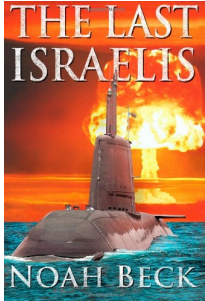


The Last Israelis

a review by Norman Berdichevsky (January 2015)



[Arab Support for Zionism, 1917-1948](#)," Hillel Cohen, NER, Feb. 2009).

Prominent Arab personalities with little sense of a nationalist identity saw in the growing strength of the Zionist movement, a potential ally, the traditional recourse to the enemy of my enemy is my friend. This was proven time and time again even during the major riots of 1929 and the general Arab uprising of 1936-1939, as well as in Israel's war of Independence and the two intifadas that have captured world headlines. It is true today, in the continued inter-Arab violence and competition for power between the Fatah and Hamas movements. In all of these struggles, the number of Arabs killed and wounded by other Arabs, exceeds the count of Jewish victims.

From the very beginning of the Mandate, the Zionist movement sought out Arab leaders willing to cooperate. The Zionist leadership made vain efforts to offer a variety of rewards that would tempt collaborationists, running the gambit from bribery, raising the general standard of living, manipulating inter-clan rivalries and providing convincing arguments that Zionism could not be extirpated and that an accommodation would be a much more farsighted policy than the eternal confrontation offered by the Mufti.

No "moderate" Arab segment of public opinion could openly confront the extremists for whom terror, blackmail and threats rather than elections or policy debates were the established way of dealing with an opposition. The only hope lay rather in convincing extreme Arab nationalist currents that confrontation would ultimately lead to an Arab defeat. Among those Arabs who did openly express opposition to the Mufti, many eventually had to flee the country and felt abandoned by their Jewish allies.

The legacy of almost thirty years of coexistence within the British Mandate left considerable

ties between Jews and Arabs in areas that brought tangible benefits to many Arabs in technical and agricultural assistance, trade union activity, transportation, medical treatment and employment. These were not simply jettisoned to satisfy the demands of the power hungry and corrupt leadership of the Palestinian Nationalist movement. As early as July, 1921, no less an authoritative Arab political figure than the mayor of Haifa and head of the traditional Muslim National Association, Hasan Shukri sent a telegram to the British government as a reaction to a Palestinian delegation setting out for London to protest the implementation of the Balfour Declaration:

"We strongly protest against the attitude of the said delegation concerning the Zionist question. We do not consider the Jewish people as an enemy whose wish is to crush us. On the contrary, we consider the Jews as a brotherly people sharing our joys and troubles and helping us in the construction of our common country."

Shukri's fate was sealed from that moment and although he enjoyed immense local prestige and authority among the Arab population of Haifa, he was the target of a failed assassination attempt in May 1936 just weeks after a successful one ended the life of his brother-in-law and former mayor of Haifa, Ibrahim Bey Khalil, a member of one of the richest families in the city.

Shukri was born in 1876 in Jerusalem to a family in the highest levels of the Ottoman bureaucracy. His family moved to Haifa when he was young, and was appointed mayor in 1914. Throughout his tenure, Shukri displayed a positive and conciliatory attitude toward the Jewish community in the city, and gave them senior posts in the municipality. One of his first decisions after Jews began taking part in local politics was to add Hebrew to the Arabic of the city's documents in 1927. In 1933 he opened up city tenders to Jewish contractors as well as Arab ones. Shukri and other moderates were the major opposition element among Palestinian notables who feared the Grand Mufti, al-Husseini and were labeled "The Nashshibi faction." They were continually frustrated by the British policy of supporting the most reactionary and extremist Muslim religious segment of Palestinian society.

The "Arab" Communities Today

In 2012, the official number of Arab residents and non-Jews in Israel was almost 1,600,000 people – almost 20 percent of Israel's population of eight million. This figure includes approximately 300,000 Arabs in East Jerusalem, under Israeli control since 1967. About 82.6 percent of the Arab population in Israel is Sunni Muslim (with a very small minority of Shia), another 9 percent is Druze, and around 9 percent is Christian (mostly Oriental Orthodox and

Catholic denominations).

