Rival Claims to Palestine Date From Biblical Times
By J. ANTHONY LUKAS
New York Times (1857-Current file); Jun 6, 1967; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2002)
pg. 20

Rival Claims to Palestine Date From Biblical Times

By J. ANTHONY LUKAS

The war in the Middle East is an outgrowth of conflicting claims that go back to Biblical days.

When Abraham was 90 years old, according to the Bible, the Lord appeared to him and said: "I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8).

Abraham had a son named Isaac, to whom the Jews trace their origin. According to the Bible, God confirmed his "everlasting covenant" with Isaac and through his son, Jacob, with every succeeding generation of Jews.

However, Abraham had another son named Ishmael, from whom the Arabs claim their descent. According to the Koran, God promised Ishmael that he and his seed would be dominant.

Today, the descendants of Isaac and the desecendants of Ishmael are fighting for possession of the land of Canaan, which the Arabs call by its Roman name, Palestine, and the Jews call Israel.

Dispute Between Cousins

This tangled, emotion-laden dispute can perhaps best be understood as a rivalry between peoples who once regarded themselves as close cousins, if not as brothers.

According to one historian, there was a time, not so long ago, when there was "no such thing as an Arab-Jewish problem, when relationships between the two peoples were as normal as those between any cousins."

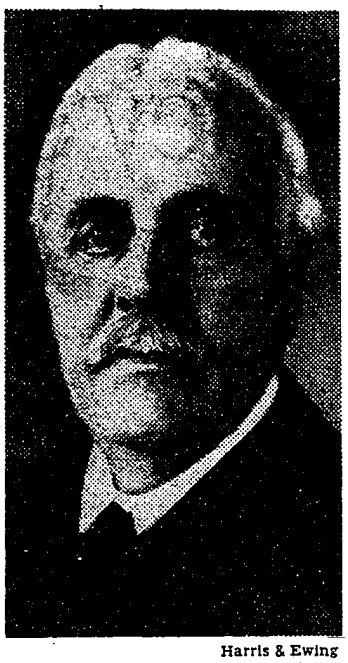
Islam, the religion of the Arabs, drew heavily on the Judaic and Christian faiths. In sharp contrast to the prevailing polytheism of his day, Mohammed insisted on a single omnipotent, omnipresent God. The line of prophetic descent leading to Mohammed included not only Abraham and Ishmael but Adam, Noah, Moses and David.

The destruction of the Biblical states of Israel and Judah by Assyria and Babylonia, in the 8th to 6th centuries B. C., led to the Diaspora, the dispersion of Jews through the Old World.

Jewish communities were reestablished in Jerusalem under the Persians in the 5th century B. C. The Maccabees established a new Jewish state in 141 B. C., but yielded to Roman rule.

Palestine came under Moslem rule in the 7th century. Later the area passed successively to the Fatimid dynasty of Egypt, the Crusaders and the Mamelukes, a military group that ruled Egypt from 1250 to 1517.

The Jewish nationalist movement known as Zionism had its origins in the 19th century in Eastern Europe, where Jews



Harris & Ewing

Lord Balfour, the Foreign Secretary of Britain, after whom the 1917 declaration on Palestine was named.

lived under the weight of periodic Russian pogroms. These Jews felt that the Diaspora was at the base of their miseries.

They believed that by returning to Palestine, and regaining contact with the soil that gave birth to Jewish religion, culture and nationhood, they could regain their sense of dignity.

In 1903, Britain offered the Zionists an autonomous territory in Uganda, then a British territory, but the Zionists turned it down, insisting on Palestine.

As early as the eighteen eighties, under Zionist auspices, Jewish settlers began returning to Palestine, which had come under Ottoman rule in the 16th century.

The Zionists saw their real chance to regain Palestine when the Holy Land became a theater of fighting. Under a British-French agreement of 1916, Britain was to take control of Palestine and Iraq after the war while France took Lebanon and Syria.

Long before the war ended, the Zionists began bringing pressure on Britain to restore Palestine as a Jewish homeland.

