

THE  
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FOR  
ISRAEL

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# 12 Did Israel Create the Arab Refugee Problem?

## THE ACCUSATION

Israel created the Arab refugee problem.

## THE ACCUSERS

"The state of Israel was established as a settler-colonial project that was sponsored by different colonial powers for different reasons. Because it was not possible to establish a Jewish state in Palestine without expelling the indigenous people who constituted the majority of the population, the 1948 war provided a cover for their widespread and systematic expulsion." (Azmi Bishara, member of the Israeli Knesset<sup>1</sup>)

Shavit: "And in 1948, does the moral responsibility for the Palestinian tragedy of that year lie only with the Jews? Don't the Arabs share the blame?"

Said: "The war of 1948 was a war of dispossession. What happened that year was the destruction of Palestinian society, the replacement of that society by another, and the eviction of those who were considered undesirable. Those who were in the way. It is difficult for me to say that all responsibility lies with one side. But the lion's share of responsibility for depopulating towns and destroying them definitely lies with the Jewish-Zionists. Yitzhak Rabin evicted the 50,000 inhabitants of Ramle and Lydda, so it is difficult for me to see anyone else as responsible for

that. The Palestinians were only responsible for being there." (Edward Said<sup>2</sup>)

"The Israelis engaged in 'ethnic cleansing,' during the 1947-1948 War. The Zionist claim that Arab leaders told the Palestinians to leave is 'not believed by anyone. . . . No one even claims this any more.' Benny Morris has shown that the Arab population 'was driven out' by the Israelis." (Noam Chomsky<sup>3</sup>)

## THE REALITY

The problem was created by a war initiated by the Arabs.

## THE PROOF

The aggressive war waged against Israel in 1947 and 1948 by the Palestinians and the Arab armies not only took land from the Palestinians but also created the first refugee problem. While the Arab armies tried to kill Jewish civilians and did in fact massacre many who tried to escape, the Israeli army allowed Arab civilians to flee to Arab-controlled areas. For example, when the Arab Legion's Sixth Battalion conquered Kfar Etzion, they left no Jewish refugees. The villagers surrendered and walked, hands in the air, into the center of the compound. Morris reports that the Arab soldiers simply "proceeded to mow them down."<sup>4</sup> The soldiers massacred 120 Jews; 21 of them were women. This was part of a general Arab policy: "Jews taken prisoner during convoy battles were generally put to death and often mutilated by their captors."<sup>5</sup> It is precisely because the Israeli army, unlike Arab armies, did not deliberately kill civilians that the refugee problem arose.<sup>6</sup>

Several distinct, although overlapping, refugee problems were created by the Arab attack on Israel in 1947 and 1948. The first was created between December 1947 and March 1948 during the attacks by Palestinians in the months before the invasion of the Pan-Arab armies. According to Benny Morris, the historian who is quite critical of Israel and Zionists and an expert on the refugee issue, "The Yishuv [the Jews of Palestine who would soon become the Israelis] was on the defensive and upper and middle-class Arabs—as many as seventy-five thousand—fled." Morris described how the families that had the means to move to Cairo, Amman, or Beirut did so, expecting to return as they had done after the violence of the late 1930s. Among those who left were "many of the political leaders and/or their families . . . including most members of the AHC and of the Haifa National Committee." These notables, according to Morris "may have feared a Husseini-ruled Palestine" as much as they worried about Jewish domination.

Morris pointed out that the Jewish-Arab conflict was only part of a "more general breakdown of law and order in Palestine after the UN Partition resolution." Public services collapsed following the withdrawal of the British and their replacement by "Arab irregulars, who extorted money from prosperous families and occasionally abused people in the streets."<sup>7</sup>

The second refugee problem began when the Haganah, the official Jewish army of self-defense, began to gain the offensive between April and June 1948. Once Haifa and Jaffa were captured by the Israelis, a domino effect began, with the flight from cities leading to flight from surrounding villages, which in turn led to flight from other villages.

