

## IRAN-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP

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### Relationships Before the Revolution

The relationship between Iranian people and the Jews goes back approximately 2500 years. In 538 BC the Persian King Cyrus invaded Babylon and added its cities to the newly formed Persian Empire. Eventually, Cyrus allowed the return of 42,000 Jews who had been exiled from Palestine by Nebuchadnezzar during the years 598 – 597 BC<sup>1</sup>. The temple in Jerusalem that had been destroyed in 586 BC by Babylonia was rebuilt between 520 and 515 BC by the returning exiles. These events have never been forgotten and they are still commemorated annually by the Jewish people. However, the Persian rulers Darius and Artaxerxes I, who came to power later, supported the Jewish resettlement of Palestine. Indeed, the walls surrounding Jerusalem itself were finished in 455 BC by the Governor Nehemiah, by the command of the King of Persia Artaxerxes I<sup>2</sup>.

In the books 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Isaiah and Daniel of the Old Testament, the name of Persian king Cyrus is many times praised and the Israelites did not forget this guardianship by the Persians in their almost 2000 years of exile. In 1917, when the British government accepted the World Zionist Organization's demand to establish a national home for Jewish people in Palestine and issued Balfour Declaration, the pioneer of the Zionist movement compared this historical decision with that of Persian King Cyrus when he favored the Jewish people. Even the Nobel peace prize holder Simon Peres considers the Cyrus Declaration as a basis of the Balfour Declaration, as it applies to the Israelites' right of return to their motherland<sup>3</sup>.

In 1941, when Hitler began to put into action his genocidal "final solution" for the Jewish people, Nazis started to hunt down Jews all

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<sup>1</sup> Gudrun Kramer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel*, Princeton and Oxford, 2002, p.11

<sup>2</sup> Mark Tessler, *A History Of The Israeli- Palestinian Conflict*, Indiana University Pres, 1994, p.10

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.president.gov.il/chapters/chap\\_1/\\_content\\_1\\_3\\_11\\_en.asp](http://www.president.gov.il/chapters/chap_1/_content_1_3_11_en.asp)

across Europe. Iran, in order to protect the lives of Iranian Jews who were living in Europe, resisted the Nazis by claiming that the Jews had been equal citizens of Persia for 2500 years. The Germans accepted this argument by Iran and did not touch those Persian Jews in Europe. In order to save them from the Nazis, Iran issued Persian passports to many Jews who were not even originally from Iran. Even after the Second World War, Persians helped many Iraqi and Iranian Jews to settle in Israel<sup>4</sup>.

The League of Nations left Palestine under the mandate of Great Britain at the San Remo Conference in 1920. This mandate was overturned by the United Nations (UN) in 1947 who then created the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). This committee consisted of 11 UN members with Iran being one of them. After 5 weeks of thorough studying the situation on the ground in Palestine, the committee members reported back to the UN in August 1947. They had prepared two solutions: a majority of seven members to four recommended that Palestine be partitioned into one Israeli nation and one Arab nation. This solution also left Jerusalem to international governance. The minority report that had been prepared by Iran, India and Yugoslavia stated that in Palestine a “sovereign federal state” should be created that consisted of both the Arabs and the Israelis. The two peoples would live in the same country but manage their own affairs separately. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1947 when the majority report was voted on in the UN General Assembly, 33 nations voted in favour, 13 voted against and 10 were neutral. Thus UN 181 resolution, which legitimized the creation of the Israel was taken. Iran was one of 13 states that were against resolution, but again Iran recognized Israel between the years 1948 – 1951.<sup>5</sup>

After the Second World War, the US replaced Great Britain as the most important foreign power in the Middle East. The US, of course, required friends in the Middle East that they can rely and Israel and Iran were the likely candidates. The Shah already wanted to police the Gulf states and his desire was supported by the Nixon administration in the US. The US and Iran rapprochement would certainly have brought

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<sup>4</sup> Abbas Milani, “For the Jews, there have always been two Iran” *International Herald Tribune*, November 10, 2005

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Harms and Ferry Todd M. Harms, *The Paletsine Israel Conflict*, (London ,Pluto Press), 2008, pp.90-91

an Iran/Israel rapprochement as well which would have fitted in well with David Ben Gurion's "surrounding neighbours theory"<sup>6</sup>.

When Mohammed Mossaded came to power in Iran in 1951, he not only nationalized Iran's petroleum, but also cancelled the recognition of Israel. But in 1953 Dr. Mossadeq was replaced by the Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlevi with the support of the US again.<sup>7</sup> It was then that Iran and Turkey jointly became dependable friends of Israel even though Iran did not officially recognize Israel. During the reign of the Shah, Israel always maintained an unofficial embassy in Tehran and for both countries economic relations got better after the 1956 Suez Canal War and 1967 Arab Israel war. Iran supplied Israel with petroleum through the Eliat-Ashkelon pipeline which connected Red Sea with Mediterranean and therefore was able to gain access to European markets<sup>8</sup>. In parallel with their economic relations, they had very close military links as well for example, Israel helped Iran with missiles projects and rocket technology<sup>9</sup>.

As a non-Arab nation in the Middle East, Iran, therefore had considerable multi-dimensional relationships (secret service cooperation, oil, arms etc) with Israel. While Iran was supplying Israel with petrol, MOSAD agents were training SAVAK<sup>10</sup> (The State Security and Intelligence Organization of Iran) and Israel also provided Iran with weapons and intelligence. In 1973 during the Arab – Israeli war Iran did not support the boycott of petroleum against Israel. After Nixon and Kissinger's visit to Tehran (in May 1972), the US allowed Iran to purchase any kind of weapon including nuclear weapons. All through the later 1970's half of America's gun exports went to Iran which was

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<sup>6</sup> Uri Avnery, "So What About Iran?", Shalom, 29.09.2007

<sup>7</sup> Roy R. Anderson, Robert F. Seibert, and Jon G. Wagner, *Politics and Change in the Middle East*, Pearson, 2004, p.66

<sup>8</sup> Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline has a maximum yearly capacity of 60 million tonnes. See <http://www.eapc.co.il/pipelines.html> for further information

<sup>9</sup> Gawdat Bahgat, "Nuclear Proliferation: The Islamic Republic of Iran," *Iranian Studies*, Volume 3, September 2006

<sup>10</sup> According to some sources SAVAK in 1957 was created with the help of America, England and Israel. Therefore Israel did not only train SAVAK members but also helped to create it. Azimi, Fakhreddin, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran*, Harvard University Press, 2008, p.164