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January 06, 2008

The Arab 'Right of Return' to Israel

By [Rachel Neuwirth](#)

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A media and propaganda campaign has been under way since the Annapolis "peace" conference to legitimate the longstanding demands made on behalf of the Palestinian "Arab refugees" -- meaning in practice the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of refugees -- from the 1948 Arab-Israel war of sixty years ago, for their return to their ancestral homes and the return of all their ancestors' former land and property in what is now Israel.

The Palestinian National Authority headed by Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Liberation Organization founded by Yasser Arafat have always made this demand a *sine*

qua non for "peace" with Israel, as do all of the Palestinian terrorist-political groups (Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, etc. etc.). And the Palestinian Arab leadership continues to stand by this demand today, promising their supporters that they will never agree to "peace" without its acceptance by Israel.

An example of the current media blitz on behalf of this "right of return" demand is an op-ed by [Nir Rosen](#), a reporter who has covered the Islamic world for many of the United States' leading media organs, in the *Washington Post* ("Scapegoats in an Unwelcoming Land," Sunday, December 16, 2007). Mr. Rosen writes:

"the rights of the Palestinian refugees have been ignored for six decades by a world that has wished them away. But the Middle East will never know peace or stability until they are granted justice. In 1948-49, around the conflict that Israelis refer to as their War of Independence and that Palestinians call the Catastrophe, some 750,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed to make way for the creation of the Jewish state. In 1967, during the Six-Day War, 400,000 Palestinians were expelled by the Israeli military, according to Amnesty International."

A similar polemic by one [Ghada Ageel](#), who describes herself as "a third-generation Palestinian refugee [who] grew up in the Khan Yunis refugee camp in Gaza and teaches Middle Eastern politics at the University of Exeter in Britain," appeared in the Dec. 1, 2007 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*: Ms. Ageel avers:

"sixty years ago, my grandparents lived in the beautiful village of Beit Daras, a few kilometers north of Gaza. They were farmers and owned hundreds of acres of land. But in 1948, in the first Arab-Israeli war, many people lost their lives defending our village from the Zionist militias. In the end, with their crops and homes burning, the villagers fled. My family eventually made its way to what became the refugee camp of Khan Yunis in Gaza. We were hit hard by poverty, humiliation and disease. We became refugees, queuing for tents, food and assistance, while the state of Israel was established on the ruins of my family's property and on the ruins of hundreds of other Palestinian villages. . . I raise this story today. . . to help convey the deep-seated fears of Palestinian refugees that we will be asked to exonerate Israel for its actions and to relinquish our right to return home.

That cannot be allowed to happen. All refugees have the right to return. This is an individual right, long recognized in international law, that cannot be



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negotiated away."

What is wrong with these demands? Just about everything. Here are only a few of the reasons why they unjust, ill-intentioned and grounded in deceit:

First and foremost, the Palestinian Arabs were the primary *aggressors* in the 1948 war, not innocent victims of the "Zionists" as their spokesmen and advocates claim. The Palestinian Arab guerilla-terrorists used very brutal tactics indeed in 1947-48 to achieve their leaders' publicly affirmed goal of "driving the Jews into the sea."

Within 24 hours of the passage of the United Nations General Assembly partition resolution of November 29, 1947, which the Palestinians' political leadership rejected, a civilian bus carrying Jewish passengers were attacked by Palestinian Arab guerilla-terrorists and five of its passengers were massacred. Two days later, the Jewish Commercial Center in Jerusalem was burned to the ground.

Soon terrorist and guerilla attacks on Jewish villages and urban neighborhoods were being carried out all across Palestine. Few if any Jewish communities were spared attack. In Jaffa, to take a fairly typical example, the minaret of the Hassan Bek mosque was used by the Palestinian Arab guerillas as a sniper post to direct random fire at Jewish civilians in nearby Tel Aviv, taking a heavy toll in lives over several months. The attacks on Jewish-operated vehicles along the roads were especially vicious, resulting in many casualties and effectively closing all of the major roads in Palestine to Jewish traffic.

As a result, many Jewish communities developed severe shortages of food, fuel, and medicines. The Jerusalem areas' 100,000 Jewish inhabitants were especially hard-hit by the Palestinian Arabs' siege warfare. By May 15, 1948, after five and a half months of Palestinian guerilla-terrorist attacks, but *before* six Arab states had begun their massive invasion of Palestine-Israel, 2,500 Jews had already been killed, half of them civilians, and thousands more had been wounded.

After the Arab states' invasion began on May 15, the Palestinian Arab "irregulars" helped the Arab armies in every way they could: they blew up Jerusalem's main water pumping station, leaving its inhabitants without regular water as well as food supplies; continued to ambush Jewish traffic on the roads; acted as guides to Arab troops; and held down defensive positions, thereby freeing the Arab regular armies for offensive operations against their Jewish neighbors. By the time the war ended, about 6,000 Jews had been killed, including approximately 2,000 civilians-nearly one per cent of the Jewish population of Palestine/Israel.

