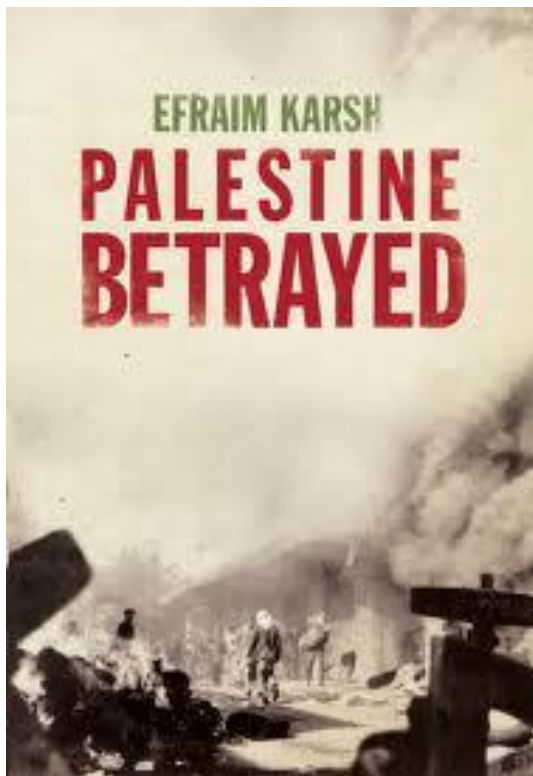


BOOK REVIEW

No.24

Tuesday, 28 May 2013



Palestine Betrayed

Efraim Karsh

Yale University Press
2010

Pages 342

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Over the past decades, innumerable scholarly endeavours have been produced to question the Palestinian perception of peace. Adding to this agglomeration, Efraim Karsh in his latest book *Palestine Betrayed* has opined several hard-line assumptions, facts and intelligence reports to vividly criticize the pro-Arab propaganda. Often accused of being a scholar of revisionist movement in Zionism by scholars like Benny Morris and Howard Sachar, Karsh believes that for Palestinians, peace is not a matter of adjusting borders and territories but rather a euphemism for the destruction of the Jewish state. He strongly advocates that only when

Palestinians and Arab leaders eschew their genocidal hopes, the refugees would be able to leave their squalid camps where they have been kept by their 'fellow Arabs' for decades.

Undoubtedly, *Palestine Betrayed* has been written to reclaim the so-called 'historical truth' regarding the betrayal of Palestine by Arabs themselves. In his endeavour, the author states that relentless pro-Arab propaganda has erased the very 'truth' from public memory that both Jews and Arabs mutually wanted to exist with each other, ultimately leading the latter to pay the price of statelessness and homelessness.

In his introduction, he questions the literal significance of *Al-Nakba* in the national narrative of Arab discourses while comparing it with the historic process of *Aliya*, that is, looking at the Arab discourses through the Jewish lens. According to him, during the time of the collapse and dispersion of Palestinian Arab Society, this term did not mean 'systematic dispossession of Arabs by Jews'. He substantiates the fact by concrete evidence found by Sir John Troutbeck, head of Middle East Office in Cairo during a fact finding mission to Gaza in June 1949. His hypothesis states that had the Palestinian Arab leaders accepted the UN partition resolution, there would have been no war and dislocation as the Zionist movement was amenable both to the existence of substantial 'non-Jewish minority' and to the two-state solution raised for the first time in 1937 by a British commission of inquiry.

The exaggerated narrative often flooded with opinions and erratic analysis proves to describe the entire Israel-Palestinian conflict with more preponderance to the political Zionist angle, thereby limiting the authenticity of the text. It does not go into the finer details of historic Palestine and the various dynasties that ruled over it or even the loopholes in Ottoman Empire's administrative structure. Doing so would have resulted in a complete analysis of Palestinian identity, both before and after the establishment of Israel.

