

HOMELESS IN GAZA

Arab Mistreatment of Palestinian Refugees

MITCHELL BARD

It is still unlikely that the Palestinian people will have their state. Despite conciliatory statements by Yassir Arafat that have led to the opening of diplomatic contact between the United States and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Israel and the U.S. will still oppose a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza that would be threatening to Israel's security. Neither Arafat nor any other Palestinian leader has repudiated the provision in the Palestine Charter that calls for the destruction of Israel. Arafat's renunciation of terrorism remains to be tested, given his unwillingness to admit PLO involvement in prior acts of terrorism. It is also unclear whether even a more peaceful Arafat could control rival Palestinian leaders who remain implacably hostile toward Israel.

It is therefore all the more important to address the principal humanitarian concern of the Arab-Israeli conflict: alleviating the plight of the nearly 800,000 Palestinians living in refugee camps. Of these, 245,000 live in the squalid, densely populated camps of the Gaza Strip. Another 210,000 live in Jordan, 75,000 in Syria, and 95,000 in the West Bank. Perhaps the most victimized are the 145,000 living in Lebanon who have suffered not only from the Sabra and Shatila massacres at the hands of Christian Phalangists, but also from military attacks by the Syrians, the Amal militia, and rival Palestinian factions. Another 1.4 million Palestinians live and work in towns and villages in the Arab states, most prominently Jordan. These latter are classified as refugees, but have more or less resettled in their current homes.

The Palestinian refugee problem dates from the Arabs' rejection of the U.N. partition resolution in 1947. Israel accepted the partition, which would have left under Arab control many areas of Arab settlement, including the Galilee and the city of Jaffa. While Jerusalem would have been placed under international control, the surrounding areas would have been part of the Arab state. The Arabs, however, were unwilling to accept the existence of a Jewish state in any part of Palestine, and when Israel declared independence in May 1948, the armies of Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon, and Iraq invaded—with the goal of driving the Jews into the sea.

Even before large-scale violence broke out, about 30,000 wealthy Palestinians fled to neighboring countries

to wait out the coming storm. Then, in January 1948, large numbers of Arab irregulars infiltrated the country and engaged the Jewish forces. Throughout the period that preceded the May 15 invasion, there were large-scale military battles, incessant shootings, robberies, bombings, and beatings. Thousands of casualties resulted from the pre-invasion violence.

On April 9, 1948, the Irgun and Lehi Israeli paramilitary forces attacked the village of Deir Yassin and killed over 200 Arabs. Deir Yassin overlooked the main highway to Jerusalem, which the Arabs had blocked to cut off the Jewish inhabitants of the city from the rest of the country. Nevertheless, the barbarity of the attack prompted the Jewish Agency, the political representative of the Jews in Palestine, to send a letter to Transjordan's King Abdullah expressing its "horror and disgust."

Thousands of Palestinians fled their homes after word spread of the massacre at Deir Yassin. "It was collective fear, moral disintegration and chaos in every field that exiled the Arabs from Tiberias, Haifa, and dozens of towns and villages," according to Walid al-Qamhawi, a member of the Executive Committee of the PLO. As panic spread throughout Palestine, the early trickle of refugees became a flood, numbering over 200,000 by the time the provisional government declared the independence of the state of Israel. After the Arab armies invaded, another 300,000 Palestinians left.

Jews suffered similar massacres, but did not flee. For example, just four days after the reports from Deir Yassin were published, an Arab force ambushed a Jewish convoy on its way to Hadassah Hospital, killing 34 doctors, nurses, patients, and Haganah guards, and injuring another 23. In the first four months alone after the partition decision, more than 500 Jews were killed.

Golda Meir's Futile Plea

Palestinian flight from wartime hazards was not entirely motivated by panic. Palestinians were actively encouraged to leave their homes to make way for the invading armies. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Said, for example, said: "We

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A Palestinian woman sits among the ruins of her house, destroyed during battles between rival Palestinian factions, in Lebanon's Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp, 1988.

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."

Golda Meir unsuccessfully pleaded with the Arabs of Haifa to stay in their homes. However, Jewish threats of physical violence encouraged the Palestinians to leave such towns as Ramla and Lydda.