In order to defend the country's 650,000 Jewish inhabitants, whose villages and urban neighborhoods were scattered amongst Arab ones, from annihilation by the combined Palestinian Arab and Arab states' onslaught, the Palestinian Jewish defense militias (just in the process of evolving into the Israeli army) were forced to capture Palestinian villages that served as bases of operation for the guerilla-terrorist attackers. It is true that when the defense militias entered some Palestinian villages in order to drive out or capture the guerilla-terrorists, much of the Palestinian Arab civilian population also fled from these villages. But this was hardly the fault of the Israelis.

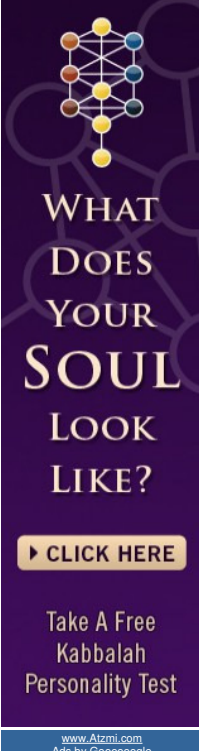
The Arab Palestinian guerillas did not wear uniforms or distinguish themselves in any way from the Arab civilian population, among whom they lived and from whom they were recruited. As a result, there was no way that the Israeli soldiers could drive the guerillas out of these villages without adversely affecting their noncombatant relatives and neighbors

Even so, the Israeli forces' counter-guerilla operations, unavoidable for self-defense as they were, were not even the immediate cause of the "exodus" of most Palestinian Arabs from the areas that became Israel in 1948. [Many Arab leaders as well as ordinary Palestinian Arabs](#) have confirmed the role of the Palestinian Arab leadership and the governments of the Arab states in causing the mass evacuation of much of the Arab population from what is now Israel. A prime example is none other than the present head of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). Abbas wrote in March 1976 that

"The Arab armies entered Palestine to protect the Palestinians from the Zionist tyranny, but instead they abandoned them, forced them to emigrate and to leave their homeland, imposed upon them a political and ideological blockade and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which the Jews used to live in Eastern Europe."

Another well-informed Arab politician, Khaled al-Azm, a former Syrian Prime Minister, states in his memoirs published in 1973 that

"Since 1948, it is we who have demanded the return of the refugees, while it is we who made them leave. We brought disaster upon a million Arab refugees by inviting them and bringing pressure on them to leave. We have accustomed them to begging...we have participated in lowering their morale and social level...Then we exploited them in executing crimes of murder, arson and throwing stones upon men, women and children...all this in the service of political purposes..."



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And Mahmud Al-Habbash, a columnist for the official PA paper, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, has confirmed that the Arabs left Israel in 1948 only after Arab leaders persuaded them to do so by promising them a speedy return to their homes in Palestine; as Habbash puts it,

"the leaders and the elites promised us at the beginning of the 'Catastrophe' [the establishment of Israel and the creation of refugee problem] in 1948, that the duration of the exile will not be long, and that it will not last more than a few days or months, and afterwards the refugees will return to their homes, which most of them did not leave only until they put their trust in those 'Arkuvian' promises made by the leaders and the political elites. Afterwards, days passed, months, years and decades, and the promises were lost with the strain of the succession of events..." [Term "Arkuvian," is after Arkuv - a figure from Arab tradition - who was known for breaking his promises and for his lies. *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, December 13, 2006].

As for Mr. Rosen's claim that "in 1967, during the Six-Day War, 400,000 Palestinians were expelled by the Israeli military," for which he gives "Amnesty International" as his source, it is true that an [AI report dated March 3, 2004](#) contains a single sentence claiming that "In . . . 1967, Palestinian refugees were expelled out of their homes by force." But the report does not give the figures cited by Ms. Rosen ("400,000") or indeed any figures at all for the refugees of the 1967 war. Even more to the point, it provides no documentation or other supporting evidence whatsoever for its expulsion claim. Nor have we seen any such evidence relating to an expulsion of Palestinians in 1967 elsewhere.

Even the claims of many of the present-day "refugees" to be Palestinians are dubious. In her painstakingly researched study *From Time Immemorial*, Joan Peters points out that UNWRA defines any Arab who lived in Palestine for a minimum of only two years before Israel became independent in 1948, and who left Israeli territory at that time, plus all Arabs descended from such individuals to the end of time. As Ms. Peters documents at great length, tens if not hundreds of thousands of Arabs immigrated to Palestine under the British Mandate administration of 1918-1948, attracted by the massive economic development and infrastructure improvements introduced into Palestine by the Jewish "settlers" and the British administration.

