**Is it fair to say that Israel was a state created as a result of terrorism?**

**Introduction**

IB History Teachers have their own Facebook Group where they discuss their views on issues relating to topics that we teach.

In December 2014, its members debated the answer to the following question:



**Questions / Tasks**

**• What are the essential arguments on both sides?**

**• Whose opinion do you agree with most?**

**• Can you produce a conclusion that you think would be acceptable to all sides?**

**Caolan** Good question. I'm reading 13 Days in September right now which is about Camp David, and according to the author, Bin Laden apparently had read Menachem Begin's memoir to see how a terrorist might become a statesman.

**Robert** Terror partially accounts for why the Brits left. Terror had nothing to do with why Truman supported the majority report against the advice of both the War Department and the State Department.

**Andy** I am tempted to take the question further and state that terror continued afterwards within and outside of Israel to 1) turn Middle Eastern government and societies against their Jewish populations so that refugees would bring workers and actual people to the new state, 2) cause conflicts which would bind a very diverse population together as Zionists/mutual survival, 3) force more Palestinians and others in occupied lands to flee so more lands could be settled by refugees/Zionists. I would be tempted to make that argument, but I will save it for later.

**Michael** If we are talking about the actual creation of Israel, wouldn't you have to say it was European antisemitism and imperialism that were the main factors? Russian Pogroms, the Dreyfus Affair, the Balfour Declaration, and the Holocaust being the key triggers?

**Andy** I blame that idiocy called Nationalism which has led to all manner of evil deeds. But yes, Israel is the temporary product of terrorism. Terror carries a negative connotation these days, but when it is successful and if we like the terrorists, they are transformed into 'freedom fighters'. While I have no idea what 'freedom' really means, it is certainly a fun word to sling around and enthrall people. I am starting to get preachy, so I will take a break.

**Robert** I'll throw my notes into the mix here: "The Arab rebellion had made the British sick of Palestine. World War II had delayed their exit, but during the war they continued to discuss how to rid themselves of the country when the war ended. Terrorism (by groups like the Irgun) and illegal immigration only served to intensify a feeling that had crystalized among many of the British by the end of the 1930’s. After three decades of Zionism in Palestine, there was still no clear timetable for the Jewish state, but no doubt remained that Jewish independence was on the horizon. The social, political, economic, and military foundations of the state-to be were firm; and a profound sense of national unity prevailed. The Zionist dream was about to become a reality. There is therefore no basis for the frequent assertion that the state of Israel was established as a result of the Holocaust. Clearly, the shock, horror, and sense of guilt felt by many generated profound sympathy for the Jews in general and the Zionist movement in particular. That sympathy helped the Zionists advance their diplomatic campaign and their propaganda…" What Israeli historian Tom Segev is arguing is that the Holocaust was not as important in the departure of the British and the eventual creation of the State of Israel as the Arab Rebellion 1936 to 1939, and the efforts of the Yishuv, to help push the British out while simultaneously laying the foundations of a state prior to the Holocaust. He also argues that Jewish political pressure on US politicians would have existed even without the emotional pull of sympathy generated by the Holocaust.

**Michael** Given the situation that developed between 1919 and the British White paper in 1939, what were the other possibilities? Especially with the refugee problem after WWII, what other realistic possibilities were there to statehood? Was the "terrorism" a cause, or simply an inevitable result of the existing situation? You seem to be talking about only the final act. Saying that Israel is a result of terrorism is like saying WWI is a result of the assassination.

**Robert** The Canadian will offer a Canadian solution: a federal state.

**Andy** I disagree Michael. Terror caused a mass exodus of a native population, which of course was the point, of large areas and through its violence prevented effective organization of resistance, whether political or otherwise on the part of native Palestinians who at that time could not comprehend or adapt quickly to this form of warfare that was foreign to their thinking in that period. Robert: I don't understand your comment in the light of the question and it certainly doesn't seem relevant to the fact that we are debating history, not proposing a solution to something.

**Robert** I was answering Michael's question, "what other realistic possibilities were there to statehood?" And I was proposing a solution because that's what teachers do (I hope)! Do we not introduce alternative and possibly more peaceful resolutions to problems?

