Is Israel repeating the Crusaders' fatal mistake? | Roy Casagranda | Déjà Vu

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> Roy Casagranda examines the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem in 1099 and its collapse under Saladin, drawing historical parallels to modern state-building projects in Palestine. He argues that the Crusaders' failure to create a lasting kingdom—driven by religious fanaticism, internal division, and economic collapse—mirrors patterns visible in later colonial and settler-state ventures.

SAŽETAK

This lecture traces the origins, trajectory, and collapse of the Crusader kingdom in Jerusalem, then extends the historical analysis to examine similar patterns in twentieth-century Zionism and the creation of Israel. Casagranda explores the factors that drove the Crusades: the integration of Viking warriors into European society, geographic envy of Muslim-held former Christian lands, and the symbolic religious framing of conquest. He details the brutal Crusader march across Anatolia and Syria, the siege and massacre at Jerusalem in 1099, and the establishment of a fragile Crusader state that survived only through raiding and pillage. The turning point came under Saladin, whose strategy of consistent mercy—freeing prisoners, protecting pilgrims, showing restraint after military victories—gradually undermined Crusader fanaticism and legitimacy. Casagranda then shifts to the late nineteenth century, examining how European anti-Semitism created an alliance between Christian Europe and Zionist thinkers seeking refuge in Palestine. He argues that the Zionist project replicated the Crusader model: a European settler state using ethnic cleansing, military occupation, and garrison-state logic to displace an indigenous population. Drawing parallels to South African apartheid, he suggests Israel faces an analogous crisis point and that withdrawal of Western support could force negotiation. Throughout, he emphasizes how both the Crusades and modern Israel demonstrate the ultimate failure of conquest-based projects when sustained only by external support and internal military coercion.

KLJUČNE PORUKE

> The Crusaders' primary weakness was internal division and the targeting of potential allies—they attacked the Fatimids (their former allies against the Seljuks)

because they were Muslim, demonstrating how religious fanaticism overrides strategic logic.

Religious extremism and the marriage of state power with religion create suffering and misery; the Crusader massacres at Antioch, Marrat, and Jerusalem exemplified terror as a tool of conquest.

The Crusader kingdom failed because it lacked economic viability, manpower, naval capacity, and a sustainable population base—forcing reliance on raiding and pillage, which destabilized the region and unified Muslim opposition.

Saladin's strategic innovation was not military genius but consistent mercy: freeing prisoners, protecting pilgrims, and showing restraint after victories, which convinced Crusaders their mission was unjustifiable and undermined their fanatical commitment.

The modern Israeli state replicates the Crusader model: a European settler population using ethnic cleansing (exemplified by Deir Yassin and the displacement of 78% of Palestine's Arab population), military occupation, and garrison-state logic to displace indigenous inhabitants.

Israel, like the Crusader states and apartheid South Africa, cannot sustain itself without external support—specifically from the United States and Germany; withdrawal of this support would force negotiation, as occurred with South Africa in the late 1980s.

Historically, Jewish communities flourished under Islamic and Ottoman rule (including under Saladin, who employed Jewish physicians like Maimonides); the modern conflict arose when Zionism shifted from seeking refuge to ethnic conquest and demographic replacement.

ČLANAK

Opening Framing: A Settler State in the Holy Land

A European settler state in the heart of Palestine, ruled over by religious zealots fueled by Western arms. A Muslim world too divided to fight back. These circumstances might sound familiar to observers of modern history, but this scenario actually describes events from 1099, when a Crusader army conquered Jerusalem and subjugated its population—Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike—for more than eighty-eight years. The Crusaders' reign ended in a single day when Saladin's army surrounded the city, crushed them, and opened Jerusalem to the wider world. The central question becomes: Why did the Crusaders fail to build a lasting kingdom in Jerusalem, and what might those lessons reveal about similar projects in later history?

The Appeal of History as a Window to Human Behavior

When asked about the origins of his fascination with history and storytelling, Roy Casagranda reflects on his childhood, when his father would tell him stories about his family and his own life. From that moment, he fell in love with stories and eventually evolved into a passion for history itself. Although he enjoys science fiction, Casagranda notes that science fiction must maintain an element of realism or at least an element of real enmity. History, by contrast, has no logic or rationale—it is completely insane. That very quality is what makes it fascinating to him. History is, in a sense, the ultimate unrestricted narrative because humans have no limit on how insanely they can behave or how ignorant they can be.