Musa Alami, a Palestinian nationalist and Arab affairs adviser to the British High Commissioner in mandatory Palestine, put the causes of the Arab exodus into perspective:

If ultimately the Palestinians evacuated the country, it was not out of cowardice, but because they lost all confidence in the existing system of defense. They had perceived its weakness, and realized the disequilibrium between their resources and organization, and those of the Jews. They were told that the Arab armies were coming, that the matter would be settled and everything returned to normal, and they placed their confidence and hopes in that. Moreover, they had before them the specter of Deir Yassin, with all its brutality.

Between 1947 and 1949, 500,000 to 800,000 Palestinians left their homes. However, about 170,000 Palestinians stayed and became citizens of Israel. The nearly three-quarters of a million Arab citizens of Israel today can vote, enjoy due process of law, own property, and otherwise share the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship, with

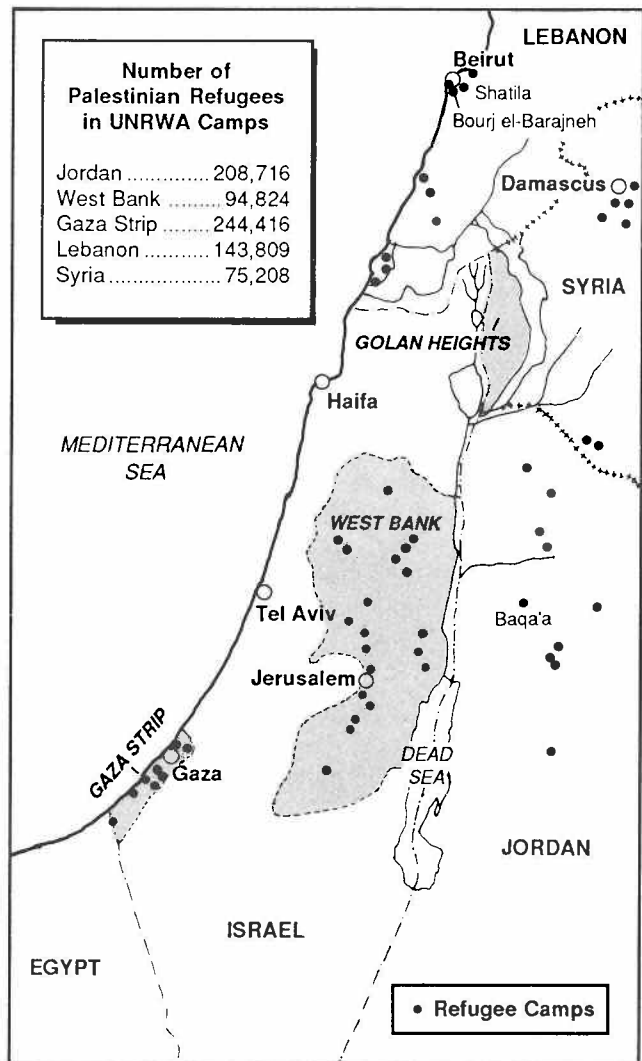
the exception of being required to serve in the military.

The United Nations took up the refugee issue even before the exodus was complete, adopting Resolution 194 on December 11, 1948, over the opposition of the Arab states. The key paragraph resolved "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes *and live at peace* with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property. . . ." It also instructed the Conciliation Commission to facilitate "the repatriation, *resettlement*, and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation . . ." [emphasis added].

The emphasized words demonstrate that the United Nations recognized that Israel could not be expected to repatriate a hostile population that might endanger its security. The solution to the refugee problem would require at least some of the refugees to be resettled in Arab lands.

Rejected Offers for Resettlement

The resolution met most of Israel's concerns regarding the refugees, whom they regarded as a potential fifth column if they were allowed to return unconditionally. The Israelis did not expect the refugees to be a major issue; they thought that the Arab states would resettle the majority and some compromise on the remainder could be reached in the context of an overall settlement. As Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel, explained: "We are anxious to help toward such resettlement provided that



real peace is established and the Arab states do their part of the job. The solution of the Arab problem can be achieved only through an all-around Middle East development scheme, toward which the United Nations, the Arab states and Israel will make their respective contributions.”