Contrary to Noam Chomsky's characterization of Morris's conclusion—Chomsky says that Morris does not believe that any Arab leaders "told the Palestinians to leave"—Morris actually says that:

In some areas Arab commanders ordered the villagers to evacuate to clear the ground for military purposes or to prevent surrender. More than half a dozen villages—just north of Jerusalem and in the Lower Galilee—were abandoned during these months as a result of such orders. Elsewhere, in East Jerusalem and in many villages around the country, the [Arab] commanders ordered women, old people, and children to be sent away to be out of harm's way. Indeed, psychological preparation for the removal of dependents from the battlefield had begun in 1946–47, when the AHC and the Arab League had periodically endorsed such a move when contemplating the future war in Palestine.<sup>8</sup>

Morris estimates that between two and three thousand Arabs fled their homes during this phase of the Arab-initiated fighting.

Again contrary to Chomsky's characterization of Morris's views, Morris notes that during the first phase "there was no Zionist policy to expel the Arabs or intimidate them into flight," although some Jews were certainly happy to see them leave. During the second stage as well, "there was no blanket policy of expulsion,"<sup>9</sup> but the military actions of the Haganah certainly contributed to the flight. Such flight from the scenes of battle occurs in most wars, if the winning side allows it, rather than seeking to kill those running away, as the Arabs did. There is little doubt that if the Arab armies had captured Jewish cities, they would not have allowed the civilian refugees to flee to other Jewish cities. They would have massacred them in order to prevent the creation of a Jewish refugee problem in the Arab state they hoped would result from an Arab victory.

The grand mufti declared "a holy war" and ordered his "Muslim brothers" to "murder the Jews. Murder them all."<sup>10</sup> There were to be no survivors or refugees. The position of the grand mufti had always been

that an Arab Palestine could not absorb even 400,000 Jews.<sup>11</sup> By 1948, the Jewish population exceeded 600,000. Extermination, not the creation of a difficult refugee population, was the goal of the Arab attack on Jewish civilian populations. As the Arab League's secretary general, Abd al-Ahman Azzah Pasha, candidly put it, "This will be a war of extermination and momentous massacre, which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades." The grand mufti's spokesman, Ahmad Shukeiry, called for "the elimination of the Jewish state" with regard to the goal of the Arab attack. There was no talk of, or planning for, a large Jewish refugee population in the event of an Arab victory. "It does not matter how many [Jews] there are. We will sweep them into the sea," the Arab League's secretary general announced.<sup>12</sup> The Jews fully understood that they "faced slaughter should they be defeated."<sup>13</sup>

Israel, on the other hand, was prepared to extend full citizenship to whatever number of Arabs remained in the Jewish state. Although many Jews surely preferred a smaller, rather than a larger, Arab minority, the official Jewish organizations took no steps to assure a reduction in the Arab population in general, although Israeli military commanders did order the evacuation of several hostile towns that had served as bases for Arab irregular units, which were preventing access to the main road to Jerusalem and which "proved a permanent threat both to all north-south and to east-west (Tel Aviv–Jerusalem) communications."<sup>14</sup>

Although it was not the policy of the Haganah to encourage the flight of local Arabs, that certainly seems to have been the policy of the Irgun (or Etzel), the paramilitary wing of the revisionist movement headed by Menachem Begin, and Lechi (or the Stern gang) headed by Yitzhak Shamir. On April 9, 1948, paramilitary units fought a difficult battle for control of Deir Yassin, an important Arab village on the way to Jerusalem. The battle was fierce, with Etzel and Lechi forces losing more than a quarter of their fighters. The Jewish fighters were pinned down by sniper fire and threw grenades through the windows of many of the houses from which the snipers were firing. Most of the villagers eventually fled. An Etzel armored car with a loudspeaker demanded that the remaining villagers lay down their arms and leave their houses. Morris reports that "the truck got stuck in a ditch"<sup>15</sup> and the message was not heard. The fighting continued, and when it was over, 100 to 110 Arabs were dead.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the dead were women, because Arab fighters dressed as women and shot Israelis to whom they had "surrendered"<sup>17</sup>—a tactic employed by some Iraqis in 2003. Some children and old people were also killed. Although there was and continues to be considerable dispute surrounding the circumstances of these deaths, the event was called a massacre, and as word spread, it clearly contributed to the flight of Arabs in surrounding villages. "Everyone had an interest" in publicizing and

