

ISRAEL IN US EMPIRE

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1. Glenda Abramson and S. Ilan Troen (eds), 'The Americanization of Israel', *Israel Studies*, 5, 1 (2000).

2. Laurence J. Silberstein, *The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture*, London, Routledge, 1999, p2. My interest here is not with postmodern or postcolonial post-Zionism, for which see Silberstein, Ella Shohat, 'The "Postcolonial" in Translation: Reading Said in Hebrew', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 33, 3 (2004): 55-75; and Nada Matta, 'Postcolonialism, Multiculturalism, and the Israeli Left: A Critique of Post-Zionsim', *Holy Land Studies*, 2, 1 (2003): 85-107.

3. Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2001, pxiii.

4. See Walid Khalidi, 'Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 18, 1 (1988 [1961]): 4-33.

5. Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, London, Croom Helm, 1987; Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987; Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab Israeli Conflict, 1948-51*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988; Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King*

POST-ZIONISM AND COLONIALISM

Any reader of *Israel Studies* recent issue on the 'Americanization of Israel' would be likely to conclude that the most important aspect of US-Israel relations was cultural and religious exchange.¹ American commodification of Israeli consumption is a key focus here, as is the impact of American religious trends on Israeli religious practices. Though politics does feature in the issue, its place is largely restricted to the influence of the US on the Israeli party political system and to the ideological convergence between Christian fundamentalism and the Likud Party. The informing conception of the issue, then, seems to be the endeavour to pinpoint those aspects of Israel that have been Americanised in recent years. Contributors are thus preoccupied with determining how specific American forms and norms have migrated to and been translated into Israeli culture and society.

However valuable such an approach might be in tracing interesting connections between the US and Israel, it is very poorly equipped to tackle a major dimension of American-Israeli relations: US state support for Israeli colonialism. The questions *never* raised include the following: What has American support for Israel actually meant for the Israeli state? Which state capacities have been enhanced and which curtailed as a result of this support (importantly, force or peace)? And what impact has this had on Israeli society and economy at large? To answer such questions would involve specifying the nature of US involvement in Israel-Palestine, spelling out the kinds of policies and objectives the US state has allowed the Israeli state to pursue. It would, in fact, involve raising the spectre of Israel as a colonial and occupying power; and this the various contributors to *Israel Studies* seem unwilling to do. Colonialism and occupation are far from mainstream concerns in the Israeli academy. This may sound strange since these practices have defined the history of Israel since 1967 if not before. Yet it is not so strange if one considers that in this respect the Israeli academy merely reflects the attitudes of wider Israeli society: academic evasion mirrors popular denial and indifference.

One group of academics that has managed to break away from this stifling national consensus has been dubbed 'post-Zionist'. Though by no means a unified or politically homogenous trend, post-Zionism has come to characterise a certain critical engagement with Israeli history and society that has led to a re-examination of Israel's 'founding myths' and ideology. Broadly speaking, it has been defined as follows: 'In a general sense, postzionism is a term applied to a current set of critical positions that problematize Zionist discourse, and the historical narratives and social and cultural representations

that it produced'.² Inherited Zionist versions of Israeli history and society have thus been debunked.

In the field of history, their main contribution has been about the 'causes, character, and course of the Arab-Israeli conflict', where Zionist historiography has been challenged and proven fallacious.³ Based on research conducted in newly-opened Israeli archives, this revisionist history has, for example, clearly documented: that Palestinians were *expelled* in 1948 – as Palestinians themselves have always maintained – rather than being asked to leave by Arab invading armies, as Israeli propaganda has it;⁴ that Arab armies never intended to 'liberate' Palestine, with Jordan colluding with the Zionists to divide it; that Israel consistently shunned peace and settlement of the 'refugee problem' at every opportunity in the early years; and, finally, that Israel has always been the powerful side in the conflict and the party responsible for denying Palestinian rights and national restitution.⁵ The picture that emerges here entirely reverses the conventional orthodoxy about victims and victimisers: Israel is seen as an ongoing perpetrator of a massive injustice against the Palestinians. (Whether it is a 'justified injustice' is a political not a historical question. What is really quite unique about many of the post-Zionist historians (Pappe excluded) is that while they do actually acknowledge what has happened in 1948 they end up justifying it nonetheless in the name of Zionism-as-refugee from anti-Semitism. Edward Said has described this position as 'a profound contradiction, bordering on schizophrenia'.⁶) Edward Said has summed up the collective contribution of this revisionism in the following terms: 'It is certainly true that the great political importance today of the new Israeli historians is that they have confirmed what generations of Palestinians, historians or otherwise, have been saying about what happened to us as a people at the hands of Israel'.⁷ And this judgment also applies to Israel's new critical sociologists.

In the field of sociology, Jewish-Israeli history and society has for the first time been examined without the blinkers of Jewish particularism and Israeli exceptionalism.⁸ A crucial development here has been the analysis of Israel as a colonial-settler state and society, both in foundation and in continuing practice. Dubbed the 'colonization model', this literature 'depicts Israel as a settler-colonial society driven by the needs of territorial acquisition and pressures of the labour market, and it regards the Israeli-Arab conflict as the most crucial determinant in the shaping of Israeli society'.⁹ Spearheaded by Baruch Kimmerling and Gershon Shafir, this research has been deeply preoccupied with both charting the specific features of Jewish colonisation of Palestine and comparing it to other settler-colonies like America and South Africa.¹⁰ Jewish colonisation should thus be understood as 'a late instance of European overseas expansion'.¹¹ Its unique features are the following: Jewish conquest of land and labour; pioneering and settlement; historical-biblical rights as justification; and the construction of what Avishai Ehrlich calls a 'permanent war society'.¹² Shafir, for example, has shown how the failure of capitalist settlement in Palestine led the Jewish Yishuv to construct the

Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988. Nur Masalha (in his *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, Washington, Institute of Palestine Studies, 1992) also participated in this debate.

6. Said, 'New History, Old Ideas', in Ephraim Nimmi (ed), *The Challenge of Post-Zionism*, London, Zed, 2003, pp199-202.

7. Said, op. cit., p201.

8. Baruch Kimmerling, 'Academic History Caught in the Cross-Fire: The Case of Israeli-Jewish Historiography', *History and Memory*, 7, 1 (1995): 41, accessed electronically.

9. Uri Ram, *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology: Theory, Ideology, and Identity*, Albany, University of New York Press, 1995, p6.

10. Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983; and Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996 [1989].

11. Shafir, op. cit., p8.

12. Avishai Ehrlich, 'Israel: Conflict, War and Social Change',

in Colin Creighton and Martin Shaw (eds), *The Sociology of War and Peace*, New York, Sheridan House, 1987, pp121-142.

13. Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998.

14. Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Israeli Citizenship*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002. For an excellent reading of Israeli culture as colonial and exclusionary, see Yerach Gorer, *Zionism: The Limits of Moral Discourse in Israeli Fiction*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

15. This is of course not to mention early Palestinian work on the topic: Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976; and Elia T. Zureik, *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

16. Ram, op. cit., p175.

17. The much neglected Palestinian Marxist Jabra Nicola (1912-1974) was a foundational influence on *Matzpen*. His most important work is 'Theses on the Revolution in the Arab East' (1972, unpublished?).

ideology and practice of Labour Zionism, in which national colonisation was spearheaded by Jewish labour and supported by Jewish capital under the leadership of colonising bureaucratic elites. The nation in Zionism thus emerges from this research as primary and determining. National primacy stifles class conflict, silences dissent and internal democracy, and sidelines social solidarity and egalitarianism, while Zionists conquer and dispossess Palestine.¹³ Israel is therefore seen as a colonial-nationalist state: colonialism is constitutive to state-formation and nation-building, and continues to determine the allocation of power, rights, and privileges in Israel to this day.¹⁴

For the first time in Israeli history, then, colonialism has become a serious topic of academic research and examination. Israeli economy, history, politics, and society can now be analysed and studied using the colonisation paradigm. What is important to note here, however, is that the academy was not the trailblazer on this front. Such analysis existed outside of the academy since at least the early 1960s in Israel.¹⁵ As Uri Ram has noted: 'The agenda of the *Matzpen* (The Israeli Socialist Organization) group exemplifies the emergence of an explicit colonization perspective in Israeli society'.¹⁶ Founded in 1962, *Matzpen* ('Compass', in Hebrew) was an anti-Stalinist, anti-Zionist splinter from the Israeli Communist Party which was particularly close to radical Palestinian activists and communists inside Israel.¹⁷ Collectively, it launched the 'Israel as colonial-settler state' analysis, and continued to develop it in its magazine *Khamsin: Journal of Revolutionary Socialists of the Middle East* published from London, where many of its members ended up as a result of state persecution and repression.¹⁸ A specimen of their most important contributions can be gleaned in 'The Class Nature of Israeli Society', an essay they published in *New Left Review* in 1971. Here exactly the same emphases of the critical sociologists of the 1980s are clearly evident: labour colonisation, class collaborationism in Zionism, and bureaucratic control:

Israeli society is not merely a society of immigrants; it is one of settlers. This society, including its working class, was shaped through a process of colonization ... The permanent conflict between settlers' society and the indigenous, displaced Palestinian Arabs has never stopped and it has shaped the very structure of Israeli sociology, politics, and economics.

In Israel the dominant ideology was never a capitalist one; it was a blend of bourgeois elements combined with dominant themes and ideas typical of the Zionist Labour movement, ideas derived from the socialist movement in Eastern Europe but transformed to express the aims of political Zionism.¹⁹

There is clearly much common ground between 1980s sociologists and 1960s *Matzpen*, and this is an important recognition of *Matzpen*'s critical rigour. There is also, however, one crucial divergence between them: their analysis

of Western influence in the region after the establishment of Israel in 1948. For *Matzpen*, it takes the form of imperialism and is constitutive to the making of Israel and to shaping its role in the region. Israel's policy towards Arabs and Palestinians cannot be understood in its entirety without considering the role and interests of Western powers:

it is clear that Israel's foreign and military policies cannot be deduced from the dynamics of the internal social conflicts alone. The entire Israeli economy is founded on the special political and military role which Zionism, and the settlers' society, fulfil in the Middle East as a whole. If Israel is viewed in isolation from the rest of the Middle East there is no explanation for the fact that 70 per cent of the capital inflow is not intended for economic gain and is not subject to considerations of profitability.²⁰

Imperialist subsidy, then, but for a reason: Israel's role as watchdog of US interests in the region after 1967: '*Israel is a unique case in the Middle East; it is financed by imperialism without being economically exploited by it.* This has always been the case in the past: imperialism used Israel for its political purposes and paid for this by economic support'.²¹ There is no reason at all to conclude from this analysis that everything Israel does is caused by external pressure or foreign interest in order to be able to appreciate the significant connection that *Matzpen* makes between imperialism and Israeli settler-colonialism. This is in fact what is novel about their argument: it combines those specific exogenous and endogenous factors in the analysis of Israeli state objectives and social dynamics. Israel is thus seen as a Zionist-colonial project that is constitutively aligned with Western interests in the region: state structure and colonising project are sustained and consolidated by Western powers while Western objectives are fulfilled and realised. Such a consistent geopolitical configuration has provided Israel with both opportunities (avoid reversing colonial expansion) and constraints (being ready and willing to protect vital Western interests in the region): the wars of 1956 and 1967 constitute important markers in this pattern (as I argue below).

In the shift from the 1960s to the 1980s, then, the 'Western imperialism' part of the 'colonisation model' is dropped and forgotten. As 'Israel as colonial-settler state' develops in the academy, Israel's subsidy and support by US imperialism loses its constitutive value in the analysis of the Israeli polity. In fact, a positive assessment of the US role in the region is introduced in its place.

For post-Zionists, the United States can do no wrong; it is in fact a model to emulate and a country that Israel should aspire to be. While being critical of Israel's foundation and continuing practice, post-Zionists have been exceptionally uncritical of the US. Tom Segev's *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel* is an excellent example in this regard. Segev, an independent historian who played a central role in shattering Israel's

Ernest Mandel dedicated his *Revolutionary Marxism Today*, London, New Left Books, 1979, to him in the following glowing terms: 'Pioneer Arab Marxist & Palestinian Trotskyist, the most impressive internationalist I ever met'.

18. An important film by Eran Torbiner which documents their history was released in 2003: *Matzpen: Anti-Zionist Israelis*. For a sample of their work see Khamsin, *Forbidden Agendas: Intolerance and Defiance in the Middle East*, London, Al Saqi Books, 1984; and Khamsin, *Palestine: Profile of an Occupation*, London, Zed Books, 1989. For a discussion of their contribution, see Silberstein, *op. cit.*, pp84-87.

19. Haim Hanegbi, Moshe Machover, and Akiva Orr, 'The Class Nature of Israeli Society', *New Left Review*, 65 (1971): 3-26.

20. *Ibid.*, p11.

21. *Ibid.*, p7 (italics in original).

22. Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis*, New York, Henry Holt, 1998 [1986] and *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, New York, Henry Holt, 2000 [1991].

