

difficulties, for 5 June 1967 was an obvious date to conclude this story. November 1968, on the other hand, is less satisfactory for drawing an interim balance.

It is generally assumed that a writer on events which happened, so to speak, only yesterday, faces almost insurmountable difficulties. Most of the source material is usually not accessible. Nor is there the necessary distance to view the course of events in a wider perspective. While engaged in research for this book I realized, somewhat to my surprise, that while a great many questions of detail remain unsolved, open to more than one interpretation, there are few, if any, real mysteries. (And these, I fear, are unlikely to be cleared up in the near future.) Most of the answers can be found in newspapers and radio broadcasts; one only has to know where to look, as the late Sir Lewis Namier used to say.

The problem of detachment and objectivity is more intricate. If 'objective' is defined as equidistant from both camps, this book lays no claim to such an approach. The Red Cross is a great blessing to everyone but I doubt whether history could or should be written from the point of view of the Red Cross. The Arab-Israeli conflict is the kind of issue which leaves few people unmoved or uncommitted. Passions may calm down in coming decades, but, basically, this will continue to be a most controversial subject until the current problems have ceased to be live issues. But to realize that there is no 'scientific objectivity' is one thing, to write a partisan history with an untroubled conscience, another. There are certain rules: one is not for instance permitted to suppress evidence however inconvenient it may be. I have tried to the best of my ability to write a truthful history. It could not possibly be objective in the sense of the definition mentioned before. Every writer has his point of view, his sympathies and antipathies which will not necessarily be accepted and shared by others. With all this, I do not think the facts in this book can be seriously disputed.

There is an Arab as well as an Israeli case; I have tried to state this fairly throughout the book. At the same time, it has been necessary from time to time to call a spade a spade. The Arab world is in the throes of a major crisis; beyond the

'military setback' the events of June 1967 have revealed a much deeper malaise. The field of publicity and expression (to quote Cecil Hourani) has been left in the hands of professional demagogues, blackmailers and semi-educated fanatics; it has led the Arab nation 'not merely to disaster, but to the brink of disintegration'. Vital aspects of Arab policy and public opinion remain inexplicable unless they are viewed against the background of this deeper crisis. From the Arab point of view, this is a painful subject; any discussion of it is bound to provoke much emotional heat. A truthful account of Israeli policy during the crisis has to register shade as well as light. It has to record confusion, panic, individual and collective mistakes as well as manifestations of courage and a spirit of sacrifice. The biblical injunction to tell it not in Gath and publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon ought to be ignored by the historian.

The crisis of May/June 1967 can be approached in various ways. There is the popular account which, if successful, gives one the feel of these days; the reader accompanies the milkman (or the postman) on his rounds and relives the drama as witnessed by them – as well as seen through the eyes of generals, politicians, and other public figures. Such books are often of considerable value; the story of the crisis, after all, is not only a series of speeches, cabinet meetings and diplomatic notes. Books of this kind will no doubt be published and have the success they deserve. Something can also be said in favour of the monographs written by political scientists who are more interested in generalizations than in concrete historical situations; the Middle Eastern crisis will provide them with models for their theories. My own interest was in the crisis *per se*. I could think of several theories which are clearly disproved by the events of summer 1967, but of no fresh, revolutionary insight that has emerged. Probably it is just too early to theorize. I have aimed at an anatomy of the crisis that is neither reportage nor a theoretical treatise. It seemed to me the only way to deal with the subject so soon after the event.

Lastly, there is the crucial question, when and where to start. History is a seamless web, the decision to choose a starting point is always arbitrary. A good case could be made to begin on 15