exaggerating the number of people killed and the brutality of the killings. The Arab side wanted to discredit the Jews by arguing—quite hypocritically, in light of their own policy over the decades of deliberately massacring civilians—that the Jews were worse than they were. The British also wanted to discredit the Jews. Etzel and Lechi wanted to “provoke terror and frighten Arabs into fleeing.” And the Haganah wanted “to tarnish” Etzel and Lechi.<sup>18</sup>

The Haganah and the Jewish Agency—the official organs of the state-to-be—immediately condemned the massacre and those who had participated in it. A formal note of apology and explanation was sent to King Abdullah. Indeed, the Deir Yassin massacre certainly contributed to the controversial decision by David Ben-Gurion—Israel’s first prime minister—to disarm, by force, these paramilitary groups in June 1948. But the effect of Deir Yassin, and the publicity surrounding it, was clearly to provoke even more flight by Arabs.

Some Palestinian leaders actually circulated false rumors that women had been raped. When confronted with the reality that no rapes had taken place, Hussein Khalidi, a Palestinian leader, said, “We have to say this, so that Arab armies will come to liberate us from the Jews.”<sup>19</sup> Hazam Nusseibi, who was a journalist at the time, told the BBC years later that the deliberate fabrication of the rape charge “was our biggest mistake . . . as soon as they heard that women had been raped at Deir Yassin, Palestinians fled in terror.”<sup>20</sup>

Deir Yassin stands out in the history of Arab–Jewish conflict in Palestine precisely because it was so unusual and so out of character for the Jews. No single Arab massacre of Jews has that status, because there are too many to list. Yet every Arab schoolchild and propagandist knows of and speaks of Deir Yassin, while few ever mention Hebron, Kfar Etzion, Hadassah Hospital, Safad, and the many other well-planned Arab massacres of Jews to come, except when extremists proudly take credit for them.

The Arabs retaliated for the Deir Yassin massacre not by attacking those responsible for perpetrating it—Etzel or Lechi military targets—but rather by deliberately committing a far more premeditated massacre of their own. In a well-planned attack four days after Deir Yassin, Arab forces ambushed a civilian convoy of doctors, nurses, medical school professors, and patients headed toward the Hadassah hospital to treat the sick, murdering seventy of them. To assure there were no survivors, the Arab attackers doused the buses and cars containing the medical personnel with gasoline, “setting them alight.”<sup>21</sup>

No apologies or excuses were offered for this carefully planned massacre of medical noncombatants. Israeli forces did not retaliate for the Hadassah massacre by targeting Arab *civilians*. They went after those armed murderers who had perpetrated the massacre. Deir Yassin remained

an isolated although tragic and inexcusable blemish on Israeli paramilitary actions in defense of its civilian population,<sup>22</sup> while the deliberate targeting of civilians remained—and still remains—the policy of Palestinian terrorist groups, as well as of many Arab governments.

Another phase of the Arab refugee problem took place when the Haganah won the battle for Haifa at the end of April 1948. According to Morris, “The Arab leaders, preferring not to surrender, announced that they and their community intended to evacuate the town, despite a plea by the Jewish mayor that they stay.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in Jaffa, the fierce fighting with many Jewish casualties caused a panic among the town’s Arab population and many fled. Morris writes that “the behavior of Jaffa’s Arab military also contributed: they looted the empty houses and occasionally robbed and abused the remaining inhabitants.” When he visited Jaffa after the fighting had died down, David Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary, “I couldn’t understand. Why did the inhabitants . . . leave?”<sup>24</sup>

