

ES  
es

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON  
ISRAELI HISTORY

The Early Years of the State

Edited by  
Laurence J. Silberstein

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS  
New York & London

## CHAPTER 3

---

### *The Origins of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*

BENNY MORRIS

The Palestinian refugee problem was born of war, not by design, Jewish or Arab. It was largely a by-product of Arab and Jewish fears and of the protracted, bitter fighting that characterized the first Israeli-Arab war. In part, it was the creation of deliberate actions by Jewish military commanders and politicians; in smaller part, it was the result of actions by Arab military commanders and politicians.

The emergence of the problem was almost inevitable, given the geographical intermixing of the Arab and Jewish populations; the history of Arab-Jewish hostility during 1917-47; the resistance on both sides to a binational state and Arab rejection of partition; the outbreak and prolongation of the war for Israel's birth and survival; 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 and, alternately, what would happen to a Jewish state born with a very large, potentially or actively hostile Arab minority in its midst.

Moreover, Palestinian Arab society suffered from a complex of interlocking structural weaknesses that, during 1948's trial of combat, facilitated the rapid socio-political disintegration that underlay the exodus. Among those weaknesses were a largely apolitical or politically primitive populace; enervating regionalism and village-centeredness; a mind-set of reliance on outsiders for succor; widespread illiteracy; a lack of representative norms and self-governing institutions; almost no internal communal taxation; a relatively small, selfish, and disunited elite and middle class, lacking in a national service orientation or tradition; the absence of a large, unified military organization; a lack

ORIGINS

of weap  
physical  
Sinc  
have do  
Arab ex  
planned  
official  
exodus  
and on  
leaders,  
way, as  
docume  
archive  
tions at  
by whi  
1947-4

Th  
obviou  
9-18  
inextri  
To the  
that o  
period

Th  
with th  
familie  
the me  
of we  
house  
hood,  
village  
ever-s  
withd  
briga  
more  
await  
famil  
varie  
mont

## Refugee Problem

war, not by design, Jewish  
and Jewish fears and of  
ized the first Israeli-Arab  
actions by Jewish military  
it was the result of actions

most inevitable, given the  
Jewish populations; the  
1947; the resistance on both  
of partition; the outbreak  
and survival; the depth of  
fears of falling under  
ould happen should the  
n to a Jewish state born  
ile Arab minority in its

red from a complex of  
; 1948's trial of combat,  
tion that underlay the  
y apolitical or politically  
l village-centeredness; a  
espread illiteracy; a lack  
institutions; almost no  
l, selfish, and disunited  
service orientation or  
ary organization; a lack

of weaponry and of a weapons-making capability; and the absence of physical preparations for war (trenches, shelters, and fortifications).

Since 1948, two mutually exclusive, all-embracing explanations have dominated discussion of the Palestinian exodus. The traditional Arab explanation has been that the *yishuv* in 1948 carried out a pre-planned, systematic expulsion of the country's Arab inhabitants. The official Jewish explanation, somewhat more complex, has been that the exodus occurred "voluntarily"—that is, not under Jewish compulsion—and on the orders or at the behest of Palestinian and external Arab leaders, in order to tarnish emergent Israel's image and to clear the way, as it were, for the invading Arab armies. However, the massive documentation now available in recently opened Israeli and British archives definitively demonstrates that both these single-cause explanations are fallacious or at least grossly insufficient and that the process by which some 700,000 Arabs departed Jewish/Israeli territory over 1947–49 was multi-staged, varied, and complex.

The exodus occurred in four clearly identifiable stages, with an obvious chronology: December 1947–March 1948; April–June 1948; 9–18 July 1948; and October–November 1948. These stages were inextricably linked to the "stages" and development of the 1948 war. To them one may add the series of population transfers and expulsions that occurred along Israel's borders during the immediate postwar period, November 1948–July 1949.<sup>1</sup>

The Palestinian Arab exodus began in December 1947–March 1948 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 Jewish-dominated districts of western Jerusalem. Flight proved infectious. Household followed household; neighbor followed neighbor; street, street; and neighborhood, neighborhood (as, later, village was to follow neighboring village). 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, Husayni rule (the Husayni family and its supporters). Some of these considerations, as well as a variety of direct and indirect military pressures, also during these months, caused the almost complete evacuation of the Arab rural

communities of the coastal plain, which was predominantly Jewish and which was to be the core of the Jewish state.