When confronted with the observation that history seems to have no rationality yet humans naturally seek patterns and guidance from the past, Casagranda expresses his long-standing resistance to the idea that history repeats itself. However, he acknowledges that it does. His immediate concern is 1933—the year when alarm bells about fascism should be ringing. Yet before exploring that modern moment, he wants to travel further back to examine the Crusades and then return to the early twentieth century to see what was happening in the world at that time.

Lessons from Six Hours of Crusade History

Casagranda's famous series of lectures on the history of the Crusades spans about six hours and includes many colorful details and figures. When examining the Crusades at that depth, several major lessons emerge. One of the biggest and most screaming lessons is the danger of allowing yourself to be pitted against one another. If there is a common cause and common interest, spending time backstabbing potential allies is a significant mistake. The other major lesson is that religious fanaticism creates suffering, misery, pain, and death. These two principles—unity among potential allies and the dangers of religious extremism—are the lessons the world should be learning from the Crusades, yet clearly is not.

When considering religious fanaticism from a European perspective, the Crusades represent the hallmark of this phenomenon: the marriage of state power and religion to create a force that seeks to conquer other parts of the world. Understanding where that driving force originates requires examining multiple factors at work during the Crusade period.

The Viking Problem: A Pressure Valve for European Warriors

One significant factor was the integration of Vikings into Christian Europe. The Vikings had become Christian, but Europe struggled to figure out how to integrate them into society. These were fighters—not only warriors but also merchants, fishermen, and dairy farmers—yet the old pagan raiding energy from their Viking days had not

dissipated. Europe sought a way to channel this excess energy. One solution was to send groups of people on Crusades, not all Normans or Vikings, but enough to serve as a pressure valve. There were too many nobles, too many knights, and too many warriors in European society, and their energy needed to be released elsewhere.

Geographic Envy and the Loss of Christian Lands

Another driving force behind the Crusades was what might be called geographic envy. After the Messenger Muhammad's death, Abu Bakr launched an army into the Persian Empire, which invaded Palestine and conquered Syria. This set off a series of events that, by 711, resulted in about half of what had been the Roman Empire falling under Muslim rule. In terms of population, Muslim rule extended over the majority of the world's Christians. Europe felt severed from that portion of Christendom and harbored a romantic desire to reclaim those lands. This drive to recover Christian territory became a powerful motivation, and Jerusalem eventually became the focal point of these ambitions.

The Religious War Frame and Rome's Request for Help

Jerusalem entered the crosshairs for two key reasons. First, the Roman Empire was collapsing and being hammered by the Turkish Seljuks. The Roman emperors, lacking a home of their own, traveled to Rome to seek help from the Roman Pope—a situation that proved embarrassing for an entity still called the Roman Empire that did not even control Rome. The Pope agreed to help, and in that moment, the conflict with the Seljuks became framed as a religious war. Once this religious framing took hold, Jerusalem became essential as a centerpiece, because if this was truly a religious war, then Christendom's holiest city had to be reclaimed.

It is worth noting that Christian pilgrims could visit Jerusalem anytime they wished; in fact, half the city was already Christian. There was no practical need to conquer the city if the goal was simply to allow Christians to visit or settle there. The city was never closed to Christian pilgrims. The driving force was symbolic—the belief that Christians should rule the city simply because they were Christian and it was their holy city, rather than accepting that Christians could visit, live, or worship there under existing conditions.

The Fatimid Alliance and Strategic Miscalculation

Historically, a tragedy unfolded in the lead-up to the Crusades. The Roman Empire was actually allied with the Fatimids, who ruled Egypt. Together, the Fatimids and Romans opposed the Seljuks and the Sultanate of Rum in Anatolia, which was pushing the Romans back. They were working as allies. However, as the Crusades were launching, the Fatimids seized Jerusalem from the Seljuks. When the Crusaders arrived, they were technically facing off against what had been their allies—a situation that should have

been obvious to the Crusaders. Yet they did not care and fought the Fatimids anyway, reasoning in their minds that Fatimids were still Muslims, so the distinction was irrelevant.

The Crusader March: From Peasant Rabble to Organized Force

When the Crusaders began their journey, the initial wave consisted of peasants who plundered Hungary, only to be put down by Hungarian forces. As Crusaders arrived in the Roman Empire, the Roman emperor—despite having requested help—found himself dealing with fighters who blurred the line between soldiers and brigands. He wanted them out of the empire as quickly as possible. When the Crusaders reached Antioch, the first major city they conquered, they established a precedent: they massacred the population. This became their method of conquest, repeated over and over. People foolishly continued to surrender, and despite the pattern, the Crusaders kept advancing, taking one city after another with terror preceding their arrival.