Of course, Jaffa remained an Arab city, and today its population includes thousands of Arabs. Haifa remained a mixed city, whose current population also includes thousands of Arabs. Some other towns and villages from which Arabs fled remain mixed today, while some have not seen a return of Arab populations. Morris, who is harshly critical of traditional Israeli history with regard to the refugee issue, summarizes the problem caused by the Palestinian and Pan-Arab attack: “The Palestinian Refugee problem was born of war, not by design. . . . The Arab leadership inside and outside Palestine probably helped precipitate the exodus. . . . No guiding hand or central control is evident.”<sup>25</sup> Morris states that “[d]uring the first months, the flight of the middle and upper classes from the towns provoked little Arab interest.”<sup>26</sup>

It looked like a repeat of the exodus that had taken place during the riots of the late 1930s, and the Husseinis “were probably happy that many of these wealthy, Opposition-linked families were leaving.”<sup>27</sup> Morris points out that “no Arab government closed its borders or otherwise tried to stem the exodus.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, Morris notes that these refugees would

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 terrorists and the “Palestinian problem” into one of the world’s most intractable.<sup>29</sup>

In his public speeches, Noam Chomsky mischaracterizes Morris’s conclusions by telling his audiences that Morris does not claim—indeed, Chomsky says that no one today claims—that Arab leaders contributed to

the flight of Palestinians. He says (falsely) that Morris places the entire blame on Israel, that there were "never any such calls" by Arab leaders, and that this story was "Zionist propaganda" that was "abandoned almost 15 years ago" and is "not believed by anyone."<sup>30</sup> The truth, of course, is that Morris does indeed conclude that some "Arab commanders ordered the villagers to evacuate" and that the Arab League had "periodically endorsed such a move."

Morris, like other historians and unlike Chomsky, finds a shared responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem and concludes that neither side deliberately caused it "by design," but that "the Arab leadership inside and outside Palestine helped precipitate the exodus"—a conclusion Chomsky assures his audience is "not believed by anyone," especially not Morris. It is always important to check the sources cited by Chomsky, especially when he is discussing Israel.

In his 1972 memoirs, the former prime minister of Syria, Khalid al-Azm, placed the entire blame for the refugee problem on the Arabs:

Since 1948 it is we who demanded the return of the refugees . . . while it is we who made them leave. . . . We brought disaster upon . . . Arab refugees, by inviting them and bringing pressure to bear upon them to leave. . . . We have rendered them dispossessed. . . . We have accustomed them to begging. . . . We have participated in lowering their moral and social level. . . . Then we exploited them in executing crimes of murder, arson, and throwing bombs upon . . . men, women and children—all this in the service of political purposes.<sup>31</sup>

Even Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the prime minister of the Palestinian Authority, has accused the Arab armies of having abandoned the Palestinians after they "forced them to emigrate and to leave their homeland and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which the Jews used to live."<sup>32</sup>

Other sources sympathetic to the Arab cause agree. In 1980, the Arab National Committee of Haifa wrote a memorandum to the Arab states that included the following: "The removal of the Arab inhabitants . . . was voluntary and was carried out at our request. The Arab delegation proudly asked for the evacuation of the Arabs and their removal to the neighboring Arab countries. . . . We are very glad to state that the Arabs guarded their honour and traditions with pride and greatness."<sup>33</sup> And a research report by the Arab-sponsored Institute for Palestine Studies concluded that the majority of the Arab refugees were not expelled and 68 percent of them "left without seeing an Israeli soldier."<sup>34</sup> At the very least, the issue is too complex and multifaceted for simple finger-pointing in only one direction.

There is some dispute about the total number of Arabs who left their cities, towns, and villages as a result of the Palestinian and Arab attacks on the Jews. There is even greater disagreement about the proportion of those who left of their own accord, were chased, or were told by Arab leaders to leave. There is also considerable disagreement over how long many of these refugees had actually lived in the areas they left. And there is little agreement about how many Arabs who currently call themselves refugees of the 1947–1948 war actually belong in that category.