Most of the upper- and middle-class families who moved from Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, Ramle, Acre, and Tiberias to Nablus, Amman, Beirut, Gaza, and Cairo probably thought their exile would be temporary. These families had the financial wherewithal to tide them over; many had wealthy relatives and accommodations outside the country. The urban masses and the *fellahin* (peasants), however, had nowhere to go, certainly not in comfort. For them, flight meant instant destitution; it was not a course readily adopted. But the daily spectacle of abandonment by their "betters," the middle and upper classes, with the concomitant progressive closure of businesses, schools, law offices, and medical clinics and the abandonment of civil service and municipal posts led to a steady attrition of morale and a cumulative sapping of faith and trust in the world around them: their leaders were going or had gone; the British were packing. They had been left "alone" to face the Zionist enemy. Palestinian urban society began to disintegrate.

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 continued.

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," that permeated Arab Palestine, especially the towns, by April 1948. In many places, it would take very little to induce the inhabitants to pack up and flee.

With the Haganah and IZL-LHI (Irgun Zvai Leumi—Lohamei Herut Yisrael) offensives of April–May, 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 go into exile. The second and principal stage of the exodus unfolded. As Palestinian military power was swiftly and dramatically crushed and the Haganah demonstrated almost unchallenged superiority in successive conquests, Arab morale cracked, giving way to general, blind panic, to a "psychosis of flight," as one Israel Defense Forces (IDF) intelligence report put it.

Towns fell first—T populations fled. The hinterlands: after Haifa, Hawassa; after Jaffa, Dhahiriya Tahta, Samir looked to the towns for into exile.

If Jewish attacks did exodus up to June 1948 was due to direct Jewish a site and to Jewish whispering propagand intimidate inhabitants a dozen villages to evacuate usually from areas covered Plan D, which called for areas.

Given Palestinian two communities, and frontiers, there were either (or both) of the "strategically vital" or standard Haganah a remaining villagers (u site already evacuated occupying force wanted undermanned Haganah populated Arab villages

Moreover, for mid-early summer of 1948 Committee (AHC) issued. This included the Arab evacuation of villages reasons—to clear the underlay orders to remove women and irregulars' command the lower Galilee, and acquiesce in Israeli

which was predominantly Jewish and Arab state.

These families who moved from Jaffa, Tiberias to Nablus, Amman, Beirut, their exile would be temporary. The withdrawal to tide them over; many expulsions outside the country. The towns, however, had nowhere to go, flight meant instant destitution; it was the daily spectacle of abandoned villages and upper classes, with the businesses, schools, law offices, and staffs of civil service and municipal government and a cumulative sapping of morale: their leaders were going or they had been left "alone" to face a society began to disintegrate.

In December 1947, January, February, along the "seams" between the two communities in the fields and on the roads, bomb attacks, and occasional disruption of communication, unemployment, especially in the towns, as the

for the mass exodus that followed the depth and the general sense of a beleaguered Arab Palestine, especially in the border areas, it would take very little to trigger a mass flight.

The Haganah's *Lohamei Herut* (Freedom Fighters) and the cumulative effect of the fears, expulsions of the previous months, the natural, basic reluctance to go into exile. The second and third. As Palestinian military power and the Haganah demonstrated successive conquests, Arab morale collapsed, to a "psychosis of flight," as intelligence reports put it.

Towns fell first—Tiberias, Haifa, Jaffa, Beisan, Safad—and their populations fled. The panic then affected the surrounding rural hinterlands: after Haifa came the flight from Balad ash Sheikh and Hawassa; after Jaffa, Salama, Al 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 the townspeople into exile.