‘founding myth’ and documenting its abuse of the Holocaust,²² has been completely blind to the question that US-Israel relations may have had serious negative effects on Israel or have led to the consolidation of state-sponsored colonialism in the Occupied Territories. There is a strong correlation in his work between Americanisation, erosion of old forms of Zionist collectivist values, and the freeing up of the individual from constricting structures. Israel, he argues, is becoming more like the US in political, social, and cultural norms. Israel’s media has been Americanised, as have its protest movements (which he compares to American protest movements of the 1960s, no less), its multiculturalist pluralism, new judicial civil rights activism, and political culture. One particularly crucial connection between the US and Israel that post-Zionists like Segev keep on repeating seems central to their worldview: the US is good for Israel because it pushes Israel to compromise, accommodate to the region, and make peace. Segev puts it thus:

This American [peace] spirit, which produced the Camp David agreements between Israel and Egypt, would later lead people to feel they had had enough of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip [which miraculously continues]. It also produced Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 [not Hizballah resistance]. The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians were all signed under the sponsorship of the United States and due to intense personal involvement of the sitting president [not as a result of the October/Yom Kippur War of 1973, that is, Arab readiness to use force]. All these agreements were made possible, to a large extent, because of the willingness of the American people to finance them. They also reflect Israel’s dependence on the US, and the depth of American penetration of all areas of Israeli life.²³

23. Tom Segev, *Elvis in Jerusalem: Post-Zionism and the Americanization of Israel*, New York, Metropolitan, 2002, p64 (my comments in parentheses).

The portrait Segev draws here is idealist in the extreme: after the 1960s the US has developed a peace culture which it has been busy spreading in the Middle East ever since: no strategic interests, no geopolitical considerations or wars are relevant. In Segev’s world, such material factors seem to have no role to play in the American presence in the Middle East.

For post-Zionists, then, the association between the US and peace is strong and pervasive. Peace with Egypt comes to emblematised US intervention in the region, and breeds a certain ‘political illusion’ in Israel (as well as for the Palestinians, as I argue below) that the US is as interested in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict as it was in exchanging the return of Sinai to Egypt for Egyptian peace with Israel. What is never appreciated here is that Camp David (forcing Israel to reverse its occupation of Sinai, or in other words, to decolonise Sinai) is an exception not the rule, and has come about mainly because of Egypt’s use of massive force in the 1973 war. The post-Zionists thus neglect the unique features of the Egyptian-Israeli peace settlement. They also, significantly, fail to recognise how unjust and totally rejectionist

of Palestinian rights it was. Writing immediately after Camp David, Fayeze Sayegh put it exceptionally well: ‘The Camp David Framework thus bestows *American-Egyptian* “legitimacy” upon the continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian areas in question for years to come’. It allows Israel to maintain and expand settlements in the Occupied Territories, and leaves the Palestinians with no right of self-determination or sovereignty: ‘A fraction of the Palestinian people (under one-third of the whole) may attain a fraction of its rights (not including its inalienable right to self-determination and statehood) in a fraction of its homeland (less than one-fifth of the area of the whole)’.²⁴ No peace here, only more suffering, dispersal, and occupation.

With the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO in 1993, the same correlation between the US and peace emerges again among post-Zionists, even though the actors, powers, and circumstances are totally different here. Shafir and Peled see Oslo as a time of lasting American peace and decolonisation. This structures their reading of the 1990s in Israel: economic liberalisation, they argue, is inseparable from political liberalisation and the ending of the occupation (a word never even mentioned in the Oslo Accords). Uncritically endorsing Bush Sr’s vision of the ‘New World Order’ as a time of peace and prosperity for all, Shafir and Peled contend that ‘[b]oth globalization and decolonization may, then, be viewed as sharing the goal of replacing political mechanisms and forces, identified with the nation and the nation-state, with financial and commercial ties which, on their part, are global forces’.²⁵ The frontier, exclusionary society that Zionism has built is thus on the decline, being slowly replaced by a liberalised nation, both economically and politically. And the Israeli business community plays a leading role in this new ‘neo-liberal peace-and-privatisation bloc’: ‘The liberal economic values of the Israeli business community are naturally more consonant with a liberal conception of citizenship than with the ethno-republican conception of pioneering civic virtue. Thus, these business leaders have been promoting liberal reforms not only in the economy, but also in civil rights, the electoral system, health care, education, mass communications, and other areas of social life’.²⁶ And this puts Israeli business in the position of contributing to ‘emancipating the non-citizen Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories’.²⁷ The symbol of this triple process of economic privatisation, political liberalisation and peace has been captured by Uri Ram: ‘A pamphlet of the Peace Now movement from the Oslo Accord period exposes explicitly the link between peace and prosperity. “From the seed of peace your economic growth will flourish” declares the pamphlet. The pamphlet is decorated with a figure of a flower cut from an American dollar bill. The flower symbolizes locality and life, the dollar globality and wealth’.²⁸ The ‘dollar flower’ accurately captures the post-Zionist position, and comes to obscure the fact that Oslo was neither about decolonisation nor about the ending of conflict, Palestinian sovereignty, or halting the settlement drive. Meron Benvenisti, an ex-Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and contributor to *Haaretz*, recognised this from the beginning. Rather than reading Oslo from a post-national

24. Fayeze A. Sayegh, ‘The Camp David Agreement and the Palestine Problem’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 8, 2 (1979): 3-40.

25. Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, ‘Peace and Profits: The Globalization of Israeli Business and the Peace Process’, in Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled (eds), *The New Israel: Peacemaking and Liberalization*, Boulder, Westview Press, 2000, pp243-264.

26. Yoav Peled and Gershon Shafir, ‘The Roots of Peacemaking: The Dynamics of Citizenship in Israel, 1948-93’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28 (1996): 391-413.

27. *Ibid.*, p409.

28. Uri Ram, ‘“The Promised Land of Business Opportunities”: Liberal Post-Zionism in the Glocal Age’, in Shafir and Peled, *op. cit.*, pp217-240.

29. Meron Benvenisti, 'An Agreement of Surrender', *Haaretz*, 12/05/1994, quoted in Samih K. Farsoun with Christina E. Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1997, p274.

30. Avishai Ehrlich, 'Zionism, Anti-Zionism, Post-Zionism', in Nimmi, op. cit., pp63-97. For Ehrlich's critical analysis of the conjuncture of the New World Order, see 'The Gulf War and the New World Order', in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch (eds), *New World Order? Socialist Register 1992*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1993, pp227-238.

31. For a survey of what the author generously calls the 'post-Zionist decade', see Ilan Pappé, 'The Post-Zionist Discourse in Israel, 1990-2001', *Holy Land Studies*, 1, 1 (2002): 9-35.

32. Segev, op. cit., p161.

33. Shafir and Peled, *Being Israeli*, op. cit., p336.

34. Ehrlich, 'Zionsim', op. cit., pp93-94. See also his 'Palestine, Global Politics, and Israeli Judaism', in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (eds), *Fighting Identities, Socialist Register 2003*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2002, pp51-72.

perspective, he stated unequivocally on reviewing the Accords that: 'one can hardly not recognize that Israeli victory was absolute and Palestinians defeat abject'.²⁹ No dilution of Israeli nationalism here: a total victory versus a total capitulation. One nationalism is up, the other down.

