

# The reality of US-Israel relations—Part 1

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31 May 2026

*This is the first of a three-part series.*

Many commentators, arguing that the US–Israel war on Iran is faltering despite overwhelming firepower, have placed the primary blame on Washington’s junior partner, Israel and on Donald Trump personally for supposedly allowing himself to be bounced into a conflict without a strategic plan for victory.

Their chief complaint is that Israel’s leadership, particularly Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has long advocated confrontation with Iran, and the powerful pro-Israel lobbying networks exercise too much influence over US foreign policy.

But the Israel-centred thesis cannot explain how a state of roughly 10 million people, with a \$610 billion GDP, far smaller than that of Saudi Arabia and a tiny fraction of the \$30 trillion of the world’s largest economy and dominant military power, the United States, could determine Washington’s strategic direction—outside of claims of a global Zionist conspiracy.

Reducing the origins of the war to the manoeuvres of the Israel lobby or the decisions of Israel’s government sidelines the historical, geopolitical, socio-economic and class dynamics that have shaped the conflict. It ignores the US National Security Strategy of 2025, written by Trump’s own national security apparatus, that stated quite categorically, “America will always have core interests in ensuring that Gulf energy supplies do not fall into the hands of an outright enemy, and that the Strait of Hormuz remain open.”

It detaches the war from its historical roots in the long strategic drive of American capitalism to dominate the Persian Gulf, from its connection to the broader US confrontation with Russia and China, and from the objective class interests of the American financial oligarchy. It abandons imperialism as an analytical framework and leads to the conclusion that the solution is to remove Israel’s malign influence and replace it with a “good” foreign policy that defends genuine American interests. All of which is left unstated.

Applied to the US–Israel war on Iran, commentators who focus narrowly on Israel’s influence overlook the fact that the war forms a third front in an emerging global confrontation that includes the war in Ukraine, the US seizure of President Maduro in Venezuela and its blockade of Cuba—theatres that lie outside Israel’s strategic priorities. And they have nothing to say about US preparations for war against its major rival, China.

Such analyses often omit the region’s vast energy reserves and the long history of British, French, and US imperial involvement. They also ignore Israel’s reliance, from its inception, on a great-power patron, and the strategic projects now being advanced—such as the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), designed to use Israel’s port of Haifa to link India, the Gulf, and Europe to Iran and counter China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

The logic driving the war reflects the dynamics of imperialism in an epoch of deepening capitalist crisis. Understanding this requires examining the geographic and historical significance of Palestine within the Levant and the actual history of the great powers’ relationship with Israel.

## Palestine’s rise to geostrategic importance

It was its proximity to the Suez Canal, whose opening in 1869 transformed global trade, that gave Palestine—an impoverished region located on the eastern Mediterranean at the junction of Europe, Asia, and Africa—its geopolitical centrality. The Canal dramatically shortened the route to India, the core of Britain’s empire, significantly expanding international trade and becoming a strategic asset.

Britain initially opposed the project but later, recognising its importance, purchased a 44 percent stake in 1875. It then seized the opportunity presented by an uprising against the ruler to occupy Egypt in 1882, taking effective control of the Canal. From that point, Palestine became the land frontier of Britain’s most important imperial artery, and any rival presence there—Ottoman, French, or German—was seen as a threat.

Britain initially still favoured preserving the Ottoman Empire, which governed most of the Arab Middle East, as a buffer against Russia. But after occupying Egypt, London began looking for ways to secure Palestine, including treating Zionist settlement as a potentially advantageous frontier outpost. At this time, “Palestine” had no fixed borders: its northern districts were governed from Beirut, its southern from Jerusalem, while the Negev and Transjordan were administered from the Hejaz (later Saudi Arabia) and Syria.

Set up by Theodor Herzl in 1897, the Zionist movement sought a Jewish national state in biblical Palestine as a solution to European antisemitism. It combined religious attachment to Zion with modern nationalism and aimed to build a capitalist state through immigration, land purchase, and institution-building. There were different conceptions of the boundaries of the putative state, with the most extreme, that of Ze’ev Jabotinsky, leader of the Revisionist Tendency, the progenitor of Netanyahu’s Likud party, encompassing “both banks of the Jordan”—all of today’s Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

Most Jews did not support Zionism; they sought emancipation in Europe or migrated to the United States. Jewish immigration to Ottoman Palestine was restricted, and Zionist leaders understood that success required backing from a major imperial power—Britain, Germany, France, or the Ottomans—because Jews were a tiny minority and faced growing Arab opposition. Zionist leaders therefore avoided issuing definitive maps before World War I, recognising that borders would be determined by Great Power diplomacy.