Israel offered Arab families that had been separated during the fighting the opportunity to return. They also offered to release refugee accounts frozen in Israeli banks, to pay compensation for abandoned lands, and to repatriate 100,000 refugees in exchange for a peace agreement. The Arabs were no more willing to compromise in 1949, however, than they had been in 1947.

Discussions concerning the refugees actually had begun in the summer of 1948, before Israel had completed its military victory. Consequently, the Arabs still believed they could win the war and allow the refugees to return triumphant. “It is inconceivable that the refugees should be sent back to their homes while they are occupied by the Jews, as the latter would hold them as hostages and maltreat them. The very proposal is an evasion of responsibility by those responsible. It will serve as a first step towards Arab recognition of the state of Israel and partition,” stated the Secretary of the Arab Higher Committee in August 1948.

The Arabs made no secret of the fact that they saw the return of the refugees as a means of continuing the war against Israel. Egyptian Foreign Minister Muhammed Saleh ed-Din said: “It is well known and understood that the Arabs, in demanding the return of the refugees to Palestine, mean their return as masters of the Homeland and not as slaves. With a greater clarity, they mean the liquidation of the state of Israel.”

It should not be surprising, then, that Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion would take a hard line against repatriating the refugees despite pressure from U.S. President Harry S. Truman. “Shall we bring back the refugees so that they can exterminate us for the second time, or should we ask America to take pity on us and send an army to protect us?” Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary in 1949. “We could not withstand American might,” he continued, “but our self-preservation is more important to us than obedience to America.”

No Arab Support for UNRWA

While the diplomatic avenues were being explored, the Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan were in desperate need of food and shelter. In 1948, there was no agency to provide aid to the Palestinians. Food, blankets, medical supplies, and other emergency provisions were contributed by various international agencies. The General Assembly subsequently voted to establish the United Nations Relief for Palestinian Refugees organization (UNRPR) to dispense aid to the refugees. The UNRPR was replaced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) on December 8, 1948, and given a budget of over \$50 million.

The UNRWA was designed to continue the relief program initiated by the UNRPR, to substitute public works for direct relief, and to promote economic development. The proponents of the plan envisioned that direct relief would be almost completely replaced by public works, with the remaining direct relief provided by the Arab governments.

The Arab governments and the refugees themselves were unwilling to contribute to any development plan, which could have been interpreted as fostering resettlement. They preferred to cling to their interpretation of the U.N. resolution, which they believed would eventually result in repatriation. Their view then, which remains unchanged, was that the international community would recognize the injustice done to the Palestinians and take measures to redress that injustice. As the director of the UNRWA wrote in his 1964 report:

In their own eyes they are not refugees at all in the sense in which that term is used to describe persons who have uprooted themselves and broken with their past in order to seek a new life in new surroundings and in a new country. The Palestinian refugees regard themselves rather as temporary wards of the international community, whom they hold responsible for the upheaval which resulted in their having to leave their homes. As they see it, the international community has a duty to enable them to return to their homes and, meanwhile, to provide for their maintenance and welfare.

About 24,000 Palestinian refugees returned to Israel within a few months after the war's end. Jordan was the only Arab country to welcome the Palestinians and grant them citizenship (to this day, Jordan is the only Arab country where Palestinians can become citizens). Although demographic figures indicated there was ample room for settlement in Syria, the Syrian government refused to accept any refugees except those who might refuse repatriation. Iraq was also expected to resettle a large number of refugees but proved unwilling. Lebanon, where approximately 300,000 Palestinians now reside (most as a result of their expulsion from Jordan in 1970-71 after a civil war between the PLO and King Hussein's army), insisted then that there was no room for the refugees.

After the war, Egypt controlled the Gaza Strip and its more than 200,000 inhabitants, but refused to allow the Palestinians into Egypt or permit them to move elsewhere. In June 1949, Israel offered to accept the refugees if Egypt agreed to give up the territory. After learning that there were nearly twice as many Palestinians in the Strip as they originally thought, however, the Israelis revised their offer and said they would accept 100,000 refugees in return for the Gaza Strip. The Egyptians said "no."