Thus many of the "Palestinians" not only have never lived in Palestine themselves, but are fairly distant descendants of people who lived their only briefly before 1948, having been born elsewhere in the Arab world -- for the most part, in the Hauran region of Syria. Even more registration of phony refugees occurred because of the United Nations Works and Relief Agency (UNWRA) practice of relying solely on the claims of self-professed refugees to determine refugee status, without attempting to verify their claims.

Equally dubious are the claims of so many of the refugees to be the heirs of former Palestinian landowners. All of the claims to ancestral land inheritances could not possibly be true. Very few Palestinian Arabs actually left behind valuable property when they left Israeli territory in 1948. Prior to Israel's independence very few Arabs possessed clear and unencumbered legal title to land in Palestine. Vast areas of the country were the property of the "state" (originally the Turkish government). Other land was held in common by villages.

Much of what land as was privately owned by Arabs prior to 1948 was included in vast latifundia owned by a few dozen wealthy "effendi" (aristocratic) families, some of whom did not even live in Palestine. Most Palestinian Arabs were tenant farmers, landless laborers, or Bedouin nomads. And such farms as were owned by Arab smallholders were usually hard-scrabble affairs on sandy, unproductive soil, which enabled their cultivators at most to eke out a bare living. Their owners were heavily indebted to money-lenders or large landlords.

In addition, many Arabs who claim to have once owned land in Palestine were actually [squatters on previously unoccupied and unclaimed "state" land, without a legal private owner](#). Although many of these individuals never possessed title deeds to the land they professed to own and did not pay any taxes on them, they or their descendants nonetheless demand that "their" land be "returned" to them.

Claims of massive poverty, deprivation and suffering on the part of the Palestinian Arab refugees are largely false. For sixty years four generations of Palestinian refugees or alleged refugees have had all or most of their housing, food, education through college and graduate school, medical care and social services [provided to them for free](#) by UNWRA. No Americans or Europeans have benefited from such a generous and all-encompassing welfare state.

On top of UNWRA assistance, the Palestinian Arabs also receive a total of over a billion dollars a year in aid from other United Nations agencies, the United States, the European Community, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, and Iran. There have been no tents in the "refugee camps" (actually towns or urban neighborhoods) since the 1950s; the "refugees" live in apartments or houses, many of them as large and with the same amenities as apartments and houses in the United States and Europe.

For example, after the fighting in Jenin in 2002, when the Israel Defense Forces were compelled by repeated terrorist massacres to enter the Jenin "refugee camp" in order to remove the large terrorist base of operations there, the United Nations rebuilt the houses that had been destroyed in the fighting *gratis* for the Palestinians, hiring a British company to build English style townhouses with central heating and all modern amenities. However, at one point, the

construction was halted by armed Palestinian Arabs with guns, who invaded the UNWRA housing office and demanded that *bigger* houses be built for them. They claimed that their original houses that were destroyed in the fighting were bigger than the townhouses designed by the British construction firm; they had been more like ranch houses.

Even Mr. Rosen, while purporting to describe the dire poverty and misery of the refugees in Lebanese "camps," lets slip an inconsistency: he observes that

"the term 'refugee camp' summons up images of tents and squalor, but Nahr-el Bared, like many of its counterparts elsewhere in Lebanon, had been a thoroughly urban camp [sic], with low-slung apartment buildings. It even had soothing views of the Mediterranean."

Of course, non-refugee multimillionaires would gladly pay millions of dollars for a plot of land and a house with such "soothing views!" In short, Palestinian refugeeism is something of a racket.

The international community has not recognized or enforced a "right of return" for most of the very numerous non-Palestinian refugee communities throughout the world. The list of refugee populations who have been forced from their homelands and whose lands have been seized without compensation because of wars and revolutions within the past 100 years is endless. The more than 850,000 Jews who have either been **expelled or fled** from Arab and other Muslim countries since the Arab world initiated hostilities against the Jews of Israel-Palestine in 1947; the fifteen million **Germans** expelled from Pomerania, Silesia, Bohemia and Moravia by Poland and Czechoslovakia after World War II; the two million ethnic **Greeks and Turks** who were expelled from either Greece or Turkey in a "population exchange" administered by the League of Nations in 1922; the additional 200,000 **Greeks** who were expelled from northern Cyprus by the Turkish military invasion in 1974; the millions of **Hindus** who fled the newly created Muslim state of "Pakistan" and the millions of Muslims who fled what remained of India to Pakistan following the partition of India in 1947; the millions of **Russians** who fled Russia after the Communist takeover of that country in 1917 for other European countries or the United States; and the **millions of Cubans, Vietnamese and Laotians** who fled their homelands for the United States after the Communist take-overs of these countries, have all been denied repatriation, the return of the vast amounts of property they were forced to leave behind, or even compensation for their lost property.