The integral ideology behind the author's arguments states that 'had the majority of Palestine Arabs been left to their own devices, they would most probably have been content to go with their lives and take advantages of the opportunities afforded by the growing Jewish presence in the country' (p.14). But he fails to substantiate such arguments with concrete facts and logistics.

Karsh also mentions about the 'hundreds of formal meetings' of Jewish representatives with their Arab counterparts in Palestine and neighbouring Arab States that took place during the 1920s and 1930s, but once again does not define the 'theme', 'active platform' and 'specific locations' about these meetings.

Karsh does not make the delicate differentiation as Alan Dowty does in his book *Israel/Palestine* where he states that early Zionists saw no necessary, objective conflict between the rebuilding of Jewish homeland in *Eretz Yisrael* and the respect for the rights on the non-Jewish population- so long as these rights were considered at the 'individual level.' The specific 'individual level' treatment has been often replaced by a collective identity issue by the author.

Karsh does not explain the major source of conflict caused by the displacement from purchased land of tenant farmers who in the wake of 1858 Land Law had lost rights to lands cultivated by their families for generations. The hostility against Jewish settlement in Palestine is not included in the book, especially the attacks of Petach Tikvah in 1886, Gedera in 1888, Yesud Ha'ma'alah in 1890, Rehovot in 1892, 1893 and 1899, Kastina in 1896, Jewish Jaffa in 1908 and Sajera in 1909. The book does not include the Arab opposition to Zionism which was also tied to the capitulations and the special protection that settlers were receiving from the foreign powers. In fact, Shukri al-Asali, the governor of Nazareth's open letter in 1910 against the disloyalty of the Zionists does not figure into the narrative of Karsh.

Though Efraim Karsh does objectively describe how 'anti-Zionism' was the central part of pan-Arab ideology by including works of Syrian political exiles such as Najib Azuri and Abdel Rahman Kawakibi. In fact, he clearly states 'Behind the façade of solidarity and unity lay the perennial web of inter-Arab rivalries, hatreds and ambitions.' (p.78). But it would have been even more balanced if Karsh had integrated 'Abd Al-Aziz Al-Duri's analysis of the beginning of the Arab consciousness during the pre-Islamic era when the Arabian Peninsula was threatened by Byzantines in the west and the Sassanid's in the east. This distinction objectively demarcates the entire pan-Arab ideology from the mere Islamic identity, which the author often collectively incorporates in his opinions.

Karsh also provides an interesting analysis of how British intelligence reports had revealed that the Jewish population had been desperately short of food and other essential domestic commodities. Thus, the Jewish authorities had to enforce strict austerity regimes to maintain tight control over stockpiling, distribution and pricing of basic commodities. Later, the fall of Haifa, Jaffa and Arab Jerusalem, had added to the genuine disinterest in the fate of Palestinian Arabs, together with the fear of direct confrontation with Britain and of annexation of parts of Transjordan, leading to a wide gap between the Arab States rhetoric and their actual disinclination to involve themselves in the struggle for Palestinian cause.

According to Karsh, the participants in *al-Nakba*, for example, the killers involved in violence in Arab village of Faja, were 'hardly a shining example of unadulterated Arab patriotism: it soon transpired that they were hardened criminals driven by monetary concerns rather than a desire for national liberation' (p.101). But once again, such political correctness is not substantiated by authentic facts.

In a nutshell, Karsh employs his criticism against pro-Arab propaganda as a free agent, rejecting the 'other' historical narratives with facts and opinions and thereby, adding to political-theoretical contributions. *Palestine Betrayed* is definitely not a quick read and requires a lot of basic understanding, well-informed ideologies and above all, ample patience. The incorporation of 180 leading figures from various political platforms/dimensions such as the Arab League, Arab Liberation Army, Britain, Egypt, Germany, Hijaz, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Saudi

Arabia, Syria, Transjordan, United Nations, United States and the Zionist movement, requires apt attention and memory of the reader. Though, the book does need a more balanced and objective narration and revealing the story of *Betrayal of Palestine* from the side of Palestinians and Arabs, as well.

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