The Siege of Jerusalem and the Genoese Advantage

By the time the Crusaders reached Jerusalem, they lacked siege equipment and had no practical way to enter the city. Jerusalem's natural advantages were formidable: it contained springs within its walls, while the surrounding terrain was arid and desolate, making it extremely difficult to maintain a siege. The city even had small farm plots inside to supplement stored food, allowing it to withstand long sieges. The Crusaders surrounded the city and began negotiating with the Fatimid defenders, because they lacked the capability to capture it by force. The situation changed when the Genovese arrived with siege equipment. Genoa, an independent Italian city-state on the western coast of Italy competing with Venice for Mediterranean trade dominance, hauled siege equipment across land to the Crusader lines. With this new capability, the Crusaders engaged in serious fighting and attacked a section of the wall, though they could not finish the job because the Fatimids held the citadel.

The Fatimids, realizing they had been betrayed by their former allies, put up a fight. The Egyptian general chose to retreat to Ascalon to continue resistance rather than surrender completely, preserving his forces for strategic purposes. Once the Fatimids left Jerusalem, the Crusaders entered the city.

The Massacre and Religious Slaughter

What followed was systematic slaughter. The Crusaders went to the Muslim and Jewish quarters and began killing everyone—children and adults without distinction. Many Jewish and Muslim inhabitants, facing certain death, chose to seek refuge in places of worship. Jews went to synagogues and Muslims went to mosques. In the Jewish quarter, the Crusaders piled wood around the synagogues and set them on fire, burning people to death inside. In the Muslim quarter, the Crusaders wanted to

convert the mosques into churches, so they broke in and slaughtered the people inside.

Tancred's Failed Mercy

Among the Crusaders was a Norman from Italy named Tancred, a man of Viking descent who was known for thinking creatively and pushing boundaries. He was present at the massacres in Antioch and remained with the army all the way to Jerusalem. Unlike others, he eventually changed his mind about the massacring and began trying to save Muslims. At one point, he encountered a group of Muslims and ran to them with his banner. He told them it was his banner and instructed them that if any Crusaders approached, they should claim they were under his protection. He promised to find more Muslims and bring them to the banner as a safe gathering place. However, by the time he returned with reinforcements, the group was dead. The Crusaders had murdered them, and Tancred's banner lay on the ground, soaked in blood. His attempt at mercy had completely failed, yet he was proclaimed Prince of Galilee despite this tragedy.

The Kingdom of Jerusalem

Godfrey became the ruler of Jerusalem but notably refused the title of king, believing that only Jesus could be the true king of Jerusalem. He ruled for less than a year before being replaced by Baldwin the First. Baldwin, however, accepted the title of king and was formally crowned, establishing what became known as the Kingdom of Jerusalem. This was his way of clarifying that the Crusader state was not merely an extension of the Roman Empire, but an independent kingdom in its own right.

The Crusaders' Economic Struggle and Turn to Raiding

After the Crusaders successfully captured Jerusalem and established their kingdom, they found themselves in a precarious position. They had separated themselves from Roman Empire rule, but now faced a critical problem: they lacked the manpower, money, navy, and economic basis necessary for survival. The irony of their situation became apparent when they began building fortifications to control the region. To construct these forts, they brought in both Christian and Muslim Arabs as a cheap labor force—meaning the Arabs were literally building the very structures designed to prevent Arabs from returning to the region.

The Crusaders' economic difficulties became increasingly severe. Many resorted to raiding to supplement their income, a practice that infuriated their Muslim neighbors, who had essentially accepted the Crusader presence and wanted them to remain contained within their borders. The most notorious of these raiders was Renaud de Chatillon, who became ruler of Antioch and earned a fearsome reputation throughout the region.

Renaud de Chatillon: The Reckless Raider

Renaud de Chatillon was a special case—a man operating in a category unto himself. Early in his career, he decided it would be advantageous to attack Cyprus, plundering and pillaging the island. When the Roman army arrived in response, Renaud faced a critical moment: Cyprus technically belonged to the Roman Empire, and he technically served as the Roman governor of Antioch. The Roman emperor's representatives demanded an explanation, and Renaud prostrated himself before them, begging for mercy. The emperor granted it for reasons that remain unclear. Rather than restraining himself, Renaud continued his rampage and eventually was captured and imprisoned for years. Upon his release, he resumed his raids and continued to terrorize the region.

