

THE BIRTH OF THE
PALESTINIAN REFUGEE
PROBLEM REVISITED

Benny Morris

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

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Conclusion

The first Arab–Israeli war, of 1948, was launched by the Palestinian Arabs, who rejected the UN partition resolution and embarked on hostilities aimed at preventing the birth of Israel. That war and not design, Jewish or Arab, gave birth to the Palestinian refugee problem.

But the displacement of Arabs from Palestine or from the areas of Palestine that would become the Jewish State was inherent in Zionist ideology and, in microcosm, in Zionist praxis from the start of the enterprise. The piecemeal eviction of tenant farmers, albeit in relatively small numbers, during the first five decades of Zionist land purchase and settlement naturally stemmed from, and in a sense hinted at, the underlying thrust of the ideology, which was to turn an Arab-populated land into a State with an overwhelming Jewish majority. And the Zionist leaders' thinking about, and periodic endorsement of, 'transfer' during those decades – voluntary and agreed, if possible, but coerced if not – readied hearts and minds for the denouement of 1948 and its immediate aftermath, in which some 700,000 Arabs were displaced from their homes (though the majority remained in Palestine).

But there was no pre-war Zionist plan to expel 'the Arabs' from Palestine or the areas of the emergent Jewish State; and the Yishuv did not enter the war with a plan or policy of expulsion. Nor was the pre-war 'transfer' thinking ever translated, in the course of the war, into an agreed, systematic policy of expulsion. Hence, in the war's first four months, between the end of November 1947 and the end of March 1948, there were no preparations for mass expulsion and there were almost no cases of expulsion or the leveling of villages; hence, during the following ten months, Haganah and IDF units acted inconsistently, most units driving out Arab communities as a matter of course while others left (Muslim as well as Christian and Druse) villages and townspeople in place; and hence, at war's end, Israel emerged with a substantial Arab minority, of

150,000 (a minority that today numbers one million – and still constitutes (a restive and potentially explosive) one fifth of the State's population).

At the same time, largely as a result of Arab belligerence and the Yishuv's sense of siege, fragility and isolation, from early April 1948 on, 'transfer' was in the air and the departure of the Arabs was deeply desired on the local and national levels by the majority in the Yishuv, from Ben-Gurion down. And while this general will was never translated into systematic policy, a large number of Arabs were expelled, the frequency of expulsions and the expulsive resolve of the troops increasing following the pan-Arab invasion of mid-May 1948 that threatened the Yishuv with extinction. Yet, still, in July and again in October–November 1948, IDF troops continued to leave Arab communities in place; much depended on local circumstances and on the individual Israeli company, battalion and brigade commanders.

But if a measure of ambivalence and confusion attended Haganah\IDF treatment of Arab communities during and immediately after conquest, there was nothing ambiguous about Israeli policy, from summer 1948, toward those who had been displaced and had become refugees and toward those who were yet to be displaced, in future operations: Generally applied with resolution and, often, with brutality, the policy was to prevent a refugee return at all costs. And if, somehow, refugees succeeded in infiltrating back, they were routinely rounded up and expelled (though tens of thousands of 'infiltrators' ultimately succeeded in resettling and becoming Israeli citizens). In this sense, it may fairly be said that all 700,000 or so who ended up as refugees were compulsorily displaced or 'expelled'.

Yet it is also worth remembering that a large proportion of those who became refugees fled their towns and villages not under direct Israeli threat or duress. Tens of thousands – mostly from well-to-do and elite families – left the towns in the war's early months because of the withdrawal of the British administration, the war-filled chaos that followed and the prospect of Jewish rule. And, in the following months, hundreds of thousands fled not under Jewish orders or direct coercion though, to be sure, most sought to move out of harm's way as Zionist troops conquered town after town and district after district. And most probably believed that they would be returning home in a matter of months if not weeks, perhaps after the Arab armies had crushed Israel.