The only political sociologist to contest this post-Zionist association between the US and peace, economic and political liberalisations, is Avishai Ehrlich. Ehrlich has updated and developed the *Matzpen* connection between US imperialism and Israeli colonialism and has argued that post-Zionism is 'a local version of US ideological globalization'.³⁰ He strongly contradicts all the basic premises of this approach: end of conflict, peace of the business class, more democracy and secularism and less Judeocentrism, and diminishing role of nation state. Ehrlich reads a crude reductionism and economism in the post-Zionist account of the 1990s. There is no peace, stability, or liberality under US hegemony, he contends. The conflict will indeed intensify, and this everybody comes to recognise by the time of the outbreak of the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, which comes to mark the end of post-Zionism.³¹ If Segev blames this on 'Palestinian terror',³² Shafir and Peled are here much more cautious and recognise that it is Israeli colonialism that is to blame: 'A clear indication that the colonial drive has not spent itself yet is the doubling of the Israeli settler population in the O[ccupied] T[erritories] since 1993. This was one of the main reasons for the resumption, in September 2000, of the intifada that the Oslo Accords were meant to end'.³³ Ehrlich's important reading thus holds: under US-sponsored peace, Zionism-as-colonialism continues and becomes entrenched, ending both the reigns of Labour and Revisionist Zionisms and transforming Zionism into a political religion: 'Both [versions] have been replaced by religion as the source of political legitimation for the state of Israel and for its continued control and colonization of the whole of Palestine ... political religion is the use of religion to explain the cohesion and uniqueness of the ethos, its history and ethos; it is the use of religion as an argument for the claim to territory and justification of political measures to defend the national project'.³⁴ The hopes of the post-Zionists for a more liberal, less colonialist Israel are thus dashed. They turn out to be based on an illusory analysis of both the US role in the region and its real impact on Israel. It is clear, then, that the categories of US peace and decolonisation have to be conceptually separated and the association between globalisation and political liberalisation broken. US hegemony and market fundamentalism are in fact much more likely to breed religious fundamentalism than liberal values.

My aim in the following is to show why this set of developments is neither unexpected nor surprising. Since 1967, US imperialism and Israeli colonialism have, I argue, worked in tandem in order to produce both Israeli and American *nationalist* outcomes. This is the only reasonable conclusion one can draw from a closer look at US history in the region, which I consider below. By analysing the roots and causes of US support for Israel, its dynamic, limitations, and major consequences, I aim to show how American interests

in the Middle East have become consistent with supporting the Jewish state and defending its colonialist objectives. My argument proceeds as follows: I first determine what those US vital interests in the region have historically been, and how they have evolved over time. I then go on to utilise this structure of ongoing US imperial interests in order to explain the substance of US strategy during and after the Cold War, including our contemporary moment, and show how crucial Israel has been in the realisation of American Empire in the Arab world. Before concluding with a brief description of the contemporary ramifications of US empire in Israel-Palestine specifically, I trace the major impact that Israeli dependency on American support has had on Israeli ideology and society.

This, I hope, will clearly show why I believe it is imperative to extend the critical analytic engagement accorded to Israel by the academic practitioners of the ‘colonisation model’ to US-Israel relations. Post-Zionism has successfully managed to integrate the Arab-Israeli conflict as a constitutive factor in the analysis of Israeli state and society, and this has been its greatest achievement. It is time to extend this theoretical framework to include relations between ‘actually existing US imperialism’ and ‘actually existing Israeli colonialism’ in the period after 1967. US imperialism should, then, come to be seen as an intrinsic factor in the shaping and development of both the Arab-Israeli conflict and the structure of the Israeli polity. Relevant here is a rich and growing tradition of analysis and radical critique exemplified in Israel by *Matzpen* and in the West by Said, Rodinson and Chomsky.³⁵ Utilising this ‘imperialism-colonialism’ paradigm will not only make a more accurate approximation of US-Israel relations and of US interests in the Arab world. It will also actively contribute to opening up a public space for critical reflection and debate on the US in Israel, a country that seems to be the last bastion of uncritical idealism about and identification with US global power. As Segev puts it: ‘The full story of the Americanization of Israel has yet to be told, even though it is central to the country’s history’.³⁶ I hope the following aids this process.

US IMPERIALISM AND ISRAELI SETTLER COLONIALISM

The initial point of analysis of US involvement in the region has to be oil. Nobody has made this point better and for longer than Noam Chomsky: ‘It has been a basic principle of international affairs since World War II that the energy reserves of the Middle East constitute an essential element in the US-dominated global system. American policy towards affairs of the region cannot be understood apart from this fundamental principle’.³⁷ And, more recently: ‘In 1945, State Department officials described Saudi Arabian energy resources as “a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history”; the Gulf region generally was considered “probably the richest economic prize in the field of foreign investment”. Eisenhower later described it as the “most strategically important area of

35. See the foundational works, Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State*, New York, Pathfinder, 1973; Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine*, New York, Vintage, 1992 [1979]; and Noam Chomsky, *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, South End Press, 1999 [1983]. Recent examples include, from international relations: Vassilis K. Fouskas and Bülent Gökay, *The New American Imperialism*, London, Praeger, 2005; and Naseer H. Aruri, *Dishonest Broker: The U.S. Role in Israel and Palestine*, Cambridge, South End Press, 2003; from urban studies: Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004; from politics: Retort, *Afflicted Powers*, London, Verso, 2005. On Oslo and colonialism, see Tanya Reinhart’s excellent *Israel/Palestine: How to End the War of 1948*, New York, Seven Stories Press, 2002, and Marwan Bishara, *Palestine/Israel: Peace or Apartheid*, London, Zed, 2002.

36. Segev, *Elvis in Jerusalem*, op. cit., p49.

37. Noam Chomsky, *Towards A New Cold War: U.S. Foreign Policy from Vietnam to Reagan*, New York, The New Press, 2003 [1982], p342.

38. Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 2003, p150.

39. Gilbert Achcar, *Eastern Cauldron: Islam, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq in a Marxist Mirror*, New York, Monthly Review Press, p36. See also Irene L. Gendzier, *Notes from the Minefield: United States Intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, 1945-1958*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1999; and Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power*, New York, Free Press, 1992.

40. Samuel W. Lewis, 'The United States and Israel: Evolution of an Unwritten Alliance', *The Middle East Journal*, 53, 3 (1999): 364, p365, p366 [accessed electronically].

41. Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest: A Critical Examination*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986, p126.

42. Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, op. cit., p309-310.

the world”'.³⁸ Gilbert Achcar has been equally forceful in making this claim, and in arguing for the decisive role that the Open Door policy over oil plays in US imperial grand strategy: 'George W. Bush's administration, like his father's administration that waged the first US war against Iraq, is as tightly linked to the oil industry as any administration in history. At the risk of annoying those who react to any explanation of US foreign policy in terms of economic interests, and oil interests in particular, with cries of "reductionism," the oil lobby has traditionally played a key role in formulating US foreign policy, at the very least since the Second World War'.³⁹ The Cold War and post-Cold War confrontation with enemies (the USSR, Arab independence and fundamentalist movements, Iraq after 1991, and Bin Laden), and US relations with allies (Europe, Japan, Israel), cannot be understood outside of this fact: control of oil is a decisive instrument of global policy.

'Regional stability' thus means a Middle East amenable to US primacy. During the Cold War, Arab regimes had to be kept away from the USSR (to prevent it from gaining a strategic presence in the region) and their independent political and economic initiatives had to be stifled, if not destroyed. 'Moderate' Arabs are subordinate Arabs, 'extremists' are independent ones who go against US interests. Nasser became an extremist in the eyes of Washington: after 1956 he became an international symbol of Third World independence and Pan-Arabism. His Arab national project had therefore to be rolled back because it threatened US dominance in the region. Mired in Vietnam, the US wasn't able to do this itself: Israel was brought in from the cold to perform this function. After having been forced by Eisenhower to return Gaza and Sinai in 1956, Israel was given the green light to attack; but this time to serve US not British and French interests. As former American Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis has argued, the American relationship with Israel changed from being 'quite cool and distant', as a result of 'an acute sensitivity to America's strategic interests, clearly identified with Saudi Arabia and its oil reserves', to a strategic alliance in the period after 1967.⁴⁰ Cheryl A. Rubenberg has also emphasised this change in policy, and has described it in the following terms: 'The most important outcome of the June War was that for the majority in the policymaking elite, Israel's spectacular military performance validated the thesis that Israel could function as a strategic-asset to the United States in the Middle East ... The belief about Israel's strategic utility was expressed in US policy through the provision of virtually unlimited quantities of economic assistance and military equipment, a de facto alliance between Washington and Israel, and in American support for virtually every Israeli foreign policy objective'.⁴¹ Israel thus became a tool of regional stability for the US: 'In the context of the Nixon Doctrine, Israel assumed the role of preserving a regional balance of power favourable to American interests. This meant, above all, curbing Arab radicalism and checking Soviet expansionism in the Middle East. Israel's local interest in keeping the Arabs in their place neatly converged with the Nixon administration's interest in expelling the Soviets from the Middle East'.⁴²

Nasser and Egyptian Pan-Arab nationalism were not the only victims of the US-Israel convergence of interests. The period when this alliance was cemented was also the period of the rise of Palestinian nationalism. The battle of al-Karamah in which both Palestinian and Jordanian troops defeated an Israeli offensive in 1968 propelled the Palestinians onto the historical stage. Palestinians became the inheritors of radical nationalism: al-Karamah (dignity, in Arabic) turned the PLO into a mass organisation. Calling for the liberation of Palestine from Zionist colonialism (backed by US imperialism), the PLO, like Nasser, had to be crushed as well. This came to be called 'Black September'. Here again the US-Israel alliance proved essential. Nixon and Kissinger interpreted the Jordanian civil war with the Palestinian guerrillas as a global superpower confrontation, not just a local or regional conflict and put the US fleet in the Mediterranean on high alert.⁴³ Israel backed the Jordanian monarchy against the PLO and mobilised its army to protect it from a Syrian tank invasion (which failed as a result). The Iraqi contingent in eastern Jordan failed to come to the assistance of the Palestinians. Nasser was equally constrained: having accepted the Rogers Plan, which called for the return of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, Nasser was ready to sacrifice his anti-imperialist stance for the return of Egyptian lands. The Saudis also stood with King Hussein. The Soviet Union itself, in actual fact, had no desire to de-stabilise the state system in the region. Even Arafat himself preferred a policy of non-interference with the Arab regimes and wanted to focus on liberating Palestine instead. Unlike the more radical Popular and Democratic Fronts, Fatah has always believed that Palestine will deliver Arab unity, not Arab unity Palestine: or in other words Palestinians should not actively seek to become social revolutionaries in the Arab world. Fatah's position became difficult to sustain when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was hijacking planes and exploding them in Jordanian airports: Jordanian sovereignty was clearly challenged. Palestinians had, therefore, to pay the price of their radicalism: all forces converged against them. At its moment of inception, then, the Palestinian revolution was defeated by its Arab enemies and their imperialist allies. Achcar describes it in the following terms:

The year 1970 in any case saw Arab nationalism finished off politically, so that the 1967 attack attained its political objectives with a three-year lag. This required crushing the other most advanced, most spectacular spearhead of the radicalization of the popular movement, which had temporarily counter-balanced the military victory of the US-Israel alliance. In September 1970 ('Black September') the Jordanian army drowned in blood the alternative, quasi-state power that the bloc of Palestinian armed organizations had built ... Thus 1970 was the year of the final rout of radical Arab nationalism.⁴⁴

1970 sounded the death knell of revolutionary transformation in the

43. Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, New York, Summit Books, 1983, pp234-249.

44. Achcar, op. cit., p22.

Middle East. Jean Genet, who was then with the guerrillas in Jordan, clearly understood what he was witnessing: 'I'd already been told the Palestinian Revolution might be summed up in the apocryphal phrase, "to have been dangerous for a thousandth of a second"'.⁴⁵

45. Jean Genet, *Prisoner of Love*, New York, New York Review of Books, 2003 [1986], p275.

The events of 1970 in Jordan should be regarded as the most illuminating in the history of the post-1967 period. The interests of global and local actors become clearly visible, and the alliance between US imperialism, Israel, and Arab reaction against revolutionary nationalism in the region was dramatically played out here. The Arab elites, it transpires, feared Arab radicalism much more than they feared the existence of Israel: the seeming contradiction between US oil interests and supporting Israel turned out to be *no contradiction at all*. Both were objectively (if not subjectively) allied and worked towards the same outcome: anti-Arab independence and democracy, and pro-Arab authoritarianism and dependence on the US. The Arab elite understood this fundamental lesson well. The Egyptian *infatih* policy (economic and political openness) and shift towards the West was a clear indication of that. It took the 1973 war to convince the US of Sadat's clear objectives: peace in return for Egyptian territory, while abandoning Palestinian and Arab rights and becoming a US client regime.⁴⁶ As Samir Amin concluded, after surveying these developments in his *The Arab Nation*: 'the Arab bourgeoisie got what it was after: Washington was forced to take it seriously'.⁴⁷

46. See Chomsky's *Fateful Triangle*, op. cit., pp. 64-75, for a review of these events. US-Israel's rejection of diplomacy for force is also emphasized in Chomsky's *Hegemony or Survival*, op. cit., pp166-167.