Renaud's ambitions reached a shocking extreme when he attempted to capture Medina itself. He sent a fleet into the Red Sea with the goal of landing near Yanbu and marching inland to Medina, where his objective was to desecrate the Prophet Muhammad's bones and carry them to Jerusalem. This audacious plan was discovered by the governor of Egypt and Saladin's brother, who dispatched the Egyptian fleet through the Mediterranean into the Red Sea, ultimately preventing the attack on Medina.

The Regional Backlash

The Crusader aggression extended far beyond Renaud's individual actions. King Amalric invaded Egypt five times, apparently obsessed with conquering the region. These repeated invasions, combined with Renaud's ongoing raids and the constant destabilization of the area, eventually prompted serious regional discussion. By the time Saladin rose to power in Egypt and began consolidating an army, the neighboring Muslim states had reached a consensus: something had to be done about the Crusader presence.

Saladin's Unexpected Rise to Power

Saladin emerged as a surprising figure to lead the Muslim response. He was not a Turk, but a Kurd, and his uncle Shirkuh—whose name means "Lion Mountain"—played a crucial role in his early career. Shirkuh was Saladin's opposite: short, heavyset, and primarily interested in fighting. He was also one of the coolest names ever. In contrast, Nureddin, the man Shirkuh served, was always well-dressed, constantly spoke about prayer, and conducted himself modestly.

Shirkuh convinced Nureddin to send soldiers on an expedition to Egypt. Saladin was extremely reluctant to participate in these campaigns. On the first expedition, he declared that even if made Sultan of Egypt, he would not go. Shirkuh responded simply: "It's not a request. This is an order." Shirkuh made three expeditions to Egypt, dragging Saladin along each time. On the third expedition, they not only defeated the

Crusaders but also defeated the Fatimid rulers. Shirkuh became the Wazir—the chief minister—of the Fatimid state.

Then came an unexpected turn: Shirkuh died after just one month in office, killed by tonsillitis. It was an inglorious end for such a formidable warrior. Suddenly, Saladin found himself in an extraordinarily precarious position. He was still young—around 31 years old—with no strong connections to the Turkish military establishment. Although Turkish soldiers and officers under his command liked and respected him, the Turkish army fully expected one of their own to become the next Wazir in place of Shirkuh.

Saladin's Ascent Through Political Maneuvering

A figure within the Egyptian bureaucracy approached Saladin with a political strategy. This man told him, "I'm going to use your weakness to get you elected Wazir. I'll go before the decision-makers and explain that you lack connections, aren't well-placed, are too young, and have no experience. Everyone will think you'll be easy to manipulate and won't conspire against you." Saladin agreed to this strategy, and it worked exactly as planned. Suddenly, this unknown outsider became the top leader of Egypt, shocking Nureddin, King Amalric, and everyone else who had expected a Turkish officer to fill the role.

Amalric, unwilling to accept this development, launched a fifth invasion of Egypt—this time with Roman support. Saladin responded with an all-in gamble, committing everything to defend Damietta against the combined Roman and Crusader forces. He succeeded in holding the city, and this victory effectively made him the Sultan of Egypt, though he could not openly claim the title since technically he served under Nureddin.

Tension Between Saladin and Nureddin

This created a new and growing tension. Saladin controlled Egypt, which had a larger population and greater economic resources than Syria. Logically, why should he remain subordinate to Nureddin? Over the next several years, the relationship between the two men deteriorated. Nureddin became convinced that Saladin had rebelled against him and began preparing an invasion of Egypt. The two territories were separated by Crusader-held land, so Nureddin's forces would have had to move through Crusader territory to reach Egypt. He gathered his officers and told them of his invasion plans, but before he could execute them, he died of tonsillitis—the same disease that had killed Shirkuh.

Almost simultaneously, King Amalric died as well. Saladin suddenly faced an extraordinary situation: his two greatest rivals were both gone. He now had to make a critical strategic choice: should he attack the weakened and leaderless Crusader states while they struggled to determine their next leader, or should he move against Syria?

Securing Syria and Consolidating Power

One of his long-time military commanders made the decision for him. This general controlled parts of Damascus and found himself caught in a power struggle between Damascus and Aleppo. He sent for Saladin, explaining that order needed to be restored and that Nureddin's son was too young to rule. The boy had effectively been kidnapped by a eunuch and taken to Aleppo. Saladin moved cavalry through Crusader territory, arriving in Damascus. Once he secured Damascus, it became merely a matter of time before he took control of all of Syria. This is how Saladin became the Sultan of both Egypt and Syria.