**Michael** Robert, a federated state was not realistic, probably impossible. Andy, the "terrorism" of the Lehi, Irgun, and even Haganah, all disciples of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, was a result of 1500 years of European antisemitism. This is the reason why Israel came into existence, and the events of 1945-7 were the final, possibly inevitable act.

**Andy** Robert, Alternative histories might be fun, but that isn't history. I certainly don't thin this is something we do as part of our field. Confused here. Maybe it is because it is midnight and I'm tired. I completely disagree Michael that anti-Jewish actions in Europe led to terror against Arabs. Wouldn't anti-Jewish actions in Europe over the centuries lead to Jewish terror groups far earlier? Why did terrorism manifest itself when it did? Not sure why you put terrorism in quotation marks.

**Robert** Opposition to a federal or unitary state came mostly—and understandably—from the Jewish side. But I think their opposition could have been overcome. The Palestinians could have lived within a predominantly Arab state where the Jewish minority was protected. Andy, you'll agree with me in the morning. It's not "alternative history;" it's allowing our students to problem solve. In fact we did it today in class when we looked at the problem of the rise of Nazism and George F. Kennan's argument that Germany's best hope to counter this problem was a cooperative effort between the Social Democrats and the Catholic Centre Party.

**Robert** Andy, according to Israeli historian Benny Morris and in answer to your question to Michael about Jewish terror groups: Compelled by the Dreyfus Affair, Theodor Herzl, a Jewish intellectual from Budapest, became in the 1890’s Zionism’s new leader. Herzl called for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine that would give rise to a “new Jew”—“a wondrous breed of Jews.” The central aspiration of Zionist ideology was the attainment of honour and respect in place of the shame and contempt that were the hallmarks of Jewish life in the Diaspora, especially in the Czarist empire. Respect was to be attained by the refashioning of the Jew into something akin to a gentile—aggressive, assertive, straight-backed. “Muscular Judaism” was seen as both a means and a goal. Jews, with traditionally well-developed “mental muscles” but physically short and weak, were now also to develop their bodies. The theme of the assertive “new” Jew was to reverberate through Zionist literature around the turn of the century, and would affect the behaviour of the colonists who reached the Promised Land.

**Michael** Yes, and the philosophy of Ze'ev Jabotinsky was a result of this. I put terrorism in quotations because focusing on that, and not the previous 1500 hundred years of European Christian persecution that led up to it, is extremely misleading.

**Andy** So basically, as I approach a state of insomnia, we can agree that Israel is the result of terrorism. Thanks to the two of you, Michael and Robert, I am learning lots here!

**Robert** Not entirely. Go back up to my first post.

**Michael** As long as we also agree the terrorism was a result of European Christian antisemitism and persecution, which was the main reason Israel came into existence.

**Jeff**  I think a Jordanian/Palestinian state could have been a possibility, but I don't think the minority Jewish population in such a state would have been happy. I think there was terror involved, on both sides, but I really think of the Zionist endeavor as more of a combination of the ills of Imperialism and Nationalism. The Holocaust didn't help, and helped create more sympathy for the Zionist State, but that was after 60 years of fairly intense colonization efforts. Then we have to add the end of imperialism and the rise of Arabic nationalism into the mix, and suddenly it is quite combustible. Of course, asking for a multi-cultural, multi-national and multi-religious federation might be asking for too much, considering the difficulties that Canada and Yugoslavia have had with it (particularly the latter) and these are from almost exclusive European populations. When I visited Jerusalem it was like going a highly organized European community to the highly chaotic Middle East in no time. It might be too much to ask for these sides to come to understand each other completely. Compare this to Yugoslavia where everyone spoke the same or very similar languages, had remarkably similar cultures and had a shared history of defeating the Nazis.

**Andy** Michael, I don't disagree that Jewish European experience led to Zionism along with the concept of nationalism. I am not convinced that it necessarily led to violence because it seems to me that that violence should have manifested itself in Europe. I am just speculating here, per usual, but I wonder if terror goes hand-in-hand with colonialism/imperialism. We all know that European colonialism was usually coupled, at least initially, with various forms of terror on native populations to either clear them out of the way or to break their resistance. The treatment of Native Americans, Africans generally, etc. Just a theory.