From the first, the AHC and the local National Committees opposed the exodus, especially of army-aged males, and made efforts to block it. But they were inefficient and, sometimes, half-hearted. And, at the same time, they actively promoted the depopulation of villages and towns. Many thousands of Arabs – women, children and old people, from villages around Jerusalem, the Coastal Plain and the Jezreel and Jordan valleys, and from various towns – left, well before battle was joined, as

a result of advice and orders from local Arab commanders and officials, who feared for their safety and were concerned that their presence would hamper their militiamen in battle. Indeed, already months before the war the Arab states and the AHC had endorsed the removal of dependents from active and potential combat zones. And, starting in December 1947, Arab officers ordered the complete evacuation of specific villages in certain areas, lest their inhabitants 'treacherously' acquiesce in Israeli rule or hamper Arab military deployments. There can be no exaggerating the importance of these early, Arab-initiated evacuations in the demoralisation, and eventual exodus, of the remaining rural and urban populations.

The creation of the Palestinian refugee problem was almost inevitable, given the geographical intermixing of the Arab and Jewish populations in what is a minute country (10,000 sq. miles), the history of Arab-Jewish hostility over 1881-1947, the overwhelming opposition on both sides to a binational state, the outbreak and prolongation of the war for Israel's birth and survival, the major structural weaknesses of Palestinian Arab society, the depth of Arab animosity towards the Yishuv and Arab fears of falling under Jewish rule, and the Yishuv's fears of what would happen should the Arabs win or of what would befall a Jewish State born with a very large and hostile Arab minority.

The exodus unfolded in four or four and a half stages, closely linked to the development of the war itself. It began during December 1947-March 1948 - the first stage - with the departure of many of the country's upper and middle class families, especially from Haifa and Jaffa, towns destined to be in, or at the mercy of, the Jewish state-to-be, and from neighbourhoods of Jewish west Jerusalem. Flight proved infectious. Household followed household, neighbour, neighbour, street, street and neighbourhood, neighbourhood (as, later, village was to follow neighbouring village, in domino clusters). The prosperous and educated feared death or injury in the ever-spreading hostilities, the anarchy that attended the gradual withdrawal of the British administration and security forces, the brigandage and intimidation of the Arab militias and irregulars and, more vaguely but generally, the unknown, probably dark future that awaited them under Jewish or, indeed, Husseini rule. Some of these considerations, as well as a variety of direct and indirect military pressures, also caused during these months the evacuation of most of the Arab rural communities in the predominantly Jewish Coastal Plain.

Most of the upper and middle class families, who moved from Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, Ramle, Acre and Tiberias to Damascus, Nablus, Amman, Beirut, Gaza and Cairo, probably thought their exile would be temporary. They had the financial wherewithal to tide them over; many had wealthy relatives and accommodation outside the country. The urban masses and the *fellahin*, however, had nowhere to go, certainly not

in comfort. For most of them, flight meant instant destitution; it was not a course readily adopted. But the daily spectacle of abandonment by their 'betters,' with its concomitant progressive closure of businesses, shops, schools, law offices and medical clinics, and abandonment of public service posts, led to a steady attrition of morale, a cumulative sapping of faith and trust in the world around them: Their leaders were going or had gone; the British were packing. They were being left 'alone' to face the Zionist enemy.

Daily, week in, week out, over December 1947, January, February and March 1948, there were clashes along the 'seams' between the two communities in the mixed towns, ambushes in the fields and on the roads, sniping, machine-gun fire, bomb attacks and occasional mortaring. Problems of movement and communication, unemployment and food distribution intensified, especially in the towns, as the hostilities drew out. There is probably no accounting for the mass exodus that followed without understanding the prevalence and depth of the general sense of collapse, of 'falling apart' and of a centre that 'cannot hold', that permeated Arab Palestine, especially the towns, by April 1948. In many places, it would take very little to nudge the masses to pack up and flee.