May when the news about the Egyptian troop concentrations reached Jerusalem. But an equally good case could be made in favour of 7 April 1967 (the air battle between Israel and Syria) or the Israeli retaliatory action at Samu, in Jordan, in November 1966. These incidents contributed greatly to the escalation of the conflict. There would, however, have been no Israeli raids but for the activities of the Arab guerrilla units and of the Syrian Government which gave them full support. If so, January 1965 (when the Syrian-based guerrillas began their forays into Israel) or February 1966 (when the new Ba'ath government came to power in Syria) provide logical starting points. On the other hand, it can be persuasively argued that the escalation in 1967 was the direct sequel to the Suez war in 1956 or, indeed, to 1948, the establishment of the Jewish state and the military intervention of the Arab armies. 1948 and 1956 in their turn were merely the culmination of historical processes that had begun long before. It seems to follow that one ought to go back to the beginnings of the Zionist movement and the first stirrings of the Arab national movement. If so, 1882 is the obvious date when the Biluim, fourteen young men and one woman, landed at the port of Yaffa, the beginning of the first *Aliyah*, the first of successive waves of immigration which preceded the establishment of the Jewish state. Equally, it could be the story of the five young men at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut who formed a secret society in 1875; many historians regard this as the cradle of Arab nationalism. The various literary societies in Beirut and Constantinople in 1912 could be the starting point or the Congress of al Fatat in Paris in 1913. These were the most important landmarks in the early history of the Arab national movement. There is a curious and in some ways tragic chronological parallelism: Moses Hess had published *Rome and Jerusalem* some years before the first Arab secret society came into being and Pinsker was then writing *Autoemancipation*. The Biluim were just about to leave for Palestine. In the year of the first Arab meeting in Paris, the eleventh Zionist Congress in Vienna decided to establish a Hebrew university in Jerusalem. No survey of recent events will be complete without a discussion, however brief, of the Jewish and Arab case for Palestine.

Throughout the ages there had been a historical connexion between the Jews in their European dispersion and the country in which their ancestors had once lived. This link played a vital part in their religion, in their prayers ('if I forget thee O Jerusalem') and in their consciousness as a community. Yet the ritual Passover blessing *Le Shana haba be Yerushalayim* – Next Year in Jerusalem – had remained a phrase without much meaning for all but a handful of Jews. For, if their thoughts lingered in the East, to quote their medieval poet, physically they were clearly inhabitants of Europe. As the walls of the ghettos fell, as after the French Revolution Jews received almost equal rights in most of west and central Europe, assimilation made rapid strides. Jews attained important positions in many walks of life, and with each generation the links with tradition became weaker. It seemed only a question of time before the Jews in the West would disappear, absorbed in French, German or British culture and society.

The great majority of Jews in Russia, Poland and Rumania were less fortunate. Cramped in the darkness of the ghettos, they just managed to survive. Latter-day sociologists have discovered redeeming aspects of life in the *shtetl* – the small towns of eastern Europe. They have told us about the warmth and the spontaneity of human relations there; but even if the life of the ghetto was not one of undiluted misery, no one could doubt the intellectual atrophy and moral degradation of the inhabitants. The ghetto Jew was despised by his gentile neighbour; the experience of centuries had taught him that he had to bow in order to survive and the lesson had left him with little self-respect. There were Jewish masses who maintained a biological existence, like ants, Joseph Brenner wrote, but a living Jewish people, in any sociological sense, no longer existed.

During the second half of the nineteenth century a generation of young Jews grew up who realized more fully and felt more acutely the pain and anomaly of Jewish life: wherever Jews lived they were strangers, at best tolerated, more often hated and persecuted. 'For the living, the Jew is a dead man; for the natives an alien and a vagrant; for property holders a beggar; for the poor an exploiter and a millionaire; for patriots a man without a

country; for all classes a hated rival' (Leo Pinsker). Complete assimilation, discarding for good and all the mantle of Jewishness, seemed one way to escape. But assimilation did not work even in western Europe. 'The Germans,' Moses Hess wrote, 'hate the religion of the Jews less than their race—they hate the peculiar faith of the Jews less than their noses.' The forces of light and reason were not as strong as the liberals had thought; the anti-semitic movement made rapid progress even in countries where Jews constituted a small minority. There was no cause to assume that assimilation could ever work in eastern Europe.

The alternative to assimilation was projected in the movement that later became known under the name of Zionism. Most of the precursors of political Zionism were not Jewish traditionalists but men like Herzl who had been estranged from Judaism and were firmly convinced that total assimilation was both desirable and inevitable. Only with considerable reluctance had they come to realize that even the most assimilated of Jews lived in an invisible ghetto in a gentile world. In this world, in which the principle of nationality was coming to play an ever greater part, there was only one road to salvation: the restoration of the Jewish state.