Saladin's Strategic Insight into the Crusaders

What followed demonstrated Saladin's most significant strategic insight. He must have asked himself a fundamental question: why were the Crusaders so effective and so committed to their cause? His conclusion, though speculative, appears to have been that they were acting out of trauma. Rather than responding with cruelty and slaughter—the typical approach of the era—Saladin chose a route of mercy that went beyond normal limits.

One of his first major battles as Sultan of Egypt and Syria was at the Horns of Hattin. The Crusaders fielded a young Baldwin the Fourth, known as the Leper King, whose illness left him physically compromised. Real command fell to Renaud de Chatillon, the very raider who had been recently freed from prison. Renaud's forces inflicted a devastating and humiliating defeat on Saladin, proving that despite his political acumen, he was not unbeatable in battle.

After this loss, Saladin apparently asked himself what made the Crusaders such formidable fighters. What sustained their fanaticism? What could be done to undermine their commitment? Eventually, Saladin and Baldwin the Fourth negotiated a peace agreement. However, Renaud could not restrain himself. He resumed his raids, attacking pilgrims traveling to Mecca and merchant caravans. His actions were sociopathic in their recklessness. Baldwin repeatedly tried to enforce the peace agreement, urging Renaud to respect their treaty obligations, but Renaud remained out of control.

When Saladin brought an army to besiege the fortress of Kerak, an unusual incident occurred. A wedding was taking place inside the fortress, and Renaud's wife took food from the wedding feast, left the fortress, and walked directly toward Saladin's camp with servants carrying the provisions. She walked right up to Saladin himself in what was clearly an extraordinary moment of personal diplomacy amid siege warfare.

A Moment of Humanity During the Crusades

There is a remarkable story from the period of the Crusades involving an act of unexpected mercy. A Crusader woman approaches carrying food from a wedding, asking Saladin if he could avoid firing artillery at a particular tower where a honeymoon would take place. Saladin accepts the food and orders his artillery men not to fire at that tower, focusing instead on other parts of the fortress. This gesture represented something profound—a moment of humanity in the midst of warfare. It was an act of kindness that cost Saladin nothing, yet it demonstrated something his enemies had not expected from him.

The woman who received this courtesy would eventually become the Queen of Jerusalem, though the full story of that connection is complex. What mattered more was what this moment seemed to reveal about Saladin's thinking. There was nothing Baldwin the Fourth could have done to stop him militarily, yet Saladin began to consider a different strategy. He appeared to realize that consistent mercy toward the Crusaders might calm them, whatever psychological baggage they carried. It was a calculated choice with a deeper purpose.

Strategic Mercy After Hattin

After the Battle of Hattin, Saladin demonstrated restraint in a way that was extraordinary for the era. He limited executions to the Turcopoles—Crusaders who fought using Turkish combat tactics, including horse archers—as well as the Knights Hospitallers and the Knights Templars. Later, at Jerusalem, he performed another act of mercy on a massive scale. This pattern became embedded in people's minds: if he was this merciful, how could he truly be an enemy? The legacy of Saladin in the historical record became one of mercy and chivalry, qualities that were remarkable during such a bloody period.

In that era, the typical practice was to either enslave prisoners or kill them. Freeing prisoners seemed illogical from a military standpoint—they would simply fight you again. Some rulers would ransom prisoners for money, but Saladin was doing something unprecedented: he was freeing them. This broke with all conventional warfare practices of the time.

The Execution of Renaud de Chatillon

There was one moment, however, when Saladin's mercy did not extend. After Hattin, both Renaud de Chatillon and Guy de Lusignan—the king of the Crusaders at the time of their defeat—were brought before Saladin. Saladin had ice water, which astonished the Crusaders; they could not comprehend how ice was available in that climate. He handed the ice water to Guy de Lusignan, who drank it. Then he offered it to Renaud

de Chatillon. But Saladin immediately said, "I did not offer it to him," and drew his sword, killing Renaud on the spot.

The logic behind this act was rooted in the laws of hospitality: if you offer a prisoner water or food, you cannot execute them. Because Saladin wished to execute Renaud, he had to act before any hospitality could establish protection. Guy de Lusignan, believing he was next, was terrified. But Saladin reassured him: "You drank water that I offered you. You are safe. Kings do not kill kings." This principle, stated clearly in that moment, governed Saladin's treatment of the Crusader ruler.