Come the Haganah (and IZL-LHI) offensives and counteroffensives of April-June, the cumulative effect of the fears, deprivations, abandonment and depredations of the previous months, in both towns and villages, overcame the natural, basic reluctance to abandon home and property and flee. As Palestinian military power was swiftly and dramatically crushed and the Haganah demonstrated almost unchallenged superiority in successive battles, Arab morale cracked, giving way to general, blind, panic or a 'psychosis of flight',¹ as one IDF intelligence report put it. This was the second - and crucial - stage of the exodus. There is a clear, chronological, one-to-one correspondence between the Jewish offensives and the flight of the bulk of the population from each town and district attacked.

Often, the fall of villages harmed morale in neighbouring towns (*vide* the fall of Khirbet Nasir ad Din and Arab Tiberias). Similarly, the fall of the towns - Tiberias, Haifa, Jaffa, Beisan, Safad - and the flight of their population generated panic in the surrounding hinterlands: After Haifa, came flight from Balad al Sheikh and Hawassa; after Jaffa, Salama, Kheiriya and Yazur; after Safad, Dhahiriya Tahta, Sammu'i and Meirun. For decades the villagers had looked to the towns for leadership; now, they followed them into exile.

If Jewish attack directly and indirectly triggered most of the exodus up to June 1948, a small but significant proportion was due to direct expulsion orders and to psychological warfare ploys ('whispering propaganda') designed to intimidate people into flight. Several dozen villages were ordered or 'advised' by the Haganah to evacuate during

April–June. The expulsions were usually from areas considered strategically vital and in conformity with Plan D, which called for clear main lines of communications and border areas. But, in general, Haganah and IDF commanders were not forced to confront the moral dilemma posed by expulsion; most Arabs fled before and during battle, before the Israeli troops reached their homes and before the Israeli commanders were forced to confront the dilemma.

Moreover, during April–July, Arab commanders and the AHC ordered the evacuation of several dozen villages as well as the removal of dependents from dozens more. The invading Arab armies also occasionally ordered whole villages to depart, so as not to be in their way.

In April–May, and indeed, again in October–November, the ‘atrocity factor’ played a major role in flight from certain areas. Villagers and townspeople, prompted by the fear that the Jews, if victorious, would do to them what, in the reverse circumstances, victorious Arab fighters would most probably have done (and, occasionally, did, as in the Etzion Bloc in May) to the Jews, took to their heels.² The actual atrocities committed by the Jewish forces (primarily at Deir Yassin) reinforced such fears considerably, especially when magnified loudly and persistently in the Arab media for weeks thereafter. Apart from the 20-odd cases of massacre, Jewish troops often randomly killed individual prisoners of war, farm hands in the fields and the occasional villager who had stayed behind. Such actions could not but amplify flight. There were also several dozen cases of rape, a crime viewed with particular horror in Arab and Muslim societies. The fear of rape apparently figured large in the Arab imagination, and this may in part account for the despatch of women and girls out of active or potential combat zones and, in some measure, for the headlong flight of villages and urban neighbourhoods from April on.

To what extent was the exodus up to June 1948 a product of Yishuv or Arab policy?

To be sure, the Haganah’s adoption and implementation during December 1947 – March 1948 of a retaliatory strategy against Arab militia bases – meaning villages and urban neighbourhoods – resulted in civilian flight. But the strategy, to judge from the documentation, was designed to punish, harm and deter militiamen, not to precipitate an exodus.

In early March, the prospect of pan-Arab invasion gave rise to Plan D. It accorded the Haganah brigade and battalion-level commanders *carte blanche* to completely clear vital areas of Arab population. Many villages served as bases for bands of irregulars; most had militias that periodically assisted the irregulars in attacks on settlements and convoys. During April–May, Haganah units, usually under orders from HGS, carried out elements of Plan D, each unit interpreting and implementing the plan as it saw fit in light of local circumstances. The Haganah

offensives were in large measure responses to Arab attacks. In general, the Jewish commanders preferred to completely clear the vital roads and border areas of Arab communities – Allon in Eastern Galilee, Carmel around Haifa and in Western Galilee, Avidan in the south. Most villagers fled before or during the fighting. Those who stayed put were almost invariably expelled.