The unwillingness to resettle the refugees was partly related to the Arabs' belief that such an action would legitimize the existence of Israel and permit the Israelis to evade their responsibility to allow the Palestinians to return home. As the years passed, this argument also became useful to Arab states determined to eschew any obligation to their brethren.

The callous disregard for the lives of the refugees was exemplified by the Arab states' contributions to the fund established by the United Nations in 1952 to reintegrate the refugees into the economic life of the Middle East by repatriation or resettlement. The total Arab pledges amounted to \$598,000. Israel contributed almost \$3 million; the United States pledged \$25 million.

Many Palestinians were unhappy with the treatment they were receiving from their Arab brothers. Some, like Musa Alami, were incredulous: "It is shameful that the Arab governments should prevent the Arab refugees from working in their countries and shut the doors in their faces and imprison them in camps." The majority of the refugees, however, focused their discontent on the Jews, whom they blamed more than they did the vanquished Arab armies for their predicament.

Refugee Racket

While many of the refugees would no doubt have preferred to work and live in another Arab country rather than stay confined to a refugee camp for years, most still hoped to return to their homes. As the Commissioner-General's 1955 UNRWA report cited: "The outstanding factor which continues to condition refugee attitudes and to influence the policy of Near Eastern governments . . . is the strong desire of the refugees to return to their homeland. This feeling has not diminished . . . and its strength should not be underestimated."

No one had expected the refugee problem to persist. The director of the UNRWA wrote in his 1951 report that he expected the Arab governments to assume responsibility

for relief by July 1952. "Sustained relief operations inevitably contain the germ of human deterioration," he warned. Sadly, he was correct.

The Palestinian refugees considered "relief in general, and rations in particular, not as something to which they must show their entitlement, but rather as a right—as a partial payment by the world at large for their involuntary expulsion from Palestine and continued exile from their

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This attitude was exacerbated by the fact that most of the refugees were better off materially under the UNRWA's administration than they had been in their original homes. *Time* reported in 1957 that the refugees "have a higher daily caloric ration (1,500-1,600) than some of the *fellahin* [agricultural workers] in Nasser's Egypt, better health and sanitation than they had ever known in Palestine." *Life* called refugee status "something between a blessing and a racket."

As a result of the "advantages" of refugee status, many destitute inhabitants of the countries housing the refugees sought and received ration cards. As early as 1950, the UNRWA discovered that births were always registered for ration purposes, but deaths were frequently concealed so that the family could continue to obtain the rations of the deceased. This trend was institutionalized over time, making it impossible to determine the true number of Palestinian refugees, then defined by the United Nations as people who had been living in Palestine for at least two years (as of May 1948) and had lost their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the war.

The Arab governments did not permit a census to be taken of the refugee population. The figures that were reported in UNRWA documents were compiled by the Area Staff, which was composed of local Arabs. Thus, when the head of the UNRWA, Henry Labrousse, was asked in 1955 how close the estimates of the refugee population were, he replied, "Not very close." Meanwhile, the numbers continued to grow, and by 1954, the UNRWA had nearly 900,000 people on its rolls and had spent over \$120 million.

The refugees were understandably bitter over their con-

finement. Rather than venting their displeasure toward the Arabs for restricting them to camps, the refugees reserved all their resentment for Israel and the West, which they held responsible for the injustice done to them. From the beginning, the camps fostered the hatred of Israel that would evolve into a vigorous Palestinian nationalist movement. The Arab states had no incentive to resettle the refugees so long as they continued to express their hostility toward Israel.

The Israelis blamed the Arabs for creating an atmosphere where hatred could smolder. They also contended that it would be dangerous to repatriate several hundred thousand people who had grown up in such an environment.

Annihilating Israel

The plight of the refugees remained unchanged after the Suez War. In fact, not even the rhetoric had changed. The 1957 Refugee Conference at Homs, Syria, passed a resolution stating: "Any discussion aimed at a solution of the Palestine problem which will not be based on ensuring the refugees' right to annihilate Israel will be regarded as a desecration of the Arab people and an act of treason."