Only in this way, they contended, would it be possible to restore to the Jewish people their elementary human dignity (*aus Judenjungen, junge Juden machen* – to make young Jews out of Jewboys, as Herzl put it). Their own state was necessary, furthermore, if the Jews were to be saved from physical destruction. Unlike the liberal assimilationists, the Zionists were not at all optimistic about the future of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. They were convinced that the anomaly of Jewish existence would produce steadily growing tension and widening persecution.

The first Zionist congress met in Basel in 1898 and the so-called second wave of immigration brought thousands of young east European Jews to Palestine. The first Kibbutzim, the co-operative agricultural settlements, came into being, and Tel Aviv was founded as a suburb of Arab Jaffa. But the Turkish authorities did not favour Jewish immigration and the idea of an auto-

nomous Jewish state was anathema to them. The realization of the Zionist dream became a practical possibility only with the end of the First World War and the breakdown of Ottoman rule. In the Balfour Declaration His Majesty's Government had expressed itself in favour of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, under a mandate held by Britain, which was to be responsible for the country for an indefinite period. The Allies had also promised Palestine to the Arabs, though in a less solemn way. These declarations (like many other pronouncements about war aims) were made while the fighting was still going on; it is not at all certain whether those who made them were aware of their full implications.

From the Zionist point of view the Balfour Declaration was a towering milestone; it was Britain's historical merit to make the development of a Jewish national home possible.

But the enthusiasm of the British authorities rapidly waned. There has been much speculation whether the Balfour Declaration was motivated by genuine sympathy with the fate of the Jews, or was simply a means to help the war effort and to promote British imperial interests in the Near East. Certainly there had been considerable support in Britain as in other European countries and in America, for the national aspirations of the Jews, but there was strong anti-Zionist feeling too, among both Jews and non-Jews. Could the promise be honoured? Britain had emerged from the First World War weaker than before: there was a growing opinion in London that the promise to the Jews had been rashly given and was a nuisance (to put it bluntly) from the point of view of British interests. The Arabs resisted Jewish immigration; there were riots in 1921, again in 1929, and most seriously in 1936-9. British military units had to be stationed in the Holy Land, and public opinion in other Arab countries was becoming more hostile, while Nazi and fascist propaganda fully exploited the British dilemma. Nor did the Jews show much gratitude as the mandatory government began to whittle away at the spirit and the letter of the Balfour Declaration. Immigration was restricted; it was announced that it would soon be prohibited – and this at a time when the rise of Hitler

had made the state of European Jewry more desperate. There were various proposals for a long-term solution, such as the establishment of cantons in Palestine and the partition of the country. But Jewish opinion was divided and the Arabs rejected all these plans without qualification.

With the outbreak of the Second World War disaster overtook the Jewish communities of continental Europe. During the war only a few thousand succeeded in reaching the shores of Palestine, and many of them were turned away. By the time the war ended, the urge to create an independent Jewish state had become overwhelming. Where else would the survivors of the death camps find a shelter but in their own state? And where would the 600,000 Jews of Palestine find security? The British mandatory authorities faced increasing illegal immigration and acts of sabotage inside Palestine. At the same time there was growing political support for a Jewish state throughout Europe and above all in the United States. In 1947, after some more rounds of inconclusive talks between the three parties concerned, Britain informed the United Nations that it was faced with an irreconcilable conflict of principles. The essential principle for the Jews was the creation of a sovereign state: for the Arabs it was implacable resistance to any establishment of Jewish sovereignty in any part of Palestine. The United Nations accepted the challenge and after due inquiries and deliberations passed in November of the same year a resolution in favour of the establishment of a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine. The case for the Jewish state seemed strong, almost incontestable. After a massacre of unprecedented extent and brutality, no one could in good conscience deny the survivors the right to live their own lives in their own country. A world that had been unable to save the Jews from the death camps could hardly force them to remain in a continent that had become the graveyard of a third of the Jewish people. Since the Arabs were irrevocably opposed to any further Jewish immigration and the British were unwilling to impose a solution, what alternative was there but to give their blessing to a small Jewish state?