During April–June, neither the political nor military leaderships took a decision to expel ‘the Arabs’. As far as the available evidence shows, the matter was never discussed in the supreme decision-making bodies. But it was understood by all concerned that, militarily, in the struggle to survive, the fewer Arabs remaining behind and along the front lines, the better and, politically, the fewer Arabs remaining in the Jewish State, the better. At each level of command and execution, Haganah officers, in those April–June days when the fate of the State hung in the balance, simply ‘understood’ what was required in order to survive. Even most Mapam officers – ideologically committed to coexistence with the Arabs – failed to ‘adhere’ to the party line: Conditions in the field, tactically and strategically, gave precedence to immediate survival-mindedness over the long-term desirability and ethos of coexistence.

The Arab leadership inside and outside Palestine probably helped precipitate flight in the sense that, while doctrinally opposed to the exodus, it was disunited and ineffectual, and had decided, from the start, on no fixed, uniform policy and gave the masses no consistent guidelines for behaviour, especially during the crucial month of April. The records are incomplete, but they show overwhelming confusion and disparate purpose, ‘policy’ and implementation changing from week to week and area to area. No guiding hand or central control is evident; no overarching ‘policy’ was manifest.

During the months before April 1948, especially in March, the flight of the middle and upper classes from the towns provoked condemnations from local NCs and the AHC (while NC members, and their families, were themselves busy fleeing their homes or already living abroad). But little was effectively done to prevent flight. And the surrounding Arab states did little, before late March, to block the entry of the evacuees into their territory. The rich and middle class arrived in Nablus, Amman, Beirut, and Cairo in a trickle and were not needy; it seemed to be merely a repeat of the exodus of 1936–1939. No Arab country effectively closed its borders though, at the end of March, Syria and Lebanon severely curtailed the issue of entry visas. The Husseinis were probably happy that many Opposition-linked families were leaving Palestine. The AHC, almost all its members already dispersed abroad, issued no forceful, blanket, public condemnations of the exodus, though occasionally it implored army-aged males to stand, or return, and fight.³ At the local level, some NCs (in Haifa and Jerusalem, for example) and local commanders tried to stem the exodus, even setting up people’s courts

to try offenders and threatening confiscation of the deportees' property. However, enforcement seems to have been weak and haphazard; the measures proved largely unavailing. And bribes could overwhelm any regulation. Militiamen and irregulars often had an interest in encouraging flight – they needed the houses for quarters and there was money to be made out of it (deportees paid to have their empty homes 'protected', abandoned houses were looted, and money was extorted from deportees).

Regarding April–May and the start of the main stage of the exodus, I have found no evidence to show that the AHC or the Arab leaders outside Palestine issued blanket instructions, by radio or otherwise, to the inhabitants to flee. However, in certain areas, women, children and old people continued to be evacuated and specific villages were instructed to leave, lock, stock and barrel. Moreover, it appears that Husseini supporters in certain areas ordered or encouraged flight out of political calculation, believing that they were doing what the AHC would want them to do. Haifa affords illustration. While it is unlikely that Husseini or AHC members from outside Palestine instructed the Haifa Arab leadership on 22 April to opt for evacuation rather than surrender, local Husseini supporters, led by Sheikh Murad, certainly did. They were probably motivated by fear that staying in Haifa would be interpreted as acquiescence in Jewish rule and 'treachery' and by the calculation that Palestinian misery, born of the exodus, would increase the pressure on the Arab states to intervene. Local and AHC leaders believed that the evacuation was temporary and that a mass return would soon follow. In any event, the AHC encouraged the continuing exodus after it had begun. The case of Haifa in late April – early May is supremely instructive about the ambivalence of the national and local Palestinian leaderships toward the exodus.