Most scholars have put the total number of Arab refugees from the Palestinian–Arab attacks of 1947–1948 at between 472,000 and 750,000. The U.N. mediator on Palestine counted only 472,000, of which 360,000 required aid.<sup>35</sup> The official Israeli count was 520,000. Morris puts it at 700,000. Palestinians put it as high as 900,000. Whatever the real figure was, it is impossible to subdivide that total figure into voluntary, forced, or some combination of factors. As Morris concludes, "The creation of the problem was almost inevitable, given the geographical intermixing of the populations, the history of Arab–Jewish hostility since 1917, the rejection by both sides of a binational [as distinguished from a two-state] solution, and the depth of Arab animosity toward the Jews and fears of coming under Jewish rule."<sup>36</sup> Put another way, the last thing many Arabs wanted was to remain as minority citizens of the Jewish state of Israel in the villages and homes they had left.

The claimed right of return has never contemplated their return as a *minority* group, based on any personal desire to live in a particular village or house in Jewish Israel. The right to return has always contemplated returning as a *majority* group so as to eliminate the Jewish state and live in a Muslim state. On August 4, 1948, Emile Ghoury, the secretary of the Arab Higher Command, told the *Beirut Telegraph* that "it is inconceivable that the refugees should be sent back to their homes while they are occupied by the Jews . . . it would serve as a first step toward their recognition of Israel."<sup>37</sup> Shortly thereafter, the foreign minister of Egypt acknowledged that "it is well known and understood that the Arabs, in demanding the return of the refugees to Palestine, mean their return as masters of their homeland, and not as slaves. More explicitly: they intend to annihilate the state of Israel."<sup>38</sup> In other words, the refugees were not primarily a humanitarian concern but rather a political tactic designed to produce the intended destruction of Israel. Surely no one would expect Israel to facilitate its own politicicide.

As to how long these refugees had actually lived in the villages and towns they left, even Morris documents that as a result of "economic and social processes that had begun in the mid-nineteenth century [well before the First Aliyah] large parts of the rural population [had] been left landless" prior to the events of 1947–1948:<sup>39</sup>

In consequence there was a constant, growing shift of population from the countryside to urban shantytowns and slums; to some degree this led to both physical and psychological divorce from the land. [They also] lost their means of livelihood. For some, exile may have become an attractive option, at least until Palestine calmed down.<sup>40</sup>

The United Nations, recognizing that many of the refugees had not lived for long in the villages they left, made a remarkable decision to change the definition of refugee—*only* for purposes of defining who is an Arab refugee from Israel—to include any Arab who had lived in Israel for two years before leaving.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, an Arab was counted as a refugee if he moved just a few miles from one part of Palestine to another—even if he returned to the village in which he had previously lived and in which his family still lived, from a village to which he had moved only two years earlier. Indeed a significant number of Palestinian refugees simply moved from one part of Palestine to another. Some preferred to live in an area controlled by Arabs rather than Jews, just as the Jews who had lived in cities that came under Arab control chose to move to the Israeli side of the partition. The Jews who moved a few miles (even those who had no choice) were not called refugees, but the Arabs who moved the same distance were. It was the most unusual definition of refugee in history.

Unlike all other refugees worldwide, Palestinian refugees are treated to a separate U.N. agency, with a separate definition of refugee and a separate mission. If the standard definition of refugee (which applies to all other refugee groups) were to apply to the Palestinians, the number of Palestinian refugees would fall precipitously.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the general refugee agency that serves refugee groups other than the Palestinians, includes in its definition of refugee someone who (1) leaves out of a "well-founded fear of being persecuted," (2) is "outside the country of [his] nationality," and (3) "is unable to, or . . . unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." But the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the separate agency specifically for Palestinian refugees, applies a far broader set of guidelines. It defines Palestinians as refugees regardless of whether they left out of a "well-founded fear of persecution" and regardless of the country where they live. Specifically, UNRWA defines a Palestinian refugee as anyone (1) "whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948," and (2) "who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict" (regardless of the reason for leaving). Plus, UNRWA defines as refugees all of the descendants of those who meet these two criteria.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, UNHCR and UNRWA have very different missions. The UNHCR is charged with finding permanent homes for refugees. UNRWA

mandate is not concerned with permanent solutions and is designed only to maintain and support Palestinians within refugee camps, where many of them remain today. With its broad refugee definition and a mission geared toward dependency, UNRWA's refugee count has risen from under a million in 1950 to over 4 million (and counting) today.<sup>43</sup>