The Legacy of Mercy and the Peace Treaty

Though another hundred years of Crusades would follow, this period marked a turning point. When Richard the Lionheart eventually arrived and made a peace treaty with Saladin before departing, something significant occurred. Saladin died shortly after Richard left, yet the peace treaty held for another two and a half years. The treaty was not perfect—it lasted only three years—but it represented something crucial: the end of the Crusades as a driving force. The Crusaders had lost their fanatical edge.

This loss of fervor was directly tied to Saladin's mercy. He had told the Crusaders that they could come to Jerusalem whenever they wished, and he would protect pilgrims to ensure no one was harmed. "You never needed to do this to begin with," he had essentially told them. Many of the Crusaders began to question why they had embarked on this entire enterprise. Saladin was not a military genius in the traditional sense; he won through being human. He exhibited humility, dignity, and grace in ways that fundamentally changed how his enemies perceived both him and their mission.

Exceptions existed, such as Renaud de Chatillon, but the overall record that survived was one of mercy. This image of Saladin would endure for centuries. His eagles appeared on flags and coats of arms, his name invoked repeatedly in Muslim law and leadership. He became the benchmark by which people in that region imagined leadership—a figure who united through humanity rather than conquest alone. When people fantasized about future leaders who might come and trigger similar historical events, they thought of Saladin.

Eight Centuries of Jewish Persecution in Europe

For roughly eight hundred years after the Crusades, nothing of major significance occurred in the region. Then, in the late 1800s, a new idea emerged: Zionism. Its founder was Theodor Herzl, a Jewish, Austrian intellectual. The immediate catalyst for Herzl's thinking was the Dreyfus affair. Dreyfus was a Jewish officer in the French army when classified material was leaked. Rather than investigate properly, the French army scapegoated Dreyfus, tried him, found him guilty, and sent him to prison in French Guyana. There was clear evidence of his innocence, but he was sacrificed nonetheless.

This event broke something in Herzl. He concluded that there was no place for Jews in Europe, that they would never be treated as first-class citizens. His assessment, however, was rooted in a longer historical reality. For eight hundred years, Europe had perpetrated pogroms against Jewish communities. When the Crusades began, the Crusaders traveled along the Rhine River and attacked the Jewish German communities living there before proceeding to the Middle East. They inaugurated the Crusades with a rampage of murder against Jews. This was not incidental; it was how they began their holy war.

Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, whenever anything went wrong in Europe—an inflation crisis, a fire in the city—Jews were blamed and attacked. There was a relentless pattern of scapegoating and violence. So when Dreyfus was condemned despite obvious innocence, it was the culmination of this long history, though arguably a minor incident compared to the horrors that had preceded it. What struck Herzl was not the severity of Dreyfus's case, but the impossibility it represented. He concluded that Jews needed a homeland outside Europe, a place they could call their own.

The Birth of Zionism and European Anti-Semitism

When Herzl's idea of Zionism spread, the answer seemed obvious to many: Palestine. That was where Jews had originated; it was natural to return there. But what happened next was revealing about European attitudes. Powerful figures in Europe—and activists who were not in power but shared their views—were largely Christian and held deeply anti-Semitic beliefs. They saw Zionism as a solution to a problem they had: the presence of Jews in Europe. Their thinking was cynical: "We don't want Jews in Europe. You're right that they should leave. This is a great solution. We hate you, but we can pretend we like you and help you fulfill your goals."**

**In that moment, anti-Semitism and Zionism formed an alliance. They had a common cause: the removal of Jewish communities from Europe. This occurred decades before the rise of Hitler and the Holocaust, which was essentially the final and most devastating of the eight-hundred-year persecution of Jews in Europe.

Jewish Life Under Islamic and Ottoman Rule

What was often overlooked in this narrative was that Jews had thrived in the Middle East. Under Arab rule, under Turkish rule, under Persian rule, Jewish communities had prospered. The Jewish community in Isfahan had been established for approximately twenty-five centuries by the time of Theodor Herzl. Saladin himself had two Jewish physicians, including Maimonides, the greatest Jewish philosopher of the medieval period, and another physician named Ibn Umayya. The Kingdom of Granada had once had a Jewish Wazir. The Jewish community in the Middle East had done well. By

contrast, the Jewish community in Europe had been constantly persecuted and subjugated.

In this context, it made sense to consider Palestine as a destination. The disconnect arose when the plan shifted from seeking refuge to one of conquest: conquering Palestine, ethnically cleansing it, and creating a Jewish-only state. This transformation was where the confusion and conflict originated.