The Arab states, apart from appealing to the British to halt the Haganah offensives and charging that the Jews were expelling Palestine's Arabs, seem to have taken weeks to digest and understand what was happening. They did not appeal to the Palestinian masses to leave, but neither, in April, did they publicly enjoin the Palestinians to stay put. Perhaps the politicians in Damascus, Cairo and Amman, like Husseini, understood that they would need to justify their armed intervention – and the exodus, presented as a planned Zionist expulsion, afforded such justification.

But the dimensions and burden of the problem created by the exodus, falling necessarily and initially upon the shoulders of the host countries, quickly persuaded the Arab states – primarily Jordan – that it were best to halt the floodtide. The AHC, too, was apparently shocked by the ease and completeness of the exodus. Hence the spate of appeals to the Palestinians in early May by Jordan, the AHC and the ALA to stay put or, if already in exile, to return home. But, given the ongoing hostilities and

the expectation of a dramatic increase in warfare along the fronts, the appeals had little effect: The refugees, who had just left active combat zones, were hardly minded to return to them, especially on the eve of the invasion. Besides, in most areas the Haganah physically barred a return. Later, after 15 May, the pan-Arab invasion and the widespread fighting made any thought of a return impracticable. At the same time, the invasion substantially increased the readiness of Haganah commanders to clear border areas of Arab communities. (And given the narrow, elongated shape of the new State, every area was in effect a border area.)

Already in April–May, on the local and national levels, the Yishuv's leaders began to contemplate the problem of a return: Should the refugees be allowed back? The approach of the First Truce in early June raised the problem as one of the major political and strategic issues facing the new State. The Arab states, on the local level on each front and in international forums, had begun pressing for Israel to allow back the refugees. And the UN Mediator, Bernadotte, had vigorously taken up the cause.

However, politically and militarily it was clear to most Israelis that a return would be disastrous. Militarily – and the war, all understood, was far from over – it would mean the introduction of a large, potential Fifth Column; politically, it would mean the reintroduction of a large, disruptive, Arab minority. The military commanders argued against a return; so did political common sense. Both were reinforced by strident anti-return lobbying by settlements around the country.

The mainstream national leaders, led by Ben-Gurion, had to confront the issue within two problematic political contexts – the international context of future Israeli–Arab relations, Israeli–United Nations relations and Israeli–United States relations, and the local context of a coalition government, in which the Mapam ministers (and, less insistently, other ministers) advocated future Jewish–Arab coexistence and a return of 'peace-minded' refugees after the war. Hence the Cabinet consensus of June–August 1948 was that there would be no return during the war and that the matter could be reconsidered after the hostilities. This left Israel's diplomats with room for manoeuvre and was sufficiently flexible to allow Mapam to stay in the government, leaving national unity intact.

On the practical level, from spring 1948, a series of developments on the ground increasingly precluded any possibility of a refugee return. These were an admixture of incidental, 'natural' processes and steps specifically designed to assure the impossibility of a return, including the gradual destruction of the abandoned villages, the destruction or cultivation and long-term takeover of Arab fields, the establishment of new settlements on Arab lands and the settlement of Jewish immigrants in abandoned villages and urban neighbourhoods.

The months between the end of the First Truce (8 July) and the signing of the Israeli–Arab armistice agreements in spring–summer 1949 were characterised by short, sharp Israeli offensives interspersed with long periods of ceasefire. In these offensives, the IDF beat the Jordanian and Egyptian armies and the ALA in the Galilee, and conquered large parts of the territory earmarked by the UN for a Palestine Arab state. During and after these battles in July, October–November and December 1948 – January 1949, something like 300,000 more Palestinians became refugees.

Again, there was no Cabinet or IDF General Staff-level decision to expel. Indeed, the July fighting (the ‘Ten Days’) – the third stage of the exodus – was preceded by an explicit IDF General Staff order to all units and corps to refrain from destruction of villages and expulsions without prior authorisation by the Defence Minister. The order was issued as a result of the cumulative political pressure during the summer by various softline ministers on Ben-Gurion and, perhaps, was never intended to be taken too seriously. In any event, it was largely ignored.