**Michael** Andy, the violence DID begin in Europe. Ze'ev Jabotinsky established the Jewish Self-Defense Organization, a Jewish militant group, in Odessa back in 1903, and later the Jewish Legion in WWI. His militaristic philosophy influenced the new generation of European Jews that led to the post-WWII violence in Palestine. He was the driving force for the Hananah, Irgun, and Lehi (Sternists). I think you fail to understand the cumulative effect 1500 years of persecution had on the Jewish people, ultimately resulting in the Holocaust. Have you not heard the words "Never Again"? By failing to take into account how modern Zionism developed, beginning in 1882 with the Russian pogroms (after a relatively improved period under Czar Alexander II) and Leon Pinsker, through the Dreyfus Affair and Theodor Herzl, you miss the key factors that led to the post-WWII terrorism. The Jews of the Aliyahs were a very select group, and attributing their actions after WWII to the immediate circumstances of that period is a gross over-simplification. You seem to want to support theories about colonialism and terrorism rather than look at the very unique circumstances that led to the creation of Israel..

**Robert** As Morris explains, anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia led to a new "Muscular Judaism," and the formation of Jewish self-defence groups in Russia after the 1903. I don't see evidence of these groups swinging over to the offensive and initiating violence in Russia. The problem was, when the Russian Jews arrived in Palestine, they saw their Russian tormentors in their Arab neighbours and proceeded to treat them as poorly as any typical European colonist treated any typical native. Hence, from the outset, relations between the new arrivals and the locals were poor. This Jewish over-aggression in Palestine in response to historic maltreatment in Europe is understandable, but sadly, has been and continues to be visited upon the Palestinians. "The Palestinians have had to pay for the sins of Europe."

**Michael** "The Palestinians have had to pay for the sins of Europe." Well said! While I know counter-factual history is not the goal, students should at least consider what would have happened if Britain had kept its word (McMahon-Hussein Correspondence), and not separated Palestine from Trans-Jordan. Was Israel created by the Balfour Declaration and later Cairo Conference?

**Caolan** What role did the Zionists play in bringing the US into WWI? I know some consider it a conspiracy theory, to others its a fact. Was the Balfour Declaration based on a promise that American Jews would get Wilson to declare war on Germany? The timing is certainly suspect.

**Robert** Balfour did not mean "Jewish State" when he wrote about a "national home" for the Jewish people. Publicly the Zionists welcomed the Declaration but were privately "committed to achieving a Jewish State." Cairo? I don't think so.

**Michael** Caolan, WOW!!!!! Honestly never heard that one before. Of course, the billions (in today's values) we sank into financing the war for Britain and France may have had a wee bit to do with it. Wilson's Idealism (or meglamania ), certainly was a factor as well. Robert, as you state, what Balfour meant, and how the Zionists capitalized on it, do not coincide. However, the Arabs were outraged that the area west of the Jordan river as broken off, and administered separately. Counter-factual or not, if Tran-Jordan had been kept as one, the state of Israel probably would not have been created.

**Robert** My sources argue that British policy makers believed that the Jews of Russia and the US were influential enough to keep the Russians from dropping out of the war and coax the Americans into dropping into it. Hence the Balfour Declaration, which contradicted their earlier pledge to Sharif Husayn. However, I have seen no evidence that allows me to conclude that Zionist pressure was part of the US decision making. I thought that the British release to the Americans of the Zimmermann Telegram was a factor in the US decision to jump in.

**Robert** Michael, I'm going to have to take a peek at the Cairo Conference. As far as I can tell, my sources don't say anything about it. But, I hear what you're saying.

**Andy** Michael I am certainly learning much from your posts. What I want to know is why it took until the last 19th century for this 'muscular Judaism' to develop after centuries of anti-semitism. Was it something particular to the Jewish Russian experience? I understand your argument that Israel was made through unique characteristics, although I am not sure I accept it yet. European colonization of various parts of the world has always been violent, etc. Yes, it is a theory and I appreciate the opportunity to explore and debate it. If we view the creation of Israel as a European invasion, as Palestinians did and do, how different was this from the European invasion of the Americans?