By the end of the decade, the number of refugees nearly doubled as a result of natural increase to almost one million. Their treatment was best summed up by another UNRWA director who wrote in 1958: "The Arab states do not want to solve the refugee problem. They want to keep it as an open sore, as an affront to the United Nations and as a weapon against Israel. Arab leaders don't give a damn whether the refugees live or die."

By 1961, 60 percent of the 500,000 adults dependent on UNRWA had matured to adulthood as refugees. They were more literate than were their parents, but most did not possess any marketable skills because they had not had an opportunity to learn a trade. About 70 percent of the refugees were unskilled workers, shopkeepers, herders, and farmers who were not accepted by Arab countries that already had an oversupply of these types of workers.

The relief rolls exceeded one million registrants, but fewer than 40 percent of the refugees remained in camps by mid-1962. Two years later, the commissioner-general of the UNRWA estimated that less than half of the refugees

themselves into their host countries and no longer needed aid were unwilling to give up their ration cards or their refugee status.

Between November 1948 and the 1967 war, the United Nations General Assembly adopted 23 resolutions that expressed variations on the theme of Resolution 194, which called for the resettlement or repatriation of the refugees. Israel continued to express a willingness to negotiate. In an address to the U.N. General Assembly on October 10, 1960, Foreign Minister Golda Meir challenged Arab leaders to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion to negotiate a peace settlement. Egyptian President Gamal Nasser answered on October 15, saying that Israel was trying to deceive world opinion and reiterating that his country would never recognize the state of Israel.

The Arabs were equally adamant in their refusal to negotiate a separate settlement for the refugees. As Nasser told the United Arab Republic National Assembly on March 26, 1964: "Israel and the imperialism around us, which confront us, are not two separate things. There have been attempts to separate them, in order to break up the problems and present them in an imaginary light as if the problem of Israel is the problem of the refugees, by the solution of which the problem of Palestine will also be solved and no residue of the problem will remain. *The danger of Israel lies in the very existence of Israel as it is in the present and in what she represents*" [emphasis added].

Nasser readily acknowledged the threat that the refugees posed to Israel when he told an interviewer on September 1, 1961: "If Arabs return to Israel—Israel will cease to exist." Such statements reaffirmed Israel's belief that solving the refugee problem would not end the conflict; therefore, there was no point in trying to deal with the problem outside the context of peace negotiations.

Second Exodus

After the 1967 war, the international community was once again called to the aid of the Palestinians as a result of their displacement from the occupied territories. The UNRWA estimated that 175,000 of its registrants had fled for a second time and approximately 350,000 fled for the first time. About 200,000 moved to Jordan, 115,000 to Syria, and approximately 35,000 left Sinai for Egypt. The secretary-general of the United Nations, U Thant, published a report citing 325,000 as the total number of people who left the occupied territories. Most of the Arabs who left had come from the West Bank.

Israel allowed some West Bank Arabs to return, despite Jordan Radio's appeals for the Arabs to harass the Israelis. In 1967, over 9,000 families were reunited and, by 1976, over 44,000 people had been allowed to rejoin their families. On the other hand, Jordan in July 1968 prohibited migration from the West Bank and Gaza for persons intending to remain in the East Bank.

By the end of the 1960s, there were over 1.5 million refugees dispersed throughout the Arab world. UNRWA support continued largely because of the commitments of the United States and the United Kingdom. The strength of their commitments relative to the rhetoric of other nations can be seen from the contributions over the years.

The UNRWA's total income from 1950 to 1969 was

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could be considered destitute. Approximately 30 to 40 percent were partly self-supporting and 10 to 20 percent were believed to be in no need of aid. These were primarily Palestinians who had or acquired skills for jobs available in the Arab world. The relief rolls continued to expand, however, because refugees who had at least partially integrated

\$696 million. Governments contributed \$667 million. Of this total, the United States provided over 68 percent (\$456 million) and Britain gave 16 percent (\$110 million). By 1972, the 19 Arab states, which had expressed such heartfelt concern for the Palestinians had contributed only \$23 million, less than 5 percent of the United States' contribution. The five richest oil-producing states had provided a total of only \$8.5 million. The Communist bloc did not contribute a penny; Israel gave \$4 million. Despite their financial assistance, the Western nations continued to be looked upon with disdain while the Eastern bloc was considered friendly to the Arab cause.