If Jewish attacks directly and indirectly triggered most of the Arab exodus up to June 1948, a small but significant proportion of that flight was due to direct Jewish expulsion orders issued after the conquest of a site and to Jewish psychological warfare ploys (*ta'amulat lahash* or whispering propaganda, as it was called by the Haganah) designed to intimidate inhabitants into leaving. The Haganah ordered more than a dozen villages 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.

Given Palestinian topography, the geographic intermingling of the two communities, and the nature of the partition plan and Palestine's frontiers, there were few Arab villages that did not, arguably, fall into either (or both) of these headings: most villages could be seen as either "strategically vital" or as lying within "border areas." Also, it was standard Haganah and IDF practice to round up and expel the remaining villagers (usually old people, widows, and cripples) from each site already evacuated by most of its inhabitants, mainly because the occupying force wanted to avoid having to leave behind a garrison. An undermanned Haganah/IDF understandably preferred empty to populated Arab villages behind its front lines.

Moreover, for military and political reasons, during the spring and early summer of 1948, Arab local commanders and the Arab Higher Committee (AHC) issued orders to evacuate close to two dozen villages. This included the Arab Legion order of 13 May for the temporary evacuation of villages north and east of Jerusalem for strategic reasons—to clear the prospective battle area. Military reasons also underlay orders to some local National Committees and villages to remove women and children to safer areas. Later in May, Arab irregulars' commanders intimidated villagers into leaving seven sites in the lower Galilee, apparently because they feared the villagers would acquiesce in Israeli rule.

In April–May and indeed again in October, the "atrocities factor" played a major role in precipitating flight from certain areas of the country. Arab villagers and townspeople took to their heels, prompted by the fear that the Jews, if victorious, would do unto them what, in the reverse circumstances, victorious Arab fighters would have done to defeated Jews (and did, occasionally, as in May in the Etzion Bloc, a bloc of four *kibbutzim* between Jerusalem and Hebron). The actual atrocities committed by the Jewish forces (primarily at Deir Yassin) reinforced such fears considerably, especially when amplified and magnified loudly and persistently in the Arab media, particularly by AHC spokesmen, for weeks thereafter.

To what extent was the Arab exodus up to July a product of *yishuv* or Arab policy? The answer is as complex as was the situation on the ground. Up to the beginning of April 1948, there was no *yishuv* plan or policy to expel the Arab inhabitants of Palestine, either from the area destined for Jewish statehood or from those areas lying outside it. The Haganah adopted a forceful retaliatory strategy against suspected bases of Arab irregular bands which triggered a certain amount of flight. But it was not a strategy designed to precipitate civilian flight.

The prospect and need to prepare for the invasion gave birth to the Haganah's Plan D, prepared in early March. It was not a grand plan of expulsion (as Arab propagandists, such as Walid Khalidi, have depicted it). However, it gave the Haganah brigade and battalion-level commanders carte blanche to completely clear vital areas; it allowed the expulsion of hostile or potentially hostile Arab villages (and "potentially hostile" was, indeed, open to a very liberal interpretation). Many villages were bases for bands of irregulars; most villages had armed militias and could serve as bases for hostile bands.

During April–May, the local Haganah commanders, sometimes with specific instruction from the Haganah General Staff, carried out elements of Plan D, each interpreting and implementing the plan in his area as he saw fit and in relation to the prevailing local circumstances. In general, the commanders saw fit to completely clear the vital roads and border areas of Arab communities—Allon in eastern Galilee, Carmel around Haifa and western Galilee, Avidan in the south. Most of the villagers fled before or during the fighting. Those who initially stayed put were almost invariably expelled.

There was never, during April–June, any national-political or General Staff decision to expel "the Arabs" from the Jewish state's areas. There was no "plan" or policy decision. The matter was never discussed

in the supr  
by all con  
Arabs ren  
politically.  
At each le  
April–Jun  
"understo  
required.  
ideologic  
"adhere"  
strategica  
the long-

The  
precipita  
no fixed  
Palestini  
about ho  
April.  
confusio  
week an

Dur:  
from the  
local lev  
Beirut i  
repeat c  
happy  
leaving.