But the overarching operational orders for operations Dekel, Dani, Yoav and Hiram – the main July–November offensives that resulted in Arab displacement – did not include expulsory clauses. However, from July onwards, there was a growing readiness in the IDF units to expel. This was at least partly due to the feeling, encouraged by the mass exodus from Jewish-held areas to date, that an almost completely Jewish State was a realistic possibility. There were also powerful vengeful urges at play – revenge for the Palestinian onslaught on the Yishuv during December 1947 – March 1948, the pan-Arab invasion of May–June, and the massive Jewish losses. In short, the Palestinians were being punished for having forced upon the Yishuv the protracted, bitter war that had resulted in the death of one, and the maiming of two, in every 100 in the Jewish population. The Arabs had rejected partition and unleashed the dogs of war. In consequence, quite understandably, the Yishuv’s leadership – left, centre and right – came to believe that leaving in place a large hostile Arab minority (or an Arab majority) inside the State would be suicidal. And driving out the Arabs, it emerged, was easy; generally they fled at the first whiff of grapeshot, their notables and commanders in the lead. Ben-Gurion said that this revealed a collective lack of backbone. In general, the advancing Haganah and IDF units were spared the need to face morally painful decisions to expel communities; to a large degree, Arab flight let the commanders off the moral hook, though, to be sure, many were subsequently, at the very least, troubled by the need to confront, and repel, would-be returnees.

The tendency of IDF units to expel civilians increased just as the pressures on the remaining Arabs by their leaders inside and outside Palestine to stay put grew and just as their motivation to stand fast

increased. During the summer, the Arab governments intermittently tried to bar the entry of new refugees into their territory. The Palestinians were encouraged to stay in Palestine or to return to their homes. At the same time, those Palestinians still in their villages, hearing of the misery that was the lot of their exiled brethren and despairing of salvation and a reconquest of Palestine, generally preferred to stay put, despite the prospect of Israeli rule. After July, Arab resistance to flight was far greater than in the pre-July days. There was to be much less ‘spontaneous’ flight; villagers tended either to stay put or to leave under duress.

Ben-Gurion clearly wanted as few Arabs as possible in the Jewish State. From early on he hoped that they would flee. He hinted at this in February 1948 and said so explicitly in meetings in August, September and October. But no expulsion policy was ever enunciated and Ben-Gurion always refrained from issuing clear or written expulsion orders; he preferred that his generals ‘understand’ what he wanted. He probably wished to avoid going down in history as the ‘great expeller’ and he did not want his government to be blamed for a morally questionable policy. And he sought to preserve national unity in wartime.

But while there was no ‘expulsion policy,’ the July offensives were characterised by far more expulsions and, indeed, brutality than the first half of the war. Yet events varied from place to place. Ben-Gurion approved the largest expulsion of the war, from Lydda and Ramle, but, at the same time, IDF Northern Front, with Ben-Gurion’s authorisation, left mostly-Christian Nazareth’s population in place; the ‘Christian factor’ outgunned security and demographic concerns and was allowed to determine policy. And, in the centre of the country, three Arab villages sitting astride vital axes – Fureidis, Jisr az Zarka and Abu Ghosh – were allowed to stay, for economic and sentimental reasons.

Again, the IDF offensives in October–November – the fourth stage of the exodus – were marked by a measure of ambivalence in all that concerned the troops’ treatment of overrun civilian populations. In the south (‘Yoav’), where Allon was in command, almost no Arab civilians remained. Allon preferred Arab-clear rear areas and let his subordinates know what he wanted. In the north (‘Hiram’), where Carmel was in charge, the picture was varied. Many Arabs declined to budge, contrary to Ben-Gurion’s expectations. This was partly due to the fact that before October, the villagers had hardly been touched by the war or its privations. Again, Carmel’s hesitant, inexplicit expulsion orders, issued after the battles were over, contributed. So did the varied demographic make-up of the central-upper Galilee pocket. The IDF generally related far more benignly to Christians and Druse than to Muslims. Most Christian and Druse villagers stayed put and were allowed to do so. Many of the Muslim villagers fled; others were expelled. But many other Muslims – in Deir Hanna, ‘Arraba, Sakhnin, Majd al Kurum and other

villages – stayed put, and were allowed to stay. Much depended on specific local factors.