Like the Balfour Declaration, the United Nations' resolution

of 1947 was little more than a statement of intent. No major power was likely to gain from the establishment of an independent Jewish state. In terms of the *Realpolitik* of the powers it was not a prudent decision; quite a few observers said so at the time. The Arabs were many and the Jews few; the Arabs had oil and their lands were strategically important. There were bound to be second thoughts about the wisdom of the resolution of 1947 – just as British foreign secretaries had come to regret the Balfour Declaration.

And then, of course, there was the Arab case: Palestine had been an Arab country up to the end of the First World War. Soon after it began, the British had given a pledge that the Arabs would gain their independence when it ended. The Jewish community was intruded from the outside by Britain. In the twenties the Zionists had bought up the best Arab lands and had established their settlements and after 1942 the creation of a Jewish state became the main plank of their programme. The Palestinian Arabs were thus being asked to atone for the sins of the Nazis and of the other European peoples who wanted to get rid of the Jews. Was it the Arabs' fault that so many Jews had been killed? Had not Arabs and Jews, up to the rise of political Zionism, lived together in peace and friendship throughout the ages? Hundreds of thousands of Arabs were now expelled from their homes following Zionist invasion and aggression, lost most of their belongings, became refugees; the Jewish refugee problem was solved by creating an Arab refugee problem. The Zionist invaders, moreover, were not satisfied by the areas assigned to them by the United Nations in 1947. The establishment of Israel was thus a crying injustice: if there had to be a Jewish state, why not in Europe or North America? Was it not the collective guilt that the European peoples felt concerning the Jews which made them ignore the fact that morally, and in every other respect, right was on the side of the Arabs in the conflict over Palestine?

Such, in briefest outline, is the Arab case. Palestine was a part of the Turkish dominions when the British took over, then inhabited by about 700,000 people, a mixture of nationalities and religions. Arabs usually overstate the cordiality and good rela-

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tions between the two peoples in periods more recent than the 'Golden Age'. There were notable exceptions, but by and large the Jews were second-class citizens under Islamic rule. The advocates of the Arab case also forget that the concept of a Jewish state gathered so much momentum precisely because the Arab leaders were so unwilling at the time to take up the idea of a bi-national state. If Israel expanded beyond the borders of the 1947 resolution, if the Palestinian Arab state that had been envisaged did not come into being, was it not because the Arab governments had refused to accept the United Nations' decision and had invaded Palestine in 1947? It is one of the ironies of history that but for Arab resistance a Jewish state might never have come into being; or have remained a small strip of land between Tel Aviv and Haifa.

That the Arabs lost the war of 1948 was a misfortune but not a moral argument. There has been traditionally, and still is, much loose thinking on both sides on the Arab-Jewish problem. Zionism more or less ignored the Arab problem for decades – it did not figure in the writings of the early Zionist movement. Later on it was argued that, since the Arabs inhabited such vast territories that had never been cultivated and developed, and since Zionism wanted only a tiny part, was it not in their own interest to make room for a small Jewish state? This was a little naïve; there was no reason to assume that Arab nationalism would ever give up any part of its homeland. But then the history of the Islamic peoples has also been one of conquests. Nations have not usually come into being in accordance with the moral law, but as a result of migrations, invasion, military conquest, and similar acts of violence. This was the way the Israelites originally came into their Promised Land, and, later on, the Arabs. After a while the right of conquest becomes a moral right – sometimes after a few decades, sometimes after a few centuries. The Jewish national movement had the misfortune to be a late-comer among the nations, and what would have passed as the most natural thing in the world in the nineteenth century was to be rejected in the twentieth. It has also been argued that in our day and age only big powers, or countries that have at least big-power support, have the right to annex terri-

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tories. But these are political explanations, not moral arguments. In Palestine there was a clash between the aspirations of Jews and Arabs; on both sides the aspirations were natural and legitimate.