No  
the exo  
world, i  
to IDF  
out of l  
of the l  
local ir  
people  
proper  
weak  
irregu  
be ma  
aband

the "atrocious factor" certain areas of the their heels, prompted to them what, in the could have done to the Etzion Bloc, a (Bron). The actual rily at Deir Yassin) then amplified and dia, particularly by

a product of *yishuv* the situation on the was no *yishuv* plan ne, either from the eas lying outside it. y against suspected certain amount of itate civilian flight. on gave birth to the as not a grand plan alid Khalidi, have and battalion-level areas; it allowed the es (and "potentially rpretation). Many villages had armed

ers, sometimes with Staff, carried out ting the plan in his ocal circumstances. lear the vital roads in eastern Galilee, in the south. Most Those who initially

ational-political or Jewish state's areas. was never discussed

in the supreme, political, 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 the military and political exigencies of survival required. Even most Mapam (generally Ahdut Ha'avodah) 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 a mentality of immediate survival over the long-term desirability of coexistence.

The Arab leadership inside and outside Palestine probably helped precipitate the exodus in the sense that it was disunited, had decided on no fixed uniform policy vis-à-vis the civilian evacuation, and gave the Palestinians no consistent, hard-and-fast guidelines and instructions about how to act and what to do, especially during the crucial month of April. The records are incomplete, but they show overwhelming confusion and disparate purpose, with "policy" changing from week to week and area to area. No guiding hand or central control is evident.

During the first months, the flight of the middle and upper classes from the towns provoked little Arab interest, except at the immediate local level affected. The rich families arrived in Nablus, Amman, and Beirut in a trickle and were not needy. It seemed to be merely a repeat of the similar exodus of 1936–39. The Husaynis were probably happy that many of the wealthy, opposition-linked families were leaving.

No Arab government closed its borders or otherwise tried to stem the exodus. The AHC, its members already dispersed around the Arab world, issued no blanket condemnation of the flight though, according to IDF intelligence, it tried during these early months to halt the flow out of Palestine, especially of army-age males. At the local level, some of the National Committees (in Haifa and Jerusalem, for example) and local irregulars' commanders tried to fight the exodus, even setting up people's courts to try offenders and threatening to confiscate the property of the departees. However, enforcement seems to have been weak and haphazard; the measures proved largely ineffective. The irregulars often had an interest in encouraging flight as money was to be made out of it (in the form of "departure taxes" or lootable abandoned dwellings).

As to April and the start of the main stage of the exodus, I have found no evidence to show that the AHC issued blanket instructions, by radio or otherwise, to Palestine's Arabs to flee. However, AHC and Husayni supporters in certain areas may have ordered or encouraged flight for various reasons and may have done so, on occasion, in the belief that they were doing what the AHC wanted or would have wanted them to do. Haifa affords an illustration of this.

While it is unlikely that Husayni or the AHC from outside Palestine on 22 April instructed the Haifa Arab leadership to opt for evacuation rather than surrender, Husayni's local supporters, led by Sheikh Murad, did so. The lack of AHC and Husayni orders, appeals, or broadcasts *against* the departure during the following week-long Haifa exodus indicates that Husayni and the AHC did not dissent from their supporters' decision. Silence was consent. The absence of clear, public instructions and broadcasts for or against the Haifa exodus over 23–30 April is extremely instructive concerning the ambivalence of Husayni and the AHC at this stage towards the exodus.

The Arab states, apart from appealing to the British to halt the Haganah offensives and charging that the Haganah was 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 demand that the Palestinians stay put. Perhaps the politicians in Damascus, Cairo, and Amman, like Husayni, understood that they would need a good reason to justify armed intervention in Palestine on the morrow of the British departure—and the mass exodus, presented as a planned Zionist expulsion, afforded such a reason.

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 Transjordan—that it was best to halt the flood tide. The AHC, too, was apparently shocked by the ease and completeness of the uprooting of the Arabs from Palestine. Hence the spate of appeals in early May by Transjordan, the AHC, and various Arab leaders to the Arabs of Palestine to stay put or, if already in exile, to return to their homes.