47. Samir Amin, *The Arab Nation*, London, Zed Books, 1978, p72.

Sadat's success in retrieving Egyptian territory by aligning with the US in the region bred what can be described as a 'political illusion' within the Palestinian camp, which would ultimately lead to Oslo. The belief was the following: national rights could only be retrieved by becoming politically 'moderate' and gaining American acceptance. If Sadat could do it, why couldn't Arafat? This logic came to justify future Palestinian capitulation, which was only fully realised in Oslo (it needed the second crushing of the PLO in Beirut in 1982, the *Intifada*, and the alienation and weakness of the PLO after the Gulf War to create the material conditions for its actualisation). But this dangerous assumption neglected the fact that there was an important difference between Egypt and the Palestinians: strategic significance. Egypt was arguably the most important state in the Arab world (in terms of size, position, and capacity) while Palestinians were the weakest and most powerless group in the region: dispossessed, stateless, and fragmented. Arafat had very little to offer the US (other than recognising Israel), while Sadat could offer them peace with Israel and legitimisation of the status quo. The only way that Palestinians could be strategically significant was by actively threatening US-Israel domination. And that required getting organised and mobilised and gaining Arab mass support. In practice, this meant the following: lacking the objective capacity to achieve their national rights themselves, the Palestinians needed the support and capacities of the Arab masses. To achieve their liberation, Palestinians had to mobilise Arabs behind their struggle and

assume the position of progressives and radical nationalists in the Arab world. In short, they needed to become what they actually claimed they were: revolutionaries. As Amin put it: ‘the liberation struggle can only succeed if it is also a social revolution’.⁴⁸

48. Ibid., p67.

If anything, 1970 showed how difficult it would be for the Palestinians to get their national rights with effectively the whole world against them. How to overcome this impediment was a brief topic of debate within the PLO. Its outcome, however, never led to the desired structural-organisational changes that would empower a mass movement: bureaucracy and opportunism won out. There was to be no ‘revolution within the revolution’ as Palestinian radicals (like Husam Khatib) wanted.⁴⁹ In his powerful critique of Palestinian nationalism, Marxist philosopher Sadiq Jalal al-Azm blamed the PLO’s defeat in 1970 on its lack of ideological preparedness for the role Palestinians were in a position to assume in the Arab world: that of social revolutionaries. For al-Azm, the PLO ironically ended up replicating exactly the same mistakes of its Arab petty-bourgeois counterparts (like Nasser). Palestinians repeated rather than transformed Arab nationalist defeats: 1970 was like 1967.⁵⁰ And like their Arab counterparts, the Palestinian elite ultimately ended up dependent on the US for security, support, and patronage.

49. Husam al-Khatib, member of Fatah executive committee, wrote the most important radical critique of the Palestinian Revolution *On the Palestinian Revolutionary Experience* [fi il-tajriba al-thawria al-falastinia], Damascus: Manshurat Wizarat il-Thaqafa, 1973.

What this tells us about the Israeli role in the region is quite clear. Israeli interventions have ended up pushing the whole geopolitical alignment of the Arab elite into the American sphere. And that has been an enormous and sustained effort. Control of oil in and of itself could not have achieved it: the US needed an activist warring state to help it perform this task. For this service, Israel has been substantially rewarded. Since 1967, the US has been Israel’s single-most important strategic ally, supporting it diplomatically, politically and economically, and allowing it to continue to expand and colonise the West Bank and Gaza Strip, go unpunished for its countless violations of international law, including its invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (which cost 20,000 mostly civilian lives), its occupation until 2000 of a long stretch of Lebanese land (which it called its ‘security zone’), and its occupation and annexation of East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights. Without US support, none of this would have been possible. Israel’s expansion would have been rolled back, as it had been in 1956. Operating within the parameters and imperatives of US empire has freed Israel from conforming to the international consensus which all the world shares, bar the US (with the momentary exception of the Rogers Plan of 1970, which was sabotaged by Nixon-Kissinger): a two-state solution based on full withdrawal to the 1967 borders, the dismantling of settlements, and the creation of a Palestinian state. To complete its mission of colonising Palestine, Zionists had therefore to fulfil Theodor Herzl’s racist prophecy in *The Jewish State*: ‘form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism’.⁵¹ To expand, Israel has had to subordinate itself to US imperial imperatives and become dependent on the US (which at times generates Israeli public resentment at the extent of US control). Samuel W. Lewis has described this process well:

50. Sadek Jalal al-Azm, *Critical Study of Palestinian Resistance Thought* [dirasa naqdiya li-fiker al-muqawama al-falastinia], Beirut, Dirasat il-Awda, 1973.

51. Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, New York, Dover Publications, 1988 [1896], p96.

The 1950s and early 1960s fostered an illusion that Israel could be truly independent economically and politically, even surrounded by a sea of hostile Arab states. The 1973 War badly eroded that confidence. Since then, Israelis have come to understand that adequate modern weapons are too expensive for a small state to obtain without close allies and economic support from abroad. Their level of frustration has grown as has their realization of their inevitable dependency on Washington. That frustration periodically produces the tendency to lash out against the very American leaders whose continued support is most needed.⁵²

52. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p376.

Such moments aside (the most recent being Sharon's accusation that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Israel was being abandoned by the US in the same way that Czechoslovakia was abandoned by the allies in 1938), Israel has indeed understood that there is no occupation, no expansion, and no rejection of Palestinian national rights without US support. As long as this agenda continues to be the dominant one in Israel, its reliance on the US will continue. Chomsky describes this bind thus:

There can be little doubt that from shortly after the 1967 conquest, Israel has been moving in the directions indicated earlier: international isolation apart from pariah states, dependence on the US with the concomitant pressure to serve US interests, militarization of society, the rise of religious-chauvinist fanaticism, the internal 'feed-back' from the policies of oppression and domination, an increasing sense of the inevitability of permanent conflict and with it, the perceived need to disrupt the region and establish a form of Israeli hegemony under the US aegis.⁵³

53. Chomsky, *Triangle*, *op. cit.*, p462.

The US has thus *allowed*, *encouraged*, and *aided* the continued Israeli colonisation of Palestine. The expansion of 1967 is indeed a continuation of the 1948 logic of occupation and dispossession, which has defined the Zionist movement in Palestine from the beginning. What was novel about 1967 was that it went against the international consensus: Israel was seen as occupier where before it had been seen as victim. To legitimize this state of affairs, expansionism became the dominant doctrine of the Israeli elite. Colonialism was strengthened and consolidated in Israeli politics and society, breeding new political ideologies and practices of occupation and settlement. Nur Masalha has described this process well in his *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*:

The war produced a spectacular territorial expansion. This territorial expansion made messianic religious and ultra-orthodox thinking seem highly credible. The 1967 conquests also made the historical Revisionist maximalist vision highly relevant. All the ingredients of Israel's new right radicalism – militarism, ultra-nationalism, territorial expansionism,

and neo-religiosity – produced political movements, including the new territorial maximalism of the Whole Land of Israel Movement and the fundamentalist settlements movement of Gush Emunim.⁵⁴

54. Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*, London, Pluto Press, 2000, p22.