Marxists, including the Bolsheviks, had consistently opposed Zionism as a reactionary nationalist ideology that divided the Jewish and Arab working class, directed the Jewish workers away from the socialist struggle and toward alliance with imperialism, and could only be realized through the colonial dispossession of the Palestinian people. The Palestine Communist Party in the 1920s had fought for the unity of Jewish and Arab workers against Zionism and British imperialism—until the Stalinization of that party destroyed it from within, eventually splitting it along ethnic lines before the end of World War II.

In his writings in the 1930s, Leon Trotsky described the Zionist project as utopian because it promised a national solution to a problem rooted in

global capitalism, and reactionary because it diverted Jewish workers from the international class struggle into a nationalist project aligned with imperialism.

In his interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in Coyoacán, Mexico in December 1937, Trotsky argued that a Jewish state in Palestine would be established only through the support of imperialist powers. He warned that the Zionist project would lead to “bloody clashes” and that the Jewish population would be “in a permanent state of siege”. Zionism offered no real solution to antisemitism. He insisted that Zionism could only be realized through colonial methods and imperialist patronage, and that the salvation of the Jewish people was “bound up inseparably with the overthrow of the capitalist system.”

In 1947, the Fourth International published “Against the Stream”, opposing the establishment of the state of Israel, as its response to the UN proposal for the partition of Palestine.

These warnings proved correct. In the early 20th century, the Zionist movement aligned first with Britain, the dominant imperial power, and later shifted toward the United States when Britain’s wartime and postwar priorities pushed it closer to the Arab states.

### **Britain backs Zionism to secure its control of Palestine**

Britain became the Zionist movement’s first major sponsor during World War I, fought in no small part for control of the Middle East and its oil. Once the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of Germany, Britain moved to dismantle it. In doing so, it issued a series of mutually contradictory commitments: promising Arab independence to secure a revolt against Ottoman rule; secretly agreeing with France to divide the region into spheres of control; and designating Palestine for “international administration” while ensuring Britain held the strongest position on the ground.

The Balfour Declaration of November 1917, issued just as British forces advanced into Palestine, gave a deliberately vague promise of a “national home for the Jewish people”. This reflected Britain’s determination to secure Palestine against French influence and to use a loyal settler population as an instrument of imperial control. Zionism also appealed to British officials as a counterweight to Bolshevism. Winston Churchill, then Minister of Munitions, framed the issue as a struggle “for the soul of the Jewish people.”

US President Woodrow Wilson endorsed the Balfour Declaration and later supported the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine (1922), which formalised Britain’s control. The Mandate incorporated Balfour’s terms and recognised the Jewish Agency as the official representative of the Jewish community, tasked with cooperating with the administration in building the “national home.” France received Syria and Lebanon, completing the Anglo-French partition of the western Ottoman provinces.

The new states created by this carve-up—Palestine, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Syria—were deliberately small, fragmented, and economically unviable, ensuring their dependence on the colonial powers. Palestine had never been a single Ottoman province; its borders were assembled through diplomatic bargaining. Under French pressure, Britain excluded the Golan Heights and the area south of the Litani River. The Mandate initially covered both sides of the Jordan River, but Britain quickly separated Transjordan in 1922 to create an emirate under Abdullah I.

By the early 1920s, Britain had created the political framework for a Zionist-colonial project it believed would stabilise its rule in Palestine and secure its strategic position. The Mandate’s legal structure, its recognition of the Jewish Agency, and its territorial engineering all laid the

foundations for Zionist state-building under British protection.

For the two decades after World War I, Britain and the Mandate authorities fostered the growth of the Zionist movement. Britain facilitated large-scale Jewish immigration—by 1936 Jews made up roughly 30 percent of the population—and allowed the Jewish Agency to function as a proto-state while preventing the emergence of comparable Palestinian institutions. British legal frameworks enabled Zionist land purchase and institutional consolidation.

By the mid-1930s, Jewish capital in Palestine exceeded that of the larger Arab population. Jews in Palestine built a separate economy, financed by European Jewish capital, refugees from Nazi Germany, and philanthropic networks in the US. They developed banks, cooperatives, development funds, industry, services, and urban centres—most notably Tel Aviv.

The Histadrut, the Zionist labour federation, became a major economic organisation, establishing factories, farms, welfare and health systems, and cooperatives. Committed to creating a self-sufficient Jewish working class, it opposed employing Palestinian labour, reinforcing economic separation and sharpening communal tensions.