But the appeals, given the war conditions along the fronts, had little effect: the refugees, who had just left an active or potential combat zone, were hardly inclined to return to it, and especially not on the eve of the expected pan-Arab invasion. Besides, in most areas the Haganah physically barred a return. Later, the Arab invasion of 15 May made

any thought of increased the re of Arab commu

Already in military and po refugee return First Truce in political and st states, on the l begun pressing Nations' Media up the cause.

However, most Israelis t war, all unders of a large, po reintroduction The military common sense by Jewish settl

The main confront the international Nations relati political conti ministers adv "peace-minder 16 June was t matter could diplomats wit allow Mapam intact.

On the developments a future refu incidental, "n the impossibi the gradual d or cultivation



in stage of the exodus, I have issued blanket instructions, by which they were ordered to flee. However, AHC and the military have ordered or encouraged them to do so, on occasion, in the absence of AHC wanted or would have been a demonstration of this.

The AHC from outside Palestine encouraged leadership to opt for evacuation. Supporters, led by Sheikh Murad, issued orders, appeals, or broadcasts during week-long Haifa exodus. They did not dissent from their military. The absence of clear, public leadership during the Haifa exodus over 23-30 days; the ambivalence of Husayni during the exodus.

By urging the British to halt the evacuation, the Haganah was expelling the Jews to digest and understand the situation to the Palestinian masses to ensure that the Palestinians stay in Haifa, Cairo, and Amman, like the British had a good reason to justify the narrow of the British departure and a planned Zionist expulsion,

the problem created by the evacuation on the shoulders of the host countries—primarily Transjordan—was that the AHC, too, was apparently not in favor of the uprooting of the Arabs. The military in early May by Transjordan to the Arabs of Palestine to return to their homes.

Along the fronts, had little active or potential combat and especially not on the eve of the invasion, in most areas the Haganah's military invasion of 15 May made

any thought of a refugee return impracticable. And it substantially increased the readiness of Haganah commanders to clear border areas of Arab communities.

Already in April-May, on the local and national levels, the *yishuv's* military and political leaders began to contemplate the problem of a refugee return: should they be allowed back? The approach of the First Truce in early June raised the problem as one of the major political and strategic issues to be faced by the new state. The Arab states, on the local level on each front and in international forums, had begun pressing for Israel to allow the refugees back. And the United Nations' Mediator for Palestine, Folke Bernadotte, had vigorously taken up the cause.

However, politically and militarily, it was clear from the start 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 into the Jewish state. The military commanders argued against a return; so did political common sense. Both were reinforced by strident anti-return lobbying by Jewish 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 political context of a coalition government, in which the Mapam ministers advocated future Jewish-Arab coexistence and a return of "peace-minded" refugees after the war. Hence the cabinet consensus of 16 June 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 maneuvering and was sufficiently flexible to allow Mapam to stay in the government, thereby leaving national unity intact.

On the practical level, from the spring of 1948, a series of developments on the ground increasingly precluded any possibility of a future refugee return. The developments were an admixture of incidental, "natural" processes and steps specifically designed to assure the impossibility of a return. These developments and steps included the gradual destruction of the abandoned Arab 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 Arab villages and urban neighborhoods.

The second half of the war, between the end of the First Truce (8 July 1948) and the signing of the Israeli-Arab armistice agreements in the spring and summer of 1949, was characterized by short, sharp Israeli offensives interspersed with long stretches of cease-fire. In these offensives, the IDF defeated the Transjordanian and Egyptian armies and the Arab Liberation Army, and conquered large tracts of territory earmarked in 1947 by the United Nations for a Palestine Arab state. These offensives—primarily those in July 1948 in the north (Operation Dekel in the Nazareth area) and the center (Operation Dani in the Lydda-Ramle area); and those in October–November in the north (Operation Hiram in the Upper Galilee) and the south (Operation Yoav in the southern coastal plain and the northern Negev)—precipitated, respectively, the third and fourth waves of the exodus. These accounted for the flight of an additional 300,000 refugees from the Israeli-controlled parts of the country.