Occupation, therefore, further fortified Israeli rejection of the Palestinian right of self-determination. Partition (albeit inequitable, leaving Palestinians 22 per cent of their homeland) was actively rejected, bolstered by US rejectionism.

It is also important to emphasise that 1967 both reinforced and transformed existing Israeli ‘national security’ patterns of militarisation. Baruch Kimmerling has shown that Israeli ‘civilian militarism’ has always been dominant in Israel: ‘The situation arises when the civilian leaders and the led both regard the primary military and strategic considerations as being self-evidently the only or the predominant considerations in most societal and political decisions or priority ordering’. The military-political nexus rules over the Palestinians and defines the national objectives (including economic) of the Israeli collectivity. After 1967, this prioritising of national security was modified by the ‘amplification of the ideological-political sphere’ of religious Zionism.⁵⁵ The Greater Israel ideology became wedded to strategic state considerations, and the former was fostered and supported by the latter:

55. Baruch Kimmerling, ‘Patterns of Militarism in Israel’, *European Journal of Sociology*, 34 (1993): 196-223.

thus the new orientation spawned fringe variants that favoured the expulsion of the entire non-Jewish population of the territories either immediately or as a result of a deliberate programme that would create circumstances favourable to such dispersion (for example, war on a local-regional scale). Jewish settlements were established feverishly in regions of the occupied territories densely populated by Palestinians so as to guarantee control over the whole conquered area, and create ‘irreversible’ *fait accompli*.⁵⁶

56. *Ibid.*, pp217-18.

Kimmerling has developed this line of analysis further in his recent *Politicide: Ariel Sharon’s War Against the Palestinians*. Here he argues that occupation has already corrupted Israeli democracy to such an extent that Israel can no longer be considered a liberal democracy: it is now a *Herrenvolk* democracy: ‘This term, coined to describe South Africa under Apartheid [OED dates it back to the Nazis], describes a regime in which one group of its subjects (the citizens) enjoys full rights and another group (the non-citizens) enjoys none. The laws of Israel have become the laws of a master people and the morality that of lords of the land’.⁵⁷

57. Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon’s War Against the Palestinians*, London, Verso, 2003, p39. My comments in parentheses.

Important though this emphasis is to understanding Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories, it ignores the fact that Israel itself has always been defined by its particularist components. Post-1967 is a mere continuation of post-1948, but now in a new environment where decolonisation is a powerful global ideological force (hence the UN response). The questions that Kimmerling never raises are: When was Israeli democracy ever *un-corrupted*

by colonialism? When did Israel treat even its own citizens as equals? The military government of 1948-1966, which only applied to Palestinian citizens of Israel, is clear evidence that Israel has never actually been a liberal democracy: its continuing exclusionary definition as 'Jewish and democratic' is further evidence of that.⁵⁸ In the post-1967 period, then, Zionist exclusivism has merely been extended, revitalised, and projected onto the West Bank and Gaza. For the Israeli elite, 1967 is like 1948: the similarities are more important than the differences.⁵⁹

The dynamic of American Empire/Israeli colonialism is, therefore, circular: US support bolsters Israeli colonialism and occupation, which bolsters Israeli militarisation of state and society, generates new ideological and political justifications, and breeds new religious fanaticisms, leading to further indigenous resistance and to more US interventions in the region. A cycle of violence if ever there was one, ultimately determined by US imperialism. The US thus becomes both a necessary and sufficient condition for Israel's colonial expansionism. Without it, Israel would be a pariah state. Without it, conditions of peaceful coexistence in the region are much more likely. Without it, Israeli militarism and Jewish fundamentalism in Israel would be on the defensive; and the mobilisation of internal domestic forces calling for the abandonment of the 'national security' ethic and the rejection of living by the sword would have a real chance of gaining political ascendancy in Israel. Siding with, serving, depending, and, even subordinating itself to the imperatives of US empire in the region can only reinforce the Arab majority perception that Israel is a hostile presence. Militarised security can be no basis for peace and reconciliation. Real security can only be achieved if Israelis come to be seen as a part of the region and not as an imposition on it: in order for that coexistence to take place, the whole logic of Jewish colonisation needs to be questioned.

Which is exactly what didn't happen in Oslo. On the contrary, Oslo was about further colonisation, further expansion, and further domination and control. The early critics of Oslo (most prominently, Edward Said,⁶⁰ Noam Chomsky, Meron Benvenisti) were proven right: Oslo was a victory for Zionism and a humiliating defeat for Palestinian nationalism. The PLO aborted the *Intifada* (the main reason for Israel's willingness to negotiate), legalised the occupation, and became Israel's colonial enforcer. As Samih K. Farsoun has argued: 'Israel achieved what it set out to do since at least the signing of the Camp David Accords with Egypt in 1978: It won limited functional civil autonomy for the Palestinians of the occupied territories and a legalized tight grip on the land, resources, economy, and security of the areas'.⁶¹ No sovereignty, no national rights, and no end of occupation: the US-sponsored peace process was as rejectionist of Palestinians' right to independence and self-determination as the post-Kissinger foreign policy consensus was.

If Israel consolidated its occupation in Oslo, the US reaped the fruits of its victory over the Soviet Union and consolidated its hold over the Middle East. The New World Order declared by Bush Sr in 1991 set this process in

58. See Ahmad Sa'di's excellent: 'The Peculiarities of Israel's Democracy: Some Theoretical and Practical Implications for Jewish-Arab Relations', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12 (2002): 119-33.

59. See Sternhell, *op. cit.*, pp335-36.

60. Edward W. Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, New York, Vintage, 1996 [1993] and *The End of the Peace Process*, New York, Vintage, 2001 [2000].