This approach to the refugee issue was calculated to keep it from being resolved and to allow it to fester and even be exacerbated. The Arab refugee problem could easily have been solved between 1948 and 1967 when Jordan controlled and annexed the West Bank, which was an underpopulated and undercultivated area. But instead of integrating the refugees into the religiously, linguistically, and culturally identical society, they were segregated into ghettos called refugee camps and made to live on the U.N. dole, while being fed propaganda about their glorious return to the village down the road that had been their home for as little as two years.

At about the same time that 472,000 to 750,000 Arabs became refugees from Israel, tens of millions of other refugees had been created as the result of World War II. In virtually all of those cases, the refugees were displaced from locations in which they and their ancestors had lived for decades, sometimes centuries—certainly more than the two years required for being considered a Palestinian refugee. For example, the Sudeten Germans, who were moved en masse out of the borderlands of Czechoslovakia, had lived there for hundreds of years. The Jews of Europe—what remained of them after the Holocaust—had lived in Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and the Soviet Union for hundreds of years.

As the result of having lived in what became Israel for as little as two years, thousands upon thousands of Arabs and their descendants have been kept in refugee camps for more than half a century to be used as political pawns in an effort to demonize and destroy Israel. During that same period of time, many other refugee problems in the world have been solved by the host nations accepting and integrating the refugee population into their own. Exchanges of population took place between several nations—including India and Pakistan, and Greece and Turkey—without the need to build permanent refugee camps. Although those exchanges were not without difficulties and some remain controversial, none has created the kind of enduring problems caused by the unwillingness of Arab states to integrate the Palestinian Arab population.

Between 1948 and 1967, tens of millions of other refugees became productive members of their new societies. Yet for the nearly twenty years that Egypt and Jordan controlled the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the Palestinian refugee population remained in camps, growing in size and desperation. Even King Hussein of Jordan, who could have helped solve the refugee problem, acknowledged that the Arab nations have used the Palestinian refugees as pawns since the beginning of the conflict: "Since

1948 Arab leaders . . . have used the Palestine people for selfish political purposes. This is . . . criminal."<sup>44</sup>

The other major refugee problem that affected the Middle East was the creation of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees from Arab and Muslim countries in which they had lived for hundreds or sometimes thousands of years, even before the advent of Islam. Mohammed and his contemporaries created a refugee problem when they banned Jews from Arabia. Then again after the creation of the Jewish state, the situation of Jews in many Arab and Muslim countries became so fraught with risk that many felt they had no choice but to leave. In the years following the establishment of the state of Israel, as many as 850,000 so-called Arab Jews became refugees from the lands in which they had been born. The number of Jewish refugees from Arab lands was slightly more than the number of Arab refugees from Israel.

There was "an exchange of populations," with the Jewish refugees having been forced to abandon far more of their property and wealth than the refugees left behind. Those abandoned assets included large houses, businesses, and cash. The difference is that Israel worked hard (although not always with complete success) to integrate its refugee population into the mainstream, while the Arabs deliberately encouraged Arab refugees to fester by keeping so many of them in camps, where many still remain, and refusing to integrate them into their more homogeneous populations. This was done purely to try to cast doubt on Israel's legitimacy despite the desperate need in some underpopulated Arab countries, such as Syria and Jordan, for more workers to serve the labor-intensive economic needs of those nations. Even after the Palestinian Authority assumed control over all the major cities on the West Bank and in Gaza, following the initial implementation of the Oslo II Agreement in 1995, no serious effort was made to move the refugees from the camps to integrate them into Palestinian society. They remain pawns in the effort to flood Israel with a hostile population designed to destroy its character as a Jewish state.