Again, during these offensives, there was no cabinet or IDF General Staff-level decision to expel. Indeed, the July fighting (the "Ten Days") was preceded by an explicit IDF General Staff directive to all units and corps to avoid destruction of Arab villages and expulsion of Arab communities without prior authorization by the Defense Minister. That order was issued as a result of the cumulative political pressure on Ben Gurion during the summer by the Mapam ministers and Bekhor Shalom Shitrit, the Minister of Minority Affairs.

But from July onwards, there was a growing readiness in the IDF units to expel. This was at least partly due to the political 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 Jewish losses and punishment for having forced upon the *yishuv* and its able-bodied young men the protracted, bitter battle. Generally, all that was needed in each successive newly conquered area was a little nudging.

The tendency of IDF units to expel Arab civilians increased just as the pressures on the remaining Arabs by leaders inside and outside Palestine to stay put grew, and just as their motivation to stay put increased. During the summer, the Arab governments intermittently tried to bar the entry of new refugees into their territory. The Palestinians were encouraged to remain in Palestine or to return to their homes.

At the same time, the of the misery that was the of the salvation and re generally preferred to stay Israeli rule. Staying put to flight in the second half days. Hence, there was m either to stay put or to le

Ben Gurion clearly v the Jewish state. He hop colleagues and aides in n But no expulsion policy : refrained from issuing cl that his generals "unders avoid going down in histc the Israeli government policy. In addition, he sc

Although there was 1 November offensives w indeed, brutality towards Yet events varied from p the largest expulsion of same time the IDF North at his behest, left Nazaret place. The "Christian fa the center of the country, Jisr az Zarka (along the Jerusalem)—were allow wishes of the military.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the IDF offen were marked by ambiva the overrun civilian popu command, almost no Ara to expel and let his subo where Moshe Carmel w Upper Galilee Arabs, c contrary to Ben Gurion' to the fact that before Oc the war or its privations

of the settlement of Jewish and urban neighborhoods.

At the end of the First Truce and Arab armistice agreements characterized by short, sharp outbreaks of cease-fire. In these Jordanian and Egyptian armies created large tracts of territory for a Palestine Arab state. In 1948 in the north (Operation Yiftach) and in the south (Operation Yoav) — precipitated, the exodus. These accounted for the refugees from the Israeli-

There was no cabinet or IDF General Staff directive to all units and orders and expulsion of Arab villages and the Defense Minister. That was the political pressure on Ben-Gurion and his ministers and Bekhor Shalom.

Following the readiness in the IDF due to the political feeling, held areas to date, that an alternative possibility. There were no reasons for Jewish losses and the IDF and its able-bodied young men, all that was needed in a little nudging.

Arab civilians increased just as the leaders inside and outside their motivation to stay put and governments intermittently into their territory. The decision to Palestine or to return to

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 the salvation and reconquest of Palestine by the Arab armies, generally preferred to stay put, even though facing the prospect of Israeli rule. Staying put was to be preferred to flight. Arab resistance to flight in the second half of 1948 was far greater than in the pre-July days. Hence, there was much less "spontaneous" flight: villagers tended either to stay put or to leave under duress.

Ben-Gurion clearly wanted as few Arabs as possible to remain in the Jewish state. He hoped to see them flee. He said as much to his colleagues and aides 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 done. He wished to avoid going down in history as the "great expeller" and he did not want the Israeli government to be implicated in a morally questionable policy. In addition, he sought to preserve national unity in wartime.