During the following months, with the Cabinet in Tel Aviv gradually persuaded by Arab rhetoric and actions that the conflict would remain a central feature of the Middle East for many years, the IDF was authorised to clear Arab communities from Israel's long, winding and highly penetrable borders to a depth of 5–15 kilometres. The result may be seen as 'stage four and a half' of the exodus. One of the aims was to prevent infiltration of refugees back to their homes. The IDF was also afraid of sabotage and spying. Early November saw a wave of IDF expulsions and transfers inland of villagers along the northern border. Some villagers, ordered out, were 'saved' by last-minute intervention by soft-line Israeli politicians. The following months and years saw other border areas cleared or partially cleared of Arab inhabitants.

In examining the causes of the Arab exodus from Palestine over 1947–1949, accurate quantification is impossible. I have tried to show that the exodus occurred in stages and that causation was multi-layered: A Haifa merchant did not leave only because of the weeks or months of sniping and bombings; or because business was getting bad; or because of intimidation and extortion by irregulars; or because he feared the collapse of law and order when the British left; or because he feared for his prospects and livelihood under Jewish rule. He left because of the accumulation of all these factors. And the mass of Haifaites who fled in his wake, at the end of April – early May 1948, did not flee only as a result of the Arab militia collapse and Haganah conquest of 21–22 April. They fled because of the cumulative effect of the elite's departure, the snipings and bombings and material privations, unemployment and chaos during the previous months; and because of their local leaders' instructions to leave, issued on 22 April; and because of the follow up orders by the AHC to continue departing; and because of IZL and Haganah activities and pressures during the days after the conquest; and because of the prospect of life under Jewish rule.

The situation was somewhat more clear-cut in the countryside. But there, too, multiple causation often applied. Take Qaluniya, near Jerusalem. There were months of hostilities in the area, intermittent shortages of supplies, severance of communications with Arab Jerusalem, lack of leadership or clear instructions about what to do or expect, lack of sustained help from outside, rumours of impending Jewish attack, Jewish attacks on neighbouring villages and reports of Jewish atrocities, and, finally, Jewish attack on Qaluniya itself (after most of the inhabitants had left). Again, evacuation was the end product of a cumulative process.

Even in the case of a Haganah or IDF expulsion order, the actual departure was often the result of a process rather than of that one act. Take Lydda, largely untouched by battle before July 1948. During

the first months of the war, there was unemployment and skyrocketing prices, and the burden of armed irregulars. In April–May, thousands of refugees from Jaffa and its hinterland arrived in the town, camping out in courtyards and on the town's periphery. They brought demoralisation and sickness. Some wealthy families left. There were pinprick Haganah raids. There was uncertainty about Abdullah's commitment to the town's defence. In June, there was a feeling that Lydda's 'turn' was imminent. Then came the attack, with bombings and shelling, Arab Legion pullout, collapse of resistance, sniping, massacre – and expulsion orders. Lydda was evacuated.

What happened in Palestine/Israel over 1947–1949 was so complex and varied, the situation radically changing from date to date and place to place, that a single-cause explanation of the exodus from most sites is untenable. At most, one can say that certain causes were important in certain areas at certain times, with a general shift in the spring of 1948 from precedence of cumulative internal Arab factors – lack of leadership, economic problems, breakdown of law and order – to a primacy of external, compulsive causes: Haganah/IDF attacks and expulsions, fear of Jewish attacks and atrocities, lack of help from the Arab world and the AHC and a feeling of impotence and abandonment, and orders from Arab officials and commanders to leave. In general, throughout the war, the final and decisive precipitant to flight in most places was Haganah, IZL, LHI or IDF attack or the inhabitants' fear of imminent attack.