The Crusader Dream Persists

At the time when Zionism was emerging, the question arose whether the idea of Crusade—the notion that Christendom and Europe had a claim to the Holy Land—was still alive. The answer was yes. Two entities hold observer status in the United Nations: the Palestinian Authority and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, which is the continuation of the Crusader order. Though the Crusaders have no vote in the UN, their presence as an observer demonstrates the persistence of this historical claim, even though that dream had been put down centuries earlier.

When World War One erupted, Arabs rebelled against Ottoman rule, and the British and French cynically supported them. The European powers had taken a map and divided up the Ottoman Empire like a Thanksgiving turkey. For Britain, acquiring Palestine was significant: King Richard the Lionheart had never successfully taken Jerusalem. Now, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the British saw an opportunity to fulfill what they viewed as Richard's unfinished dream. They were reclaiming Jerusalem.

The British Mandate and Contradictions

The Arabs had rebelled with British assistance against the Ottomans, expecting independence. Instead, they were defeated. France took control of Lebanon and Syria, while Britain took Palestine. A French general, Charles, visited Saladin's tomb and kicked it, declaring, "We're back, Saladin." This was not subtle; from the French perspective, this was unquestionably a Crusade. The British and French protested otherwise, but the symbolism was unmistakable.

Palestine became a British mandate. By this point, Britain had also signed the Balfour Declaration, essentially promising this land to European Jews. The British were playing both sides, but their primary interest was clear: they did not want to lose Jerusalem. This was their dream realized. After World War Two, it was apparent that Britain would lose India and much of its empire, but Jerusalem seemed worth holding onto. However, the situation was more complicated than the British anticipated.

Jewish terrorist organizations began committing acts of terrorism in Palestine, attempting to break British will to maintain control. These early Zionist groups, particularly those that would eventually create the state of Israel, knew that violence

would be necessary to achieve their goals. The birth of the state would be violent—this was understood from the beginning.

The Problem of Demographic Reality

By 1947, when the UN created Israel by vote, the Zionists owned only 7% of Palestine. They faced a fundamental problem: they had legal deed to only a fraction of what they sought. The UN allocation gave them 55% of Palestine while assigning 45% to Palestinians, but the population was overwhelmingly Palestinian. The question became how to make this arrangement work, and the answer, as the speaker suggests, came from examining the playbook of the United States and the Crusades. Israel's thinking was clear: a large Arab population would foment rebellion, so something had to change.

Ethnic Cleansing and Demographic Shift

When Israel invaded in 1948, the Deir Yassin massacre triggered a panic among Palestinians, causing mass flight. The majority of the population in Gaza and the West Bank today are actually refugees or internal refugees—people displaced from other parts of Palestine rather than indigenous to their current locations. Instead of Israel ending up with the UN-allocated 55% of Palestine, it ultimately controlled 78%, having carved out an additional 23%, or roughly a quarter of the territory. The stories emerging from places like Yassin became horrific examples that spread to other towns and cities. As Palestinians heard these accounts, they faced an agonizing choice: stay and face unknown horrors, or leave.

The speaker draws a parallel to early Crusader conquests, which similarly relied on terror as a tool for territorial gain. Cities like Antioch and Marrat exemplified this approach. In both cases—the Crusaders and Israel—European populations arrived and ethnically cleansed existing inhabitants using large-scale violence.

Shock and Incomprehension

One critical factor that hampered Arab response was shock. The Palestinian population, along with Jordanians, Egyptians, and Syrians, could not comprehend the scale and cruelty of the Israeli plan. This paralysis through shock mirrors what occurred during the Crusades: the Arabs simply could not believe the scale of the Crusader invasion and did not know how to respond. This inability to grasp the magnitude of what was happening left populations unable to mount effective resistance.

The Garrison State Model

The Zionist settlers who arrived in Palestine had just emerged from two world wars, making them experienced soldiers. This military background became foundational to

how the state of Israel understood itself—as a garrison state. The Crusader states operated under a similar logic: essentially, they were armies without a land. Both Israel and the Crusader states took land and became something different, yet both remained fundamentally military enterprises. Israel institutionalized this with mandatory military service for both men and women. The country cannot escape its need to be constantly at war, much as the Crusader states were trapped in perpetual conflict. This is not incidental; it is inherent to how these entities were formed and sustained.