Although there was no "expulsion policy," the July and October–November offensives were characterized by more expulsions and, indeed, brutality towards Arab civilians than in the first half of the war. Yet events varied from place to place. In July, Ben-Gurion approved the largest expulsion of the war from Lydda and Ramle; but at the same time the IDF Northern Front, with Ben-Gurion's agreement if not at his behest, left Nazareth's population, which was mostly Christian, in place. The "Christian factor" was allowed to determine policy, and in the center of the country, three Arab villages—Al-Fureidis and Khirbet Jisr az Zarka (along the Haifa-Tel Aviv road), and Abu Ghosh (near Jerusalem)—were allowed to stay, the politicians overriding the clear wishes of the military.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the IDF offensives of October in the Galilee and the south were marked by ambivalence concerning the troops' attitude towards the overrun civilian population. In the south, where Yigal Allon was in command, almost no Arab civilians remained, anywhere. Allon tended to expel and let his subordinates know what he wanted. In the north, where Moshe Carmel was in charge, the picture was varied. Many Upper Galilee Arabs, overrun in Operation Hiram, did not flee, contrary to Ben-Gurion's expectations. This was probably due in part to the fact that before October the villagers had hardly been touched by the war or its privations.

The varied religious makeup of the population contributed to the mixed picture. 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 Muslim villagers—for example, in Deir Hanna, Arraba, Sakhnin, and Majd al Kurum—stayed put, and were allowed to stay. Much depended on specific local factors.

During the following months, with the cabinet in Tel Aviv increasingly persuaded that Israeli-Arab enmity would remain a central feature of the Middle East for many years, the IDF was authorized to clear Arab communities from Israel's long, winding, and highly penetrable borders to a depth of five to fifteen kilometers. 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 or transfers of villagers inland along the northern border. Some villagers, ordered out, were "saved" by last-minute intervention by "soft-hearted" 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 1947-49, accurate quantification is impossible. I have tried to show that the exodus occurred in stages and that causation was multi-layered: a Haifa merchant who fled to Beirut in March 1948 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. A Haifa laborer, who fled with his family at the end of April 1948, left because he had endured months of strife, unemployment, a breakdown of administration and law and order, and intermittent material privations; had seen his "betters"—the rich and privileged, doctors, lawyers, teachers, civil servants—leave in a steady stream during the preceding months; had noted Arab incompetence and weakness and relative Jewish prowess; had seen the Haganah's swift demolition of Arab military power on 21-22 April; had been traumatized by the Jewish mortar barrages during the conquest; had noted the swift Arab collapse and his leaders' decision to quit the city; had witnessed the panic flight of his neighbors, friends, and relatives; and feared for his

future unde  
him should  
Haifa.

The de  
more clear-  
column ap  
here, too,  
Jerusalem.  
shortages c  
of leaderst  
or reports  
itself (by v  
tion was th

Even i  
departure  
In Lydda,  
unemploy  
war and t  
April, thou  
town, car  
brought (  
There wa  
defense, :  
imminent  
Legion p  
expulsion

What  
and varie  
to place,  
is untena  
in certain  
1948 fro  
leadershi  
predomi  
Haganah  
atrocities  
impoten  
comman  
precipita  
inhabita

tion contributed to the far more benignly to t Christian and Druse . Many of the Muslim any other Muslim vil- Sakhnin, and Majd al z. Much depended on

cabinet in Tel Aviv would remain a central IDF was authorized to winding, and highly kilometers. One of the k to their homes. The early November saw a gers inland along the , were "saved" by last- iticians. The following l or partially cleared of

is from Palestine over I have tried to show ion was multi-layered: 1948 did not leave only bombings; or because tion and extortion by w and order when the s and livelihood under on of all these factors. end of April 1948, left oyment, a breakdown ntermittent material d privileged, doctors, dy stream during the ce and weakness and 's swift demolition of a traumatized by the l noted the swift Arab y; had witnessed the es; and feared for his

future under Jewish rule and feared, as well, for what would happen to him should the Arab armies invade Palestine and bomb and assault Haifa.