What percentage favor an accommodation with Israel? It is simply really impossible to know. What is certain is that public opinion polls among them do not give recognition to the opportunism and fear of expressing dissident opinion that characterizes Arab political culture in the region. This means there are no real political parties, no free press or independent judiciary—hence the expression “The Arab Street,” i.e. the opinion shaped by the inability to confront the power of intimidation exercised by the prevailing majority and conventional wisdom.

Questions and issues of policy are not debated. They are manifested in street demonstrations, almost always orchestrated. In stable states with strong governments, the “people” support the government. A minority of Israeli Arabs has hitherto been able to resist the intimidation of Hamas and Hizbollah. More and more Israeli Arabs have made considerable progress in their careers and education through mastery of Hebrew and would be loath to give up this advantage in a monolingual, mono-cultural, mono-religious Palestinian Arab state.

The Novel – The Last Israelis by Noah Beck – the Truth of Fiction

Noah Beck’s novel is a thriller. It is a work of substantial literary merit and a clarion wake-up call to warn of the Armageddon scenario awaiting Israel, its neighbors and the entire world after Iran achieves even a single nuclear weapon. Most of the action occurs on board the Israeli nuclear submarine “Dolphin” whose crew reflects the reality of a multicultural diverse Israeli society today in which native born, immigrants, Holocaust survivors, religious, secular and atheist Jews with varying political opinions from far right to left serve along with non-Jews including a Druze, Christian Arab and the “gay” son of Vietnamese “boat refugees” who were rescued and granted asylum in Israel following the collapse of South Vietnam in 1977. Among the Jewish crew members is a “refusenik” who suffered for his Zionist convictions in the Soviet Union, and a black Ethiopian – the son of immigrants who crossed the Sudan by foot to reach Israel. All of them feel a common bond in the first line of defense of their homeland.

The plot is brilliantly portrayed with a degree of suspense and tension making the story a dramatic masterpiece. Can such diverse people get along on a voyage isolated from all contact with home and family, living in close quarters, and facing deadly threats and aware that Iran may have already unleashed a nuclear attack on Israel?

The Last Israelis is full of unexpected turns and twists. The crew of 35 men must survive or die together and determine what to do if Israel no longer exists. They must struggle with the

heaviest moral decision anyone in the military can face in the most claustrophobic environment imaginable. They are not stick figures or cartoon characters. We come to know them on a personal level and how their conflicting backgrounds must be resolved in a way to fulfil their objective and patriotic love of homeland.

What propelled Noah Beck to self-publish a book that has won such instant recognition and popularity? In 2012, he felt compelled to write the novel as a warning that time was running out for a solution to be found to the Iranian threat. He quit his job in the hope of contributing to and influencing the public debate. The result of that effort is *The Last Israelis*.

Beck paints each of the 35 crew members in realistic detail. Through them, we get a kaleidoscopic picture of Israeli society today. Each one has to make a decision – more traumatic than any made by a jury of twelve. He also has taken pains to interview Israeli sailors and acquaint himself with the technology, command structure and environment of a modern Israeli nuclear sub.

What about the Arab? Druze? The gay Vietnamese? Are their reactions and emotions any different from those defined and accepted as “Jews” by the sole religious criteria of the ultra-Orthodox? Their feelings and behavior bear out the conclusions in my own book ([Darling of the Left to Pariah State](#)” (see NER May 2012), subject to continual venomous attacks coming from those who call themselves “liberal” and consider themselves “progressive” and “morally sensitive,” i.e. the mainline churches, university faculties clamoring to boycott and “disinvest” from Israeli owned companies, the media elite and those on the Left side of the political spectrum who equate Israel with apartheid and cannot think outside the box of “identity politics” – i.e. your views must conform to the ethnic, racial, religious, gender or class of your ancestors (see [“The Left is Seldom Right](#) and