During the second half of 1948, international concern about the refugee problem mounted. Concern translated into pressure. This pressure, initiated by Bernadotte and the Arab states in the summer of 1948, increased as the months passed, as the number of refugees swelled, as their physical plight became more acute and as the discomfort of their Arab hosts grew. The problem moved to the forefront of every discussion of the Middle East crisis and the Arabs made their agreement to a settlement, nay, even to meaningful negotiations, with Israel contingent on a solution of the problem by repatriation.

From summer 1948, Bernadotte, and from the autumn, the United States, pressed Israel to agree to a substantial measure of repatriation as part of a comprehensive solution to the refugee problem and the conflict. In December, the UN General Assembly endorsed the 'peace-minded' refugees' 'right of return'. But, as the abandoned villages fell into decrepitude or were bulldozed or settled, and as more Jewish immigrants poured into the country and were accommodated in abandoned Arab houses, the physical possibility of substantial repatriation grew more remote. Allowing back Arab refugees, Israel argued, would commensurately reduce Israel's ability to absorb Jewish refugees from Europe and the Middle East. Time worked against repatriation. Bernadotte and the United States wanted Israel to make a 'gesture' in the coin of repatriation, to get peace negotiations off the ground.

In the spring of 1949, the thinking about a 'gesture' matured into an American demand that Israel agree to take back 250,000, with the remaining refugees to be resettled in the neighbouring countries. America threatened and cajoled, but never with sufficient force or conviction to persuade Tel Aviv to accede.

In the spring, in a final major effort, the United Nations and United States engineered the Lausanne Peace Conference. Weeks and months of haggling over agenda and secondary problems led nowhere. The Arabs made all progress contingent on Israeli agreement to mass repatriation. Under American pressure, Tel Aviv reluctantly agreed, in July, to take back 65,000–70,000 refugees (the '100,000 Offer') as part of a comprehensive peace settlement. But by summer 1949, public and party political opinion in Israel – in part, due to conditioning by the government – had so hardened against a return that even this minimal offer was greeted by a storm of public protest and howls within Mapai. In any case, the sincerity of the Israeli offer was never tested; the Arabs rejected it out of hand. The United States, too, regarded it as insufficient; as too little, too late.

The insufficiency of the '100,000 Offer', the Arab states' continuing rejectionism, their unwillingness to accept and concede defeat and their inability to publicly agree to absorb and resettle most of the refugees if Israel agreed to repatriate the rest, the Egyptian rejection of the 'Gaza Plan', and America's unwillingness or inability to apply persuasive pressure on Israel and the Arab states to compromise – all meant that the Arab–Israeli impasse would remain and that Palestine's displaced Arabs would remain refugees, to be utilised during the following years by the Arab states as a powerful political and propaganda tool against Israel. The memory or vicarious memory of 1948 and the subsequent decades of humiliation and deprivation in the refugee camps would ultimately turn generations of Palestinians into potential or active terrorists and the 'Palestinian problem' into one of the world's most intractable. And at the core of that problem remain the refugees.

ENDNOTES

1. HIS-AD, 'The Emigration . . . 1.12.47-1.6.48', 30 June 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.13 (1).
2. Aharon Cohen, no enemy of the Arabs, at the time quoted two observations. An English sergeant told an American newsman on the day of Jaffa's surrender: 'The Arabs were frightened to death when they imagined to themselves that the Jews would do to them half of what they would have done to the Jews were the situation reversed'; and an educated Haifa Arab said, according to Cohen: 'The Arabs always thought that they [themselves] were a primitive, wild and uncivilised people, capable of anything, while the Jews [they thought] were a civilised people, able to restrain their impulses. But in face of the Deir

Yassin atrocity, [the Arabs] began to think that this was not exactly the picture. And because at that time [i.e., April] the Jews were winning the military struggle, the flight began' (Cohen, 'In Face of the Arab Evacuation', undated but late May 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.11 (8), published in *Ahdut Ha'avodah*, June 1948).

3. HIS-AD, 'The Emigration . . . 1.12.47-1.6.48', 30 June 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.13 (1).