The decision of rural Arabs to quit their homes and land was often more clear-cut and simple. Usually, the villagers fled as a Haganah/IDF column approached or laid down a preliminary mortar barrage. But here, too, multiple causation often applied, as in Qaluniya, near Jerusalem. There were months of hostilities in the area, intermittent shortages of supplies, severance of communications with Jerusalem, lack of leadership or clear instruction about what to do or expect, rumors or reports of Jewish atrocities, and, finally, a Jewish attack on Qaluniya itself (by which time 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. In Lydda, largely untouched by battle before July 1948, there were unemployment and skyrocketing prices during the first months of the war and the burden caused by the presence of armed irregulars. In April, thousands of refugees from Jaffa and its hinterland arrived in the town, camping out in courtyards and on the town's periphery. They brought demoralization and sickness. Some wealthy families left. There was uncertainty about Abdullah's commitment to the town's defense, and by June there was a feeling that Lydda's "turn" was imminent. Then came the attack, with bombings and shelling, Arab Legion pull-out, collapse of resistance, sniping, massacre—and the expulsion orders of 12–13 July.

What happened in Palestine/Israel over 1947–49 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 a prevalence of cumulative internal Arab factors—lack of leadership, economic problems, breakdown of law and order—to a predominance of external, compulsive causes. These included Haganah/IDF attacks and expulsions, fear of Jewish attacks and atrocities, lack of help from the Arab world and AHC, a feeling of impotence and abandonment, and orders from Arab institutions and commanders to leave. In general, in most places, the final and decisive precipitant to flight was a Haganah, IZL, LHI, or IDF attack or the inhabitants' fear of imminent attack.

During the second half of 1948, international concern mounted over the refugee problem. Concern translated into pressures. These pressures, launched by Bernadotte and the Arab states in the summer of 1948, increased as the months passed, as the number of refugees swelled, and as their plight became physically more acute. The refugee problem moved to the forefront of every discussion of the Middle East conflict and the Arabs made their agreement to a settlement with Israel contingent on a solution of the refugee problem by repatriation.

From the summer of 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 to the general conflict. In December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly upheld the refugees' "right of return." But, as the abandoned villages fell into ruin 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 a repatriation of the Arab refugees. Bernadotte and the United States wanted Israel to make a "gesture" in the coin of repatriation, to get the efforts for a comprehensive settlement off the ground. In the spring of 1949, the thinking about a "gesture" matured into the United States' demand that Israel agree to take back 250,000, with the remaining refugees to be resettled in the neighboring Arab countries. America threatened and cajoled, but never with sufficient force or conviction to persuade Tel Aviv to relent.

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," so called because it would have included an additional 25,000 refugees who had already returned to the country illegally, and 10,000 more who would return under a family reunification scheme) as part of a comprehensive peace settlement. But by the summer of 1949, public and party political opinion in Israel—in part, due to government propaganda—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 c  
rejected it out of han  
insufficient, as too li

The insufficienc  
rejectionism, their u  
inability to publicly  
if Israel agreed to re  
(which would have p  
Arab local and refu  
America's unwilling:  
Israel and the Arab  
Israeli impasse wou  
remain refugees, to  
states as a powerful  
memory or vicariou  
humiliation and dep  
generations of Pal  
terrorists and the "I  
intractable.

concern mounted pressures. These es in the summer mber of refugees ute. The refugee of the Middle East ement with Israel repatriation.

the autumn, the ntial measure of refugee problem e United Nations rn." But, as the or settled, and as were accommod- ility of substantial refugees, Israel to absorb Jewish

efugees. Berna- "gesture" in the nsive settlement bout a "gesture" ree to take back the neighboring but never with elent.

ed Nations and nce. Weeks and ns led nowhere. eement to mass antly agreed in offer," so called fugees who had ore who would comprehensive blic and party propaganda— imal offer was 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 decidedly insufficient, as too little, too late.

The insufficiency of the "100,000 offer," the Arab states' growing 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 repatriation of the rest, the expiry of the "Gaza Plan" (which would have placed the Gaza Strip, with its sizable population of Arab local and refugee populations, under Israeli sovereignty), and America's unwillingness or inability to apply persuasive pressures on Israel and the Arab states to compromise—all meant that the Arab-Israeli impasse would endure and that Palestine's exiled Arabs would remain refugees, to be utilized during the following years by the Arab states as a powerful political and propaganda pawn 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 guerrillas and terrorists and the "Palestinian problem" into one of the world's most intractable.