In addition to the refugees, there was now a new class of Arabs, those in the occupied territories living under Israeli military rule. Like the refugees of 1948, these Palestinians were victimized by their brethren. Nasser's belligerence doomed the Arabs of Gaza. King Hussein's refusal to heed Israeli warnings to stay out of the 1967 War led to the loss of the Palestinians' homes in the West Bank.

The future of these new refugees became dependent on a peace settlement or some unilateral Israeli withdrawal. Israel annexed East Jerusalem. A peace settlement based on territorial compromise was out of the question after the Arab states announced their "three noes" (no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel, no recognition of Israel) in Khartoum in August 1967. Approximately 65,000 Arabs were affected in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, 6,396 Arabs in the Golan Heights, 596,637 in the West Bank, 356,261 in the Gaza Strip, and 33,441 in northern Sinai came under military rule.

Enforced Homelessness

With the exception of the requirement that school texts in the occupied territories be purged of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic language, the authorities tried not to interfere with the inhabitants. Israel provided some economic assistance and moved some refugees in the Gaza Strip from camps to new houses. Ironically, this led to protests from Egypt, which had done nothing for the refugees during the nearly two decades it controlled the area. Subsequent efforts by the Israelis to move the refugees out of the camps have also met with opposition from the Arab states who have pushed the adoption of a U.N. resolution each year since 1971 demanding that Israel desist from the removal of Palestinian refugees from camps in Gaza and the West Bank. They prefer to keep the Palestinians in a position where their hostility can fester and where they will be symbols of Israeli "oppression."

The attitude of Palestinians who have grown up under occupation differs from that of those who endured the hardships of the 1948 war. The younger generation does not want to return to homes most never knew. They have a more ideological commitment based on the belief that the Palestinians were victims of Zionist aggression and that justice requires that Israel be liquidated. This is a typical pledge of allegiance for Palestinian children in the camps:

Palestine is our country.
Our aim is to return.
Death does not frighten us,
Palestine is ours,
We shall never forget her.

Another homeland we shall never accept!
Our Palestine, witness, O God and History,
We promise to shed our blood for you!

Although most Palestinians are no longer in camps and are largely self-sufficient, their freedom is still sharply limited not only by Israel's occupation authorities, but by the Arab states (except Jordan), which still do not permit them to become citizens and restrict their movement and employment. These constraints are largely responsible for the

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frustration and bitterness that has exploded in the occupied territories. The Palestinians also remain frustrated that they are thought of as refugees rather than as a people with a right to self-determination.

The PLO also has more selfish reasons for refusing to take any action that might be seen as moderate or conciliatory and thus present the opportunity for ameliorating the plight of the refugees. After all, the frustrated and bitter inhabitants of the camps provide the various Palestinian factions with their *fedayeen* (anti-Israel commandos). As early as 1973, the UNRWA complained that the PLO had taken over some of its buildings in Lebanon. When that country descended into chaos, the UNRWA was forced to secure the cooperation of the PLO to carry out its mission. Although UNRWA officials feigned ignorance, the Israelis learned prior to their 1982 invasion that the PLO was using agency facilities for bases. During the war, Israeli soldiers found anti-Israel propaganda, military uniforms, and stockpiles of weapons in a UNRWA school near Sidon.

Facing Reality

With the exception of the far right in Israel, most now recognize the Palestinians as a people, but this does not mean that their demands must be met. The Arab-Israeli conflict remains the context in which Palestinian calls for self-determination are made and therefore a "just solution" to the Palestinian problem must also meet Israel's criteria for insuring its own security.

The Palestinians need not give up their claims (though a willingness to compromise would increase the chances of reaching their goals immeasurably) for the plight of the refugees to be improved. In the meantime, the Palestinian children from the camps who are now throwing stones are being taught to hate not only Israelis but Jews as the anti-Semitism purged from school textbooks is perpetuated through oral indoctrination.