**Robert** I think as a consequence of being a perpetual minority group everywhere, that the Jews coped as any other minority group would. It seems to me that their choices were limited to assimilation or isolation. The Jews of "the Pale of Settlement" probably felt safe in numbers, "isolated" from their gentile neighbours. The Dreyfus Affair (1894) and the 1903 slaughter of forty-nine Jews in Kishinev, Russia, are important turning points in the Jewish response to the persecution. Further: Morris is essentially saying that typically legalistic Jews suddenly came to realize that they could no longer rely on gentile authorities to protect them, as they had in the past.

**Jeff**  I think many of the revisionist historians of Israel have painted our judgement somewhat and I think we should be careful to use them without understand more on how other historians there view the foundations of the state. I like these historians, people like Benny Morris and Tom Segev, but I think reading them without any more understanding of Israeli or Jewish history is kind of like just reading Howard Zinn and saying you know everything about the United States. Good historians all, but their judgements, some would say indictments, of Israel's origin story, only tell one side of the story. I think they add lots to our analysis, but without any consensus historians helping create a great narrative we end up with just a very biased perspective on the state of Israel.

**Andy** I have really appreciated all contributions to this debate.

**Robert** Jeff, I hear what you're saying, and I do account for the "traditional" school of thought regarding Israeli history when I'm teaching. However, I think the "traditional" narrative has been debunked by the "new historians," mostly because of their having combed through the Israeli archives.

**Andy** To revisit the issue of appealing to US Zionists to bring the US into WW1, the following quote is from Martin Sicker's book 'Reshaping Palestine: From Muhammad Ali to the British Mandate 1831-192"2, p.116. " the German government came to believe that the Zionist Organization could be used as an instrument to further German strategic interests. Indeed, some influential officials were convinced that the Zionist movement was sufficiently powerful in Eastern Europe to be able to have significant impact on Russia's ability to prosecute the war. Thus, one report to the German high command predicted that the Zionist Organization, in Germany's hands, 'would be able to provide information on all political and military events in enemy countries and, should we avail ourselves of its useful intelligence and guidance, we might reduce substantially the heavy losses of our forces.' Another report suggested that since all supplies of cereal and livestock for the Russian Army are delivered by Jewish middlemen, so we have in the Zionists an effective means to impede the catering and the operation of the Russian Army.' It was also believed by some German officials that the Zionists could be used to influence international Jewish opinion in the West in a way that would tend to reduce the popularity of waging war against Germany." Sicker goes on to indicate that the British government, in part, made the Balfour Declaration in order to enlist support of US Zionists who they hoped and expected to bring the US into the war against Germany and/or that if they recognized a Jewish state in Palestine before Germany, then they would at least prevent any pro-German Zionist leanings in the US.

**Michael** Am I missing something? The Balfour Declaration was issued in Nov. of 1917, AFTER we were already in the war. The Zimmerman Telegram was simply a final straw. Wilson's policy of neutrality was so absurd that William Jennings Bryan resigned as Sec.of State, stating Wilson would back us into a corner. Guess what, Wilson did! Does anyone not think that all the money we loaned Britain and France played a, if not THE, major role? While no doubt both sides wanted the support of World Jewry, this should not be blown out of proportion, or taken out of historical context.

**Jeff**  Robert, I think the New Historians are great but I think my traditional learning helped me process it better. It think too much New Historians without any context doesn't allow anyone to better understand the story.

**Michael** Andy, as Robert explains, European Jews learned their survival depended on passivity. There is one instance, during the period of the Black Death, when Jews fought back, and were massacred. Their emancipation in the 19th century raised great hope and expectations of assimilation and equality. However, the emergence of true antisemitism, based on race, the crackdown by Alexander III in 1882, and the Dreyfus Affair, crashed these hopes. We all know people live under oppression for centuries without revolting, but when things start getting better raising, hopes, and then go south again, that's when revolutions occur. I think the expectations of the 19th century are the reasons why "the muscular Jew" emerged.