Balfour Declaration

The result of these pressures was the 1917 Balfour Declaration, named after the Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, in which the British said they would "view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish People and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this objective."

In an attempt to assuage the Arabs, the declaration said it was "clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

Under British civil rule, established in 1920 under a mandate of the League of Nations, Arab extremist attacks on Jews were often matched by Jewish terrorism.

Tension rose so high that a British Royal Commission in 1937 declared the mandate unworkable and recommended the partition of Palestine into an Arab state, comprising two-thirds of the teritory, a Jewish state. This formula formed the basis of the partition plan adopted ten years later by the United Nations General Assembly. The Arabs refused to recognize the partition.

Israel Wins Independence

As soon as the British mandate ended and the state of Israel was proclaimed in May, 1948, the neighboring Arab states invaded Israel. However, the Israelis turned back the attack and occupied additional areas not allocated to them by the partition. After several abortive truces, the war ended Jan. 7, 1949.

Under armistice agreements, Israel added 2,380 square miles, mostly in the Negev and West Galilee, to the 5,760 square miles assigned to the Jews under the United Nations partition.

The neighboring Arab countries received more than 700,000 Arab refugees driven from their homes in Palestine. Most of them found refuge in Jordan.

The armistice agreements established four mixed armistice commissions, each with representatives of the countries involved and a United Nations chairman. However, the commissions were unable to keep the peace.

Palestinian refugees often stole across the borders at night to take fruit and vegetables from the fields that had once been their own. More serious raids followed. Israel embarked on a policy of reprisals.

An intensification of raids on both sides resulted in the Israeli invasion of Sinai on Oct. 29, 1956.

The invasion was supported by Britain and France, which hoped to use the opportunity to reoccupy the Suez Canal, nationalized by Egypt earlier in 1956.

The Israeli attack, was a success. In seven days the Israelis overran the Sinai Peninsula, routing 35,000 Egyptian troops and killing 3,000 of them.

However, this time Israel was not allowed to retain her conquests. The United Nations General Assembly established a United Nations Emergency Force to supervise a restoration of order and occupy the Gaza strip and Sharm el Sheikh at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba after Israel withdrew her troops in March, 1957.

For the next few years, an uneasy peace, ruptured intermittently by raids and reprisals, prevailed in the Middle East.

Starting in November, Israel began a series of raids that it said were in reprisal for Syrian terrorist activity.

The frst arid, in whch 40 houses were razed n a Jordanian village Nov. 13, brought a strong condemnation from the big powers in the Security Council.

On April 6, Israel conducted another raid, downing six Syrian jets, and during Israeli's Independence Day in early May, officials issued new warnings of reprisals unless Syrian-backed terrorism halted.

The Arabs apparently felt taunted into a public show of military solidarity. President Gamal Abdel Nasser of the United Arab Republic apparently saw in the situation an opportunity to reassert his leadership of the Arab world.

In mid-May, Egyptian troops paraded past the United States Embassy, Arab armies in the United Arab Republic, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait were put on alert, and the United Arab Republic and Syria moved their troops toward the Israeli border. Israel promptly called up reserves.

Moves Thought Routine

Most officials in Western capitals still regarded the moves as routine. What woke them up to the seriousness of the situation was President Nasser's demand on May 17 that the seven-nation United Nations force pull out of the Egyptian side of the 117-mile armistice line it had patrolled for the last 10 years. Israel never allowed the force into Israeli territory.

Secretary General Thant promptly ordered the 3,400 Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Brazilian, Yugoslav, Canadian and Indian troops to end patrols and begin withdrawing.

Then, on May 23, Mr. Nasser reimposed a blockade on shipping through the Gulf of Aqaba to Elath. This is Israel's only port for shipping from the south and east and the main supply route for her vital oil imports.

The United States and other countries sought peaceful means of lifting the blockade. With Britain, Washington was working out a joint declaration by the world's maritime powers contending that the gulf was an international waterway and warning that they were ready to join with others in insuring recognition of the right to free passage.

Efforts on this and other means of reducing tension in the Middle East were continuing when war erupted yesterday morning.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.