea was the application of brute force in order to give the Arabs, when they had been dispossessed of their land, no hope of getting it back. There was to be no consideration of what was morally right or wrong. Compromise was entirely ruled out. It was a “them or us” strategy.

To revise means to examine and correct, to make a new, improved version. The use of the noun revisionist as an adjective to describe the honest current of Zionism has (or could have) a particular implication—that Jabotinsky alone was responsible for turning Zionism into a monster that devoured Palestinian land and rights. In theory there is a case for dumping on Jabotinsky all the blame for what Israel became; but, in fact, it would be a case with big holes in it.

As far back as 1895, two years before he convened the first Zionist Congress in Basle, Herzl, the founding father of mainstream Zionism, committed to his diary his own private thoughts on what would have to be done about the Arab natives of Palestine if Zionism was to achieve its objective of creating a Jewish state. He wrote:

We shall have to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries while denying it any employment in our own country... Both the process of expropriation (of Arab land) and the removal of the poor must be carried out discreetly and circumspectly.¹⁶

Over the years Herzl’s original thinking was developed by honest Zionists in Palestine. Joseph Weitz was the head of the Jewish Agency’s Colonisation Department. In 1940 he wrote a secret memorandum headed *A Solution to the (Jewish) Refugee Problem*. It said: “Between ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples together in this country. We shall not achieve our goal if the Arabs are in this country. There is no other way than to transfer the Arabs from here to neighbouring countries—all of them. Not one village, not one tribe, should be left.”¹⁷

The Jewish Agency’s Colonisation Department: “We shall not achieve our goal if the Arabs are in this country... Not one village, not one tribe, should be left.”

By 1976 the fact that there were places in Israel where the Palestinian Arabs were either outnumbering Jews or soon would outnumber Jews was the cause of another secret memorandum. This one, submitted to Prime Minister Rabin, was written by Israel Koenig, the Northern District Commissioner of the Ministry of the Interior, who had called the

Palestinians in the Galilee “a cancer in the state’s body”. In Lilienthal’s account the Koenig Memorandum proposed “to redress the drastic situation by giving the Arabs no more than 20 percent of the available jobs; by changing the selection system to reduce the number of Arab students in the universities and encouraging the channelling of these students into technical

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professions, physical and natural sciences and thus to leave them with less time for dabbling in nationalism—also to make trips for students easier while making the return and employment more difficult, which is to encourage their emigration.” In Ralph Schoenman’s account in *The Hidden History of Zionism*, the Koenig Memorandum included this: “We must use terror, assassination, intimidation, land confiscation and the cutting of all social services to rid the Galilee of its Arab population.”¹⁸

As for Jabotinsky’s Iron Wall policy, there would be no greater advocate of it than Raphael Eytan. The day was coming when, as the IDF’s chief of staff, he would say: “We declare openly that the Arabs have no right to settle on even one centimetre of Eretz Israel... Force is all they do or ever will understand. We shall use the ultimate force until the Palestinians come crawling to us on all fours.”¹⁹ And the day was also coming when, before the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Eytan would say this: “When we have settled the land, all the Arabs will be able to do will be to scurry around like drugged cockroaches in a bottle.”²⁰

The only difference between mainstream and revisionist Zionists, the so-called moderates and extremists, was that the latter were always prepared to do whatever was necessary—in defiance of the moral teachings of Judaism and international law—to advance Zionism’s cause. The former hoped that the dirty work would be done by Britain. The real division was between truly effective and not-so-effective Zionists.

It might be an error to describe Herzl as the founding father of mainstream or so-called moderate Zionism. The truth might be that Herzl was the founder of the Zionist way proclaimed and executed by Jabotinsky and his heirs and successors; and that their revisionism was necessary only because Weizmann as president of the WZO was, as well as being naïve in some respects, ambivalent about actually doing whatever was necessary to bring a Jewish state into existence; ambivalent because, perhaps, the doing of a terrible injustice to the Arabs troubled his conscience.

Sometimes.

When Jabotinsky wrote *The Iron Wall* he was fully aware that it would be years before the Zionists were capable of taking on and beating

the Arabs in battle. Jews were good at bargaining and banking, but fighters they were not. Not yet.

In 1935, on board a ship taking him to America for a visit, Jabotinsky was recognised by a Jewish communist journalist, Robert Gessner. He asked Jabotinsky if he would consent to an interview that would be published in *New Masses*. Jabotinsky agreed with enthusiasm. In the course of the interview he said it was his intention to speak about revisionism very frankly in America. To Gessner and for publication he said: "Revisionism is naïve, brutal and primitive. It is savage.

You go out into the street and pick any man—a Chinaman—and ask him what he wants and he will say 100 percent of everything. That's us. We want a Jewish Empire."²¹

There is a case for saying that, after the Balfour Declaration and before Britain obtained from the League of Nations endorsement of its Mandate for Palestine, President Wilson might have been able to prevent the doing of a terrible injustice to the Palestinians if he had not suffered a stroke.

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Theodore Herzl
Political Zionism's Founding Father



Chaim Weizmann
Political Zionism's Master Diplomat



Ahad Ha-am
*Conscience of Spiritual Zionism,
Scourge of Political Zionism*



David Ben Gurion
*The Zionist's state's founding
father and first Prime Minister*



Arthur Balfour

*British Godfather of the
Zionist State, modern Israel*



Edwin Samuel Montagu

*"Jewish Englishman", British Cabinet
Minister who opposed a state for Jews*



Vladimir Jabotinsky

Founding Father of Zionist militarism



President Woodrow Wilson

*Couldn't stop Britain and Zionism
sewing the seeds of catastrophe*



President Franklin D Roosevelt

Troubled by Zionism and not in favour of a Jewish State



King Ibn Saud

Saudi Arabia founder who warned the US about making enemies of the Arabs



Bernard Mannes Baruch

Jewish American advisor to Presidents with great influence for Zionism



King Abdullah of Jordan

Annexed part of Palestine to prevent Israel taking it