By contrast, the Palestinian economy remained predominantly agrarian. With limited access to international capital and wealth concentrated among landed elites, there was little reinvestment in industry. Zionist institutions, backed by British policy, were able to purchase land from absentee landlords, leading to the displacement of peasants and the eviction of entire villages.

These economic inequalities, combined with accelerating Jewish immigration, triggered the Arab General Strike and Revolt of 1936–39 against British rule. Britain crushed the uprising with extreme brutality—destroying homes and crops, imprisoning and exiling leaders, and fragmenting the Palestinian national movement. This decapitation of the Palestinian leadership was a decisive factor enabling the later establishment of the Zionist state and the 1948 displacement of Palestinians.

As World War II approached, Britain—seeking Arab support—distanced itself from Zionism. A 1939 White Paper reversed its earlier policies: it capped Jewish immigration at 75,000 over five years, restricted land sales, and rejected partition in favour of an independent Palestine within ten years with shared Arab-Jewish governance. Britain enforced these limits during the war, treating further Jewish immigration as “illegal” and detaining refugees in Cyprus.

Zionist leaders rejected the White Paper and came into increasing conflict with British imperialism over immigration restrictions and the terms of any future settlement. The Irgun, the armed faction of the right-wing Revisionist tendency, launched terrorist attacks to force a British withdrawal and press for a Jewish state across all of Mandate Palestine. It was at this point that David Ben-Gurion and other mainstream Labour Zionists shifted their strategy decisively toward US imperialism, formalised at the 1942 Biltmore Conference in New York that set the stage for the decisive US role in 1947–48.

### **US support for the carve-up of Palestine**

By the end of World War II, Britain could no longer contain the conflict in Palestine. Exhausted by war, financially bankrupt, and facing anti-colonial revolts across its empire, it was being replaced by the US as the dominant imperialist power in the Middle East. Britain’s proposal for a bi-national state was rejected by both Arabs and Jews, and London referred the issue to the United Nations, expecting to regain control through an international trusteeship.

Washington saw an opportunity to reshape the region in line with its own interests. By 1947, the wartime alliance between the imperialist powers and the Soviet Union had broken down, the Cold War had emerged and was hardening into confrontation. The Truman Doctrine (March 1947) announced American support for Greece and Türkiye against “communist subversion”, explicitly targeting Soviet influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Marshall Plan (June 1947) aimed to rebuild Western European capitalism and consolidate American hegemony in Europe. The Palestine question was part of a broader struggle to secure the region’s oil, trade routes, and strategic position.

Britain’s withdrawal created a strategic vacuum that the US and the Soviet Union both moved to fill. Once the UN created the Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), the US used its dominant position to shape its recommendations and ensure that partition—two non-contiguous states with Jerusalem under international administration—was presented as the only “practical” solution, especially to the post-Holocaust refugee crisis.

The US had barred large-scale Jewish immigration during the Holocaust. It saw a Jewish state both as a destination for Europe’s refugees and as a means of asserting American influence in the Middle East at the expense of Britain and France, preventing Soviet penetration, countering Arab nationalism that threatened US control of oil, and creating a settler state dependent upon Western support.

Washington used diplomatic pressure, UN vote-whipping, refugee policy, and close coordination with Zionist organisations to secure the votes of smaller states for the partition plan in November 1947 and to facilitate the rapid consolidation of a Jewish state, wrapped up in the language of moral responsibility after the Holocaust. America granted de facto recognition to Israel within minutes of its declaration of independence on 14 May 1948.

President Harry S. Truman’s backing at this formative moment—political, diplomatic, and later military—established the US as the primary external guarantor of Israel’s legitimacy and security. It shaped the regional order that followed, defining US alliances, its confrontation with Arab nationalism, and its long-term role as the dominant imperialist power in the Middle East.

### **Stalin’s treachery: the shift to supporting partition and a Zionist state**

The Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union acted as the second midwife of the Zionist state. Joseph Stalin’s abrupt shift in April 1947 to support the partition of Palestine reflected the accelerating pressures of the emerging Cold War. Until then, Moscow had largely aligned with the Arab states in opposing partition and the elevation of a Zionist movement traditionally tied to Britain. But as the post-war confrontation with London and Washington deepened, Stalin reassessed Palestine through the prism of an escalating imperialist offensive.