There are those who argue that the Palestinian refugees were different from the Jewish refugees in another respect: while the Palestinians were forced to flee from their homes, the Jews chose to leave their ancient homelands. We have already seen that the reasons why the Palestinians left are complex and not amenable to such a simple, singular cause. A brief review of the Jewish flight from Arab and Muslim countries demonstrates a comparable complexity and shows that the two refugee problems, although very different in their solutions, were quite similar in their causes. One historian summarized the situation as follows:

In the years leading up to the establishment of Israel, Jews in many parts of the Arab and Muslim world faced increasing threats to their safety. In

November 1945, the head of the Jewish community of Tripoli (the capital of Libya) described the scene this way:

"The Arabs attacked Jews in obedience to mysterious orders. Their outburst of bestial violence has no plausible motive. For fifty hours they hunted men down, attacked houses and shops, killed men, women, old and young, horribly tortured and dismembered Jews isolated in the interior. . . . In order to carry out the slaughter, the attackers used various weapons: knives, daggers, sticks, clubs, iron bars, revolvers, and even hand grenades."<sup>45</sup>

When the War of Independence began in 1947, the violence intensified. In Aleppo, 300 houses and 11 synagogues were destroyed in a pogrom, and 82 Jews were killed in Aden. Riots in Iraq and Egypt forced Jews out of those countries. The Jews of the Arab world were forced out by fear as political violence spilled onto the streets. In this case, it was fed by official government incitement, as in Iraq, where Zionism could be punished by death.<sup>46</sup>

Sabri Jiryis, a former Arab-Israeli lawyer who left Israel and became a member of the Palestinian National Council, has acknowledged that "the Jews of the Arab states were driven out of their ancient homes [and] shamefully deported after their property had been commandeered. . . . [W]hat happened was a . . . population and property exchange, and each party must bear the consequences. . . . [T]he Arab states . . . must settle the Palestinians in their own midst and solve their problems."<sup>47</sup> Instead, they deliberately exacerbated the problems.

It is important to recall that Israel was not the only country that gained territory as a result of the failed Arab attack. Jordan occupied—indeed annexed—the entire West Bank, while Egypt occupied the Gaza Strip. There were no resolutions demanding an end to these occupations, although they were often quite repressive and brutal. One observer described Gaza as "in effect, a large Egyptian prison camp."<sup>48</sup> The Palestinians did not seem to care that their land, villages, and cities were being occupied as long as they were not occupied by Jews. Nor were there complaints that some Palestinians—especially Christians—became refugees from the Jordanian and Egyptian occupations.<sup>49</sup> The refugee issue of 1947–1948 was deliberately left unresolved by the Arabs as a tactic designed to destroy the new Jewish state.

To understand how different the Arab-Israeli conflict would look if the Arab world including the Palestinian Muslims had accepted the two-state solution when it was first proposed (or even for years thereafter), we must briefly return to the *Peel Commission Report*. If the Arabs had accepted the Peel Commission partition proposal, there would have been a Palestinian state (in addition to Transjordan) in most of what was left of Palestine

following the partition of Transjordan. The vast majority of Arabs and Muslims in Palestine would have lived under Palestinian control, and the Arab minority that lived in the land allotted to the Jewish state would have had the choice to move to the Palestinian state or remain as part of the Arab minority in the Jewish state. The same would have been true for the Jews who lived in the Arab state.

The Jewish state would have been open to immigration and could have saved hundreds of thousands, perhaps even more, European Jews from the Holocaust. Although the area allotted to the Jewish state by the Peel Commission was tiny in comparison with that allotted to the Arab state (and comparably even smaller if Transjordan is included), it was large enough to absorb millions of refugees, as evidenced by the fact that millions of people live within that area today.

There would have been no Arab refugee problem had the Arab states accepted the subsequent U.N. partition. But instead, having rejected Jewish self-determination in 1937, the Arab world rejected it once again in 1948 and attacked Israel in an effort to destroy the new Jewish state, exterminate its Jewish population, and drive the Jews into the sea. Then again in 1967, it threatened Israel with destruction and annihilation.