61. Farsoun, *op. cit.*, p270.

motion. Iraq had to be tamed and cut back to size, and its invasion of Kuwait provided an excellent excuse for that. The end of the war with Iran had left it with a bloated army, a huge war debt, and resentment against Arab oil regimes and US double-dealing.⁶² Saddam Hussein was perceived as a threat to US global strategy: oil had to be protected and regional stability (that is a pro-US status quo) reaffirmed. The ‘spectacle’ of the Gulf War achieved this when Iraq was bombed back to the pre-industrial era (as one UN report put it). It is doubtful that such a diminution of state capacities, economic and political independence, and military power could ever have been realised without force. Though there was clearly an element of ‘demonstration effect’ for both global and US domestic consumption in the projection of American military might, only war could significantly diminish Iraqi state power, consolidate American military presence, and safeguard the pre-eminence of US political and economic interests in the region. Arab oil regimes were protected, and Israeli military supremacy was assured: Iraq would never be able to pose any sort of threat to either Saudi Arabia or Israel (and, if Bush Sr had had enough support for regime change then, the US wouldn’t have had to wait for what Rice called the ‘opportunity’ of post-9/11 to occupy Iraq). Only war, thus, could have satisfied the material and ideological requirements of US imperialism.

The end of the Cold War generated a peculiar expectation with regard to US policy towards Israel: Israel would become far less important for the US. Because the Gulf War coalition excluded Israel (and included Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt), and because Bush Sr delayed a ten billion dollar loan-guarantee to Israel until it agreed to participate in the Madrid Peace conference, which came on the heels of the Gulf War, Israel’s role in US empire was perceived to have been diminished. The days of the ‘strategic asset’ thesis were over, it was claimed: the US was now freer to create a more balanced foreign policy strategy in line with the international consensus of the impermissibility of acquiring territory by force. The reality was quite different, however: even during the Gulf War crisis the US forcefully rejected Hussein’s (self-interested) *linkage* argument: Iraq would leave Kuwait, Israel would leave the Occupied Territories. No such universal standards were applied: double standards were the order of the day.⁶³ The Madrid conference ended up in near total deadlock. Bush’s ‘peace and justice’ were as elusive as ever. The 1990s would in fact prove to be the most fruitful time in US-Israel relations. The alliance became stronger than ever, intensifying and deepening. It is to Chomsky’s realism that we owe this judgment: the end of the Cold War would only bring tactical modifications not substantial changes in US global strategy. Anti-nationalism and hostility to social radicalism would continue to define its agenda, as he predicted. And this would also apply to Israel, as the following statement from Israeli military strategist Shlomo Gazit clearly shows:

Israel’s main task has not changed at all, and it remains of crucial importance. Its location at the center of the Arab Muslim Middle East

62. Donald Neff, ‘The U.S., Iraq, Israel, and Iran: Backdrop to War’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 20, 4 (1991): pp23-41.

63. Norman Finklestein, ‘Israel and Iraq: A Double Standard’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 20, 2 (1991): 43-56.

64. Quoted in Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New*, New York, South End Press, 2002, p166.

predestines Israel to be a devoted guardian of stability in all the countries surrounding it. Its [role] is to protect the existing regimes: to prevent or halt the processes of radicalization and to block the expansion of fundamentalist religious zealotry.⁶⁴

The New World Order is, then, very much like the old world order: US and Israel fighting common enemies and satisfying mutual elite interests. The only difference lies in the realisation of more amendable conditions of operation. US global primacy has been the main outcome of the Cold War, and after the Gulf War Israel's regional military superiority was again reconfirmed. One other slight variation is relevant here: a new enemy. If Arab nationalism was the enemy of the Cold War period, major factions of Islamic fundamentalism are the enemies of the New World Order (and this is in no way to equate the social content of each ideology). Once a Cold War ally against nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism has turned into a foe. Examples abound. Two main ones will suffice: Mujahideen in Afghanistan (Taliban, Bin Laden and al-Qaida) and radical fundamentalists in the Arab world. In the Palestinian context, the Muslim Brotherhood is an example of the latter. It went from being supported by Israel against nationalist Fatah to mutating into Hamas and becoming the main agent of anti-colonial struggle and Palestinian self-determination in the Occupied Territories. The cost of this shift is mainly paid by local societies: with the fundamentalists, regressive social agendas rule and the sphere of individual liberty (already severely curtailed by Arab secular nationalism) shrinks even more. This is not a problem that worries Israel or the US much, as long as the fundamentalists are suppressed or kept out of office (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc). For US-Israel, the problem with democracy in the Middle East today is the problem of Islamic fundamentalism: most free elections would result in fundamentalists getting into power, as recent victories by Hamas and the United Iraqi Alliance in Iraq (and by the FIS in Algeria before that) show. Denying real democratic sovereignty remains a fundamental premise of US policy. So after the recent elections in Palestine (and the US hope for a Fatah win), the US now demonises and boycotts majority-elected Hamas and seeks to punish and 'starve' Palestinians for their democratic choice (as a recent *NY Times* headline put it). The War on Terrorism is the New World Order unleashed and unbound. It replays the Cold War dynamic, aims to reproduce its oppressive structure, and continues to satisfy longstanding US interests in Middle East: control of oil and rejection of Arab radicalism, which have led to support for colonial Israel. And so it goes.

What this brief analysis of 'imperialism-colonialism' teaches us is clear. The US has been determining major economic and political outcomes in the Middle East since at least 1967, with Israel continuing to play a crucial role in their realisation. In Israel-Palestine, this has meant that force and colonial peace have alternated as main instruments of policy, with the main objective being a constant: Jewish supremacy in Palestine – as much land as

possible, as few Palestinians as possible. The US has exploited this Zionist imperative for its own interests in the region, and has fostered a militarised and fundamentalist Israel in the process. This reality can be gauged in Israel's most recent parliamentary elections. Gideon Levy has put it well: 'An absolute majority of the MKs (Members of Knesset) in the 17th Knesset will hold a position based on a lie; that Israel does not have a partner for peace. An absolute majority of MKs in the next Knesset do not believe in peace, nor do they even want it – just like their voters – and worse than that, don't regard Palestinians as equal human beings. Racism has never had so many supporters. It is the real hit of this election campaign'.⁶⁵ For the Palestinians, the impact of US-Israel has been much worse: collapse of the secular national project and national unity; continuing annexation of lands and resources; enclosure and 'enclavisation'; fragmentation, de-mobilisation, and collective paralysis; and unending death and suffering. If for Levy Israelis are 'One Racist Nation', for Amira Hass Palestinians have become: 'A Nation of Beggars': 'For it is not natural disasters that have transformed the Palestinians into a nation that lives on handouts from the world; it is Israel's accelerating colonialist process'.⁶⁶ This too is an outcome of US-Israel, imperialism-colonialism.

Between colonialism, looming starvation, and *sumud* (steadfastness), hope for *real* change seems remote, if not impossible. And this may yet prove to be imperialism's most catastrophic effect.

65. Gideon Levy, 'One Racist Nation', *Haaretz*, 26 March 2006, <<http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.1?itemNo=698426>>.

66. Amira Hass, 'A Nation of Beggars', *Haaretz*, 1/03/06, <<http://www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.1?itemNo=688642>>.