He came to see the creation of a Jewish state as a means of weakening British power, challenging the US and establishing a foothold in the Middle East. At the time, significant sections of the Zionist leadership—including Ben-Gurion’s Mapai and the broader Labour Zionist tradition—deployed socialist and even Marxist rhetoric. The kibbutz movement, the corporatist Histadrut, and the general ethos of Labour Zionism presented themselves as progressive and collectivist. Stalin and his advisers may well have calculated that the new Israeli state could be drawn into the Soviet orbit as a nominally “socialist” bridgehead in the Middle East.

This proved to be a profound miscalculation: within a year of its

founding, Israel was firmly aligned with American imperialism.

Stalin’s previous opposition to Zionism had nothing to do with defending the interests of the Jewish people, let alone adopting a principled position on the national question in Palestine. Rather, Jewish survivors of Nazi concentration camps were regarded with deep suspicion by the Soviet regime: many had spent time in Western countries, had contacts with non-Soviet Jews, or were seen as potential purveyors of “cosmopolitan” influence. At the very moment he was supporting the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, Stalin launched a virulent antisemitic campaign that culminated in the “Doctors’ Plot” of 1952–53 and preparations for a potential mass deportation of Soviet Jews — halted only by his death in March 1953.

The Stalinist bureaucracy supported partition in Palestine while persecuting Jews at home because both policies served the short-term tactical positioning of the Soviet state in the international arena. It was a betrayal of the Arab masses and of the working class of the entire region, including the Jewish working class. Indeed, Stalinism’s betrayals and its antisemitism helped drive many socialist-minded Jews toward Zionism.

The broader mass support for the establishment of a Jewish state in the aftermath of the Holocaust was itself the product of the catastrophic defeats inflicted on the international working class by Stalinism—above all the defeat of the German working class and the rise of Hitler, which produced the Holocaust and the mass of displaced Jewish survivors. By approving the establishment of a Zionist state, Stalinism completed its betrayal of a socialist solution to the Jewish question and helped create a political disaster for the Palestinians and all the peoples of the Middle East.

Within Palestine, Stalinism had already played a disastrous role. The Palestine Communist Party (PCP), founded in 1920, was perpetually divided between its Jewish majority and Arab minority, repeatedly torn apart by factional splits. This was the direct responsibility of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow, which had abandoned the internationalist strategy of the October Revolution and the Theory of Permanent Revolution in favour of the nationalist doctrine of “socialism in one country.” The PCP, like every section of the Third International, was subordinated to the shifting foreign-policy needs of the Kremlin.

The unprincipled zigzags of Soviet policy—the subordination of Communist parties to bourgeois-nationalist leaderships, the Popular Front alliances with capitalist parties, the Hitler–Stalin Pact, and the dissolution of the Comintern—had a devastating impact on the PCP. During the Arab Revolt of 1936–39, the party subordinated itself to the Arab Higher Committee in the name of supporting the national struggle, only to be swept aside when the revolt was crushed by British imperialism. At the same time, the PCP treated the Jewish population as a single hostile bloc, ignoring class differentiation and refusing to make a class appeal to Jewish workers for the socialist reorganisation of Palestine. The result was predictable: the party splintered along nationalist lines.

Moscow delivered the crucial votes from the Soviet bloc to ensure the UN General Assembly reached the required two-thirds majority on partition. The USSR became the first state to grant de jure recognition to Israel and supplied arms during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war via Czechoslovakia, playing a significant role in Israel’s military success.

Despite Stalin’s political support for the state’s creation, Moscow soon reverted to a pro-Arab orientation once Israel’s alignment with Washington became clear. Israel’s Communist Party (Maki), which had supported the establishment of the state, found itself politically marginalised.

The Fourth International’s 1948 position stood in the starkest contrast to the Stalinist betrayal. In “Against the Stream” it declared: “The Fourth International rejects as utopian and reactionary the ‘Zionist solution’ of the Jewish question. It declares that total renunciation of Zionism is the sine qua non condition for the merging of Jewish workers’ struggles with

the social, national and liberationist struggles of the Arab toilers.”

The Palestinian question could be resolved only through the unity of Arab and Jewish workers against Zionism, imperialism, and all factions of the Arab bourgeoisie—a unity that the establishment of the Zionist state made immeasurably more difficult.

The result of Stalin’s betrayal was the political disorientation and demoralisation of the Communist parties of the Arab world and the undermining of the Palestinian working class’s capacity to resist dispossession. It played a significant role in creating the permanent catastrophe of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict whose consequences we are living through today in the most barbaric form—the Gaza genocide.

*To be continued.*



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