Parallels with South Africa

The speaker invokes the apartheid state of South Africa as the most illuminating modern parallel. The government that created apartheid was elected in 1948, with the first apartheid law taking effect in 1949—the same year Israel was established. This timing is remarkable given that the world had just witnessed the horrors of ethnic cleansing during World War Two. Yet both states emerged in this post-war moment with policies of ethnic domination. The unspoken logic seemed to be: such practices were acceptable if the perpetrators were white and the victims were brown or black. The speaker asks directly: how is what Israel did to Palestine different from what Germany did to Poland? He concludes he cannot see a meaningful distinction.

South Africa's apartheid system soon led to regional conflict. By the 1960s, South Africa found itself in exhausting warfare—the border war—fighting in Namibia, Angola, and Zambia for twenty years. This pattern describes Israel's trajectory as well. Israel has spent decades bombing Lebanon and Syria, invaded Lebanon in 1978, withdrew, invaded again in 1982 and remained until 2000 when Hezbollah drove them out, invaded again in 2006, and invaded once more in 2024. The cycle repeats. Similarly, Israel fought multiple wars against Egypt—not five like King Amalric of the Crusader kingdoms, but a pattern of recurrence nonetheless. Israel captured the Sinai Peninsula, shut down the Suez Canal, and occupied Sinai for sixteen years. These recurring themes and parallels extend across centuries.

The Moment of Recognition

The speaker expresses hope that Israel is approaching its own critical turning point—what he calls its "1987 moment" or its "1192 moment." In 1192, Richard the Lionheart and Saladin reached a settlement (negotiated through intermediaries, as Richard and Saladin never actually met). In 1987, the South African government began secret negotiations with the African National Congress, realizing they had reached a point where they could not continue. A crucial factor was that the United States had finally stopped funding South Africa. Without the flow of economic and political support from Europe and America, South Africa could not sustain its model. It needed European trade and Western support—the very networks that had enabled the apartheid state.

The speaker identifies a "birds of a feather" dynamic among South Africa, Israel, and the United States: these were settler colonies designed to grind down native populations. There was considerable sympathy between them. However, Reagan, despite his documented racism—evidenced by recorded conversations with Nixon referring to Africans as "monkeys"—eventually faced pressure from his own Republican Party. The party finally told him there was no path to save South Africa.

Shifting Opinion in the West

The United States may be heading in a similar direction. The speaker points to growing resistance on the right in America, in Hollywood, and among Gen Z populations questioning why the country supports what they frame as Israel's genocide of Palestinians. Israelis themselves are questioning the state's trajectory, with large numbers of Israelis leaving the country permanently. The Jewish community in the United States has also begun to see the situation clearly, recognizing it as harmful to everyone involved. The Jewish people will carry this legacy forever. The speaker, who is part German and whose family left Austria in 1904, reflects that even those not directly responsible for historical atrocities—he was not part of the Holocaust—still bear shame for what their people did. Such damage and trauma cannot be erased within a few generations.

The Trap of Unprocessed Trauma

The speaker's hope rests on the idea that Israelis will eventually become exhausted and that support from Germany and the United States—the only reasons Israel continues to operate—will diminish. If these powers cut off support, Israel would be forced to the negotiation table and make a deal. He notes that when Israeli leadership today justifies Western support, they employ the language of "civilizational" defense, invoking the idea of Judeo-Christian civilization. Yet the speaker points out a historical irony: Christians and Jews were never on the same side. Even under the Roman Empire, Romans brutalized Jewish populations. The concept of a "Judeo-Christian" tradition is a recent invention, originating from the Zionist movement to restructure history and religion in ways that would resonate with uninformed Western audiences.

Historical Jewish Communities Destroyed

Historically, Jews had homes throughout the Middle East. There were wonderful, massive communities in Morocco, Iraq, Yemen, and Egypt. What Israel has done, in another tragedy, is destroy these communities. The speaker visited Morocco in 2018, going synagogue to synagogue to mourn the loss of the Moroccan Jewish community. In Essaouira, they encountered a renovated synagogue that also functioned as a museum. When the speaker's wife asked a Muslim curator why the Moroccan government spent millions maintaining these synagogues for a largely absent Jewish population, the woman replied: "We're waiting for them to come home. They were

taken from us. Morocco can never be whole until they come back. And we're waiting. We're going to keep these synagogues operating. We'll never give up on them."

#Crusades and medieval conquest #Saladin and Islamic military strategy #Religious fanaticism and state power #Zionism and settler colonialism #Ethnic cleansing and displacement #Israeli-Palestinian conflict #Apartheid South Africa parallels #European anti-Semitism and Jewish history #Garrison states and military occupation

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