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THE GREAT REFUGEE SCAM

The story of the Arabs who left the coastal areas of Palestine in the spring of 1948 encapsulates one of the great international frauds of the 20th century. The Arabs are the only declared 'refugees' who became refugees by the initiative of their own leaders. The concoction of the monstrous charge that it was the Jews who had driven out the Arabs of Palestine was a strategic decision made by the leaders of the Arab League months after the Arabs' flight.

The Arab 'refugees' were not driven out by anyone. The vast majority left at the order or exhortation of their leaders - always with the same reassurance - that it would help the Arab states in the war they were about to launch to destroy the State of Israel.

The fabrication can most easily be detected by the simple circumstance that at the time the alleged expulsion of the Arabs by Zionists was in progress, nobody noticed it.

Foreign newspapermen abounded in the country, in daily contact with all sides - and they did in fact write about the flight of the Arabs, but even those most hostile to the Jews saw nothing to suggest that the flight was not voluntary.

In the three months that the major part of the flight took place, the London Times, a newspaper most notably hostile to Zionism, published 11 leading articles on the situation in Palestine, in addition to extensive news reports. In none was there even a remote hint that the Zionists were driving Arabs from their homes.

Even more pertinent: No Arab spokesman made such a charge. At the height of the flight, the Palestinian Arabs' chief representative at the United Nations, Jamal Husseini, made a long political statement (on April 27) that was not lacking in hostility toward the Zionists; he did not mention refugees. Three weeks later (while the flight was still in progress) the secretary-general of the Arab League, Azzam Pasha, made a fiercely worded political statement on Palestine; it contained not a word about refugees.

WHY DID they leave? Monsignor George Hakim, then Greek Catholic bishop of Galilee, the leading Christian personality in Palestine for many years, told a Beirut newspaper, Sada al-Janub, in the summer of 1948: 'The refugees were confident that their absence would not last long, and that they would return within a week or two. Their leaders had promised them that the Arab armies would crush the 'Zionist gangs' very quickly, and that there was no need for panic or fear of a long exile.'

The initiative for the flight was indeed no secret. One of the famous American newspapermen of the time, Kenneth Bilby, who had covered Palestine for years, explained the Arab leaders' rationale for the flight in his book *New Star in the East*, published in 1950:

'Let the Arabs flee into neighboring countries. It would serve to arouse the other Arab countries to greater effort, and when the Arab invasion struck the Palestinians could return to their homes and be compensated with the property of Jews driven into the sea.'

There is also the piquant report in the files of the British police at Haifa, of how the leaders of the Jewish community pleaded with the leaders of the Arab community not to leave Haifa, and how the Arabs refused. There is too, in the annals of the UN Security Council, a speech by Jamal Husseini heaping praise on the Arabs of Haifa for refusing to stay put and insisting adamantly on leaving their homes. The British police then kindly provided transport and helped the Haifa Arabs across the Lebanese and Transjordanian borders.

When, four months after the invasion, the prospect of the flightlings' returning 'in a few weeks' had faded, there were some recriminations. Emil Ghoury, a member of the Palestinian Arabs' national leadership, said in an interview with the Beirut newspaper, Daily Telegraph: 'I don't want to impugn anybody, but only to help the refugees. The fact that there are these refugees is the direct consequence of the action of the Arab states in opposing partition and the Jewish state.'

'The Arab states agreed upon this policy unanimously, and they must share in the solution of the problem.'

THE POLICY adopted inside the country was emphasized by the leaders of the invasion. The prime minister of Iraq, Nuri Said, thundered: 'We will smash the country with our guns and obliterate every place the Jews seek shelter in. The Arabs should conduct their wives and children to safe areas until the fighting has died down.'

One of the Arabs who fled later succinctly summarized the story of the refugees in the Jordanian newspaper Al-Difaa: 'The Arab governments told us: Get out so that we can get in. So we got out, but they did not get in.'

Later, after the fighting began, many Arab villagers who believed the false rumors of a massacre at the village of Deir Yassin 'panicked and fled ignominiously before they were threatened by the progress of the war.' So wrote the British general Sir John Glubb, who commanded the Transjordanian army. Throughout the war there were two incidents - at Ramle and Lod - in which a number of Arab civilians were driven out of their homes by Israeli soldiers.

The total number of Arabs who evacuated, even according to the British Mandate's statistics, could not have been more than 420,000. This figure conforms roughly also to the figure published from Arab sources, and by the UN.

The central, horribly cruel fact is that the Arab states - who had brought about their plight - denied them residence rights; and the idea was born that they should be left in camps and used as a weapon for Israel's destruction. 'The return of the refugees,' said president Nasser of Egypt years later, 'will mean the end of Israel.'

IT WAS in the immediate aftermath of the war that the refugee scam was developed into an international operation. As soon as the UN Disaster Relief Organization started providing food, shelter, clothing and medical attention to the Arabs who had fled Palestine, a mass of needy Arabs descended on the camps from all over the Arab states. The organization had no machinery for identification; so the arrivals simply signed the register as refugees and received the free aid.

Already in December 1948, the director of the Relief Organization, Sir Rafael Cilento, reported he was feeding 750,000 'refugees.' By July 1949 the UN reported a round million.

The Red Cross International Committee joined the party. It pressed for the recognition of any destitute Arab in Palestine as a refugee. Thus about 100,000 were added to the list. To add a touch of mordant humor, the Red Cross authority wrote about the additional people that 'it would be senseless to force them to abandon their homes to be able to get food as refugees.'

So these people stayed at home, received their free services there, and were added to the rolls of the refugees.

Thus - and by other more expectable means of humanistic falsification we have, in the third generation, a large amorphous mass of Arabs, all of them comfortably lumped together in official UN lists as Arab refugees, described as 'victims of Israeli aggression' and demanding the right of 'return.'

While everybody in Israel has rejected the Arab demand for accepting the return of the 'refugees,' the government has not rejected the idea that if negotiations for a settlement take place the problem of the refugees will be discussed. Moreover, there has been talk of 'compensation' by Israel.

There have even been voices suggesting the return of a 'symbolic few' of the refugees. Israel must, from the outset and forever, unequivocally reject such ideas.

Once and for all Israel must remind whoever has to be reminded that the responsibility for the displaced Arabs lies wholly and absolutely on the shoulders of the Arab states. Their utterly unprovoked invasion of the territory of Israel in May 1948 was a crime. Its declared intent was a crime. Six thousand Israel citizens were killed in that war, and thousands of others were injured. It was the Arab states that called on the Arab population to evacuate, all in order to facilitate accomplishment of their evil purpose.

It is a hutzpa of historical dimensions and significance to ask Israel to even discuss giving an inch or paying a penny of the price of the refugee problem. And it is dangerous for any Israeli spokesman to even agree to take part in any discussion of the subject - at any forum or in any context whatsoever.

Indeed, the Israeli government should long ago have declared - but even now it is not too late: 'We shall not participate in any discussion of the so-called refugee problem. This is a problem the Arab nation must solve for itself in its own spacious territories.'