



The ethnic cleansing of Arabic Jews

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ASHLEY PERRY , THE JERUSALEM POST

Israel is perhaps the least efficient "ethnic cleanser" in the history of mankind, calumnies to the contrary notwithstanding.

In 1947 some 740,000 Palestinians lived in the British Mandate for Palestine. Today, the Arab residents of the West Bank and Gaza, together with Arab citizens of Israel, comprise a total of over five million Palestinians (altogether over nine million people worldwide refer to themselves as Palestinian.)

Using a popular population growth rate equation, the Palestinian growth rate has been calculated as close to double that of Asia and Africa over a comparable period of time.

Drazen Petrovic defines ethnic cleansing as "a well-defined policy of a particular group of persons to systematically eliminate another group from a given territory." By this definition, only one type of ethnic cleansing has occurred in the Arab-Israeli conflict - that of the Jews of Asia and North Africa. Whereas before 1948 there were nearly 900,000 Jews living in Arab lands, by 2001 only 6,500 remained.

THOSE WHO claim Israel carried out ethnic cleansing of Arabs can point to no official command to that effect. Jewish ethnic cleansing from Arab lands, on the other hand, was often official state policy.

Jews were formally expelled from many areas in the Arab world. The Arab League released a statement urging Arab governments to facilitate the exit of Jews from Arab countries, a resolution which was carried out through a series of punitive measures and discriminatory decrees that made it untenable for Jews to remain in their native lands.

On May 16, 1948, *The New York Times* recorded a series of measures taken by the Arab League to marginalize and persecute the Jewish residents of Arab League member states. It reported on the "text of a law drafted by the Political Committee of the Arab League, which was intended to govern the legal status of Jewish residents of Arab League countries. It provides that, beginning on an unspecified date, all Jews except citizens of non-Arab states would be considered 'members of the Jewish minority state of Palestine.' Their bank accounts would be frozen and used to finance resistance to 'Zionist ambitions in Palestine.' Jews believed to be active Zionists would be interned and their assets confiscated."

IN 1951, the Iraqi government passed legislation that made affiliation with Zionism a felony and ordered "the expulsion of Jews who refused to sign a statement of anti-Zionism." This pushed tens of thousands of Jews to leave Iraq, while much of their property was confiscated by the state.

In 1967, many Egyptian Jews were detained and tortured, and Jewish homes confiscated. In Libya that year, the government "urged the Jews to leave the country temporarily," permitting each to take one suitcase and the equivalent of \$50.

In 1970, the Libyan government issued new laws confiscating all the assets of Libya's Jews, issuing in their stead 15-year bonds. But when the bonds matured, no compensation was paid. Libyan leader Muammar al-Gaddafi justified this on the grounds that "the alignment of the Jews with Israel, the Arab nations' enemy, has forfeited their right to compensation."

These are just a few examples of what would become common measures throughout the Arab world - not to mention the pogroms and attacks on Jews and their institutions that drove a major part of the Jewish exodus.

THE ECONOMIC suffering on the part of the two refugee populations was equally lopsided.

According to the newly released study "The Palestinian Refugee Issue: Rhetoric vs. Reality" by former CIA and State Department Treasury official Sidney Zabudoff in the *Jewish Political Studies Review*, the value of assets lost by both refugee populations is strikingly uneven.

Zabudoff uses data from John Measham Berncastle, who in the early 1950s, under the aegis of the newly formed United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), undertook the task of calculating the assets of the Palestinian refugees. Zabudoff calculates that their assets were worth \$3.9 billion in today's currency.

The Jewish refugees, being greater in number and more urban, had almost double those assets.

On top of this equation, it must be taken into account that Israel returned over 90 percent of blocked bank accounts, safe deposit boxes and other items belonging to Palestinian refugees during the 1950s. This considerably diminishes the UNCCP calculations.

THESE FACTS are conveniently forgotten or not publicized, leaving the way open for Israel-bashers like Exeter University history Prof. Ilan Pappé to omit any mention of the Middle East's greatest ethnic cleansing.

However, a few recent events are clearing the world community's perception of this history. On April 1, the US Congress adopted Resolution 185, which for the first time recognizes Jewish refugees from Arab countries. It urges that the president and US officials participating in Middle East discussions ensure that any reference to Palestinian refugees "also include a similarly explicit reference to the resolution of the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab countries."

Just as importantly, the first-ever hearing in the British parliament on the subject of Jewish refugees from Arab countries takes place today in the House of Lords. It will be convened by Labor MP John Mann and Lord Anderson of Swansea, a joint briefing organized by Justice for Jews from Arab Countries (JJAC) in association with the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Greater recognition of the refugee issue and the ethnic cleansing of Jews from the wider Arab world will bring clearer definition of the area's history to a greater number of people.

A people cannot be said to have been "ethnically cleansed" from an area in which it has grown at double the rate of its geographic neighbors. On the other hand, a people that lost more than 150 times its number from an area over the course of a few decades can make a very strong case for having undergone ethnic cleansing.

The writer, a political analyst who has worked with many organizations including the Israel Prime Minister's Office, is the editor of the Middle East Strategic Information project.

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