Israel continues to assert its willingness to negotiate, but

it is no longer possible for a compromise to be reached in which Israel would accept large numbers of Palestinians. In fact, there is a growing movement in Israel to do just the opposite, that is, expel those who live in the West Bank and Gaza. Fortunately, this remains a minority view.

The Palestinians, meanwhile, no longer want to be repa-

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triated unless it is to the Palestine that existed before the establishment of Israel. This will not happen. Israel will not commit suicide, as Ben-Gurion said four decades ago.

Recently, PLO officials have talked about a settlement that would be based on the 41-year-old partition resolution, but Israelis insist that too much has occurred in the interregnum. The borders of the Jewish state created by the U.N. did not include Jerusalem, and can no longer be considered relevant after five wars. Thus, any effort by the Palestinians to obtain recognition for a state on the basis of what transpired in 1947 will fail.

Resettlement Precedents

Even if the Palestinians were to declare their independence in only the West Bank and Gaza, and Israel were to acquiesce (a farfetched prospect), there is not enough land nor enough employment opportunities to settle more than a fraction of the refugee population.

Consequently, the only solution is for the Arab states to accept the responsibility that they have avoided for more than 40 years and allow the Palestinians to become citizens of their states and integrate them into their societies. Historically, this is how all refugee problems have been solved. No other displaced persons have become wards of the international community the way the Palestinians have. The German minorities in Poland and Czechoslovakia who were expelled after World War II were allowed to take only those possessions they could carry. They received no compensation for confiscated property and no international assistance. Finland was forced to give up almost one-eighth of its land and absorbed over 400,000 refugees from the Soviet Union. These were the losers of the war. There was no aid for their resettlement.

One frequently cited example of a population transfer that caused suffering for millions of people was the partition of India and Pakistan, which also occurred in 1947. The eight million Hindus who fled Pakistan and the six million Moslems who left India were afraid of being a

minority in their respective countries. Like the Palestinians, these people wanted to avoid being caught in the middle of the violence that engulfed their countries. In contrast to the Palestinians, however, the exchange of populations was considered the best solution to the problem of communal relations between the two states. Despite the enormous number of refugees and the relative poverty of the two nations involved, no special international relief organizations were established to aid them in resettlement.

The number of Jews fleeing Arab countries for Israel in the years following Israel's independence was roughly equal to the number of Arabs fleeing Palestine. Many Jews were allowed to take little more than the shirts on their backs. These refugees had no desire to be repatriated. Of the 820,000 Jewish refugees, 586,000 were resettled in Israel at great expense and without any offer of compensation from the Arab governments, who confiscated their possessions. Israel has consequently maintained that any agreement to compensate the Palestinian refugees must also include Arab compensation for Jewish refugees.

Palestinian Pipe Dream

So long as the Palestinians remain refugees, they will continue to grow more bitter and new generations will mature with a motive for perpetuating the conflict. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have never known any life other than that of occupation. Similarly, Israelis entering the army have known Israel only as an occupying power, a country denied peace by its neighbors. It is in the interests of both Palestinians and Israelis that the refugee problem be resolved.

One possible solution is to move Palestinians in the Gaza and West Bank camps out of their overcrowded shacks and into more permanent housing. This will require the Arab states to abandon their opposition and to provide financial assistance for construction.

A second option is to resettle large numbers of Palestinians in the Arab world. The Arab states should permit Palestinians to become citizens. This would allow those already living in Arab states to integrate into society and permit Palestinians living in camps to settle in the nation of their choice. The Palestinians in Lebanon, who are a destabilizing force in that fractured nation, present a particular problem. Giving them the option of settling in Syria or some other Arab land offers the best possibility for ameliorating their plight.

Today it remains a pipe dream that a Palestinian state will be created in the territories occupied by Israel without a radical change in the negotiating positions of both sides. Even if such a development were to occur, the geographic and economic limitations of the West Bank and Gaza Strip would preclude the resettlement of all the Palestinian refugees on Palestinian soil.

The United States can help to stabilize the region and advance the peace process by making it clear that there is no conceivable Arab-Israeli settlement that can alleviate the refugee problem without a commitment by the Arab states to resettle large numbers of Palestinians. 