Why should the Palestinian Arabs be considered a uniquely special case, with more rights than other refugees from wars and/or revolutions?

Last but certainly not least, implementation of the "right of return" demand for Palestinian Arabs would force the relocation of millions of people, most of them refugees or the descendants of refugees themselves, who have been resettled in the course of sixty years on land that is claimed by the Palestinian Arabs. The "return" of four million alleged "refugees," actually the descendants, mainly third and fourth generation, of people who once were or claimed to be refugees, who have been trained from birth to hate Israel, would result in a massive internal insurgency against the state, followed by the occupation of Israel by hostile Arab armies and the probable extermination of its Jewish population. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that this is precisely what most "right of return" advocates have in mind.

It is long overdue for the libel of an Israeli or Zionist "original sin" against the Palestinian Arabs to be discredited, along with the supposed Palestinian Arab "right of return," which is grounded in this false "narrative." There can be no peace between Arabs and Israelis before the lies are dispelled, and people on both sides, as well as the international media, academic experts, the world's governments and international organizations all acknowledge the truth.

John Landau contributed to this article.

Documentary sources: We used the following documentary sources in addition to those indicated by the hyperlinks: *Our account of the Palestinian Arab's active and aggressive role in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War is derived from Netanel Lorch, Israel's War of Independence 1947-49* (2nd edition, 1969); *A Clash of Destinies*, also published under the title *Both Sides of the Bunker*, by Jon and David Kimche, (1960); *O Jerusalem* by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre (1972; reissued 2007); and *Genesis 1948* by Dan Kurzman (1992). All of these are listed on Amazon Books.com web site in the section on "Israel-Arab War 1948-49." See also Eli E. Hertz, *Arab and Jewish Refugees-The Contrast*, (<http://www.mythsandfacts.com/Conflict/8/Refugees.pdf>), pp.1-12, and David Meir-Levi, *Big Lies: Demolishing The Myths of the Propaganda War Against Israel*, (2005), <http://www.frontpagemag.com/media/pdf/biglies.pdf>, pp.15-25. For the dubious claims of many "refugees" to Palestinian nationality and/or refugee status, see Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial*, (1984), pp.4-5, 17-19, 269-325; and Hertz, *Arab and Jewish Refugees*, 18-19, 31-32, 36-37. For Arab land tenure in Palestine, see Michael J. Cohen, *The Origins and Evolution of the Arab-Zionist Conflict* (1987), 72-76; and Hertz, *Arab and Jewish Refugees*, 40-41, 58, in addition to the hyperlinked sources. For the generous benefits received by Palestinian Arab "refugees," from UNWRA, see Hertz, *Arab and Jewish Refugees*, 26-34, 36-37; Report of Karen Koning Abuzayd, Commissioner-General of UNWRA, to the U.N General Assembly, <http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/f45643a78fcb719852560f6005987ad/f41861cdd2f7a7bf8525738d004ef47f?OpenDocument>; UNWRA Home Page, <http://www.un.org/unrwa/>; and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Relief_and_Works_Agency_for_Palestine_Refugees_in_the_Near_East. For the additional massive international foreign aid to the Palestinian Arabs, see **Q: How**

much international aid does Palestine receive?

<http://www.israelipalestinianprocon.org/bin/procon/procon.cgi?database=5-J-Sub-Q10.db&command=viewone&op=t&id=1&rnd=343.787719090257>; Ben-Dror Yemini, "And the World Pays," *Maariv International*, 11/1/2007, <http://www.maariv.co.il/online/1/ART1/529/562.html>; Clyde Mark, Specialist in Middle East Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division, **United States Aid to the Palestinians**, CRS Report for Congress, Received through the CRS Web, March 4, 2005, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS21594.pdf>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_aid_to_Palestinians; and numerous other online articles. For the luxurious townhouses built for "refugees" in the Jenin "refugee camp" by a British construction firm, and the Palestinian complaints that they weren't big enough, see Judy Lash Balint, **The ingrates of Jenin**, June 29, 2004, <http://web.israelinsider.com/Views/3795.htm>; Gideon Levy, **This week in rebuilt Jenin**, *Ha'aretz*, 11 June 2004, <http://www.fromoccupiedpalestine.org/node/1312> and numerous other press accounts. For the lack of a "right of return" for non-Palestinian refugees, see Hertz, **Arab and Jewish Refugees**, 20-26, 32-33, 36-37 in addition to hyperlink sources. For the international community's non-recognition of a right of return or even restitution for non-Palestinian refugees, see Hertz, **Arab and Jewish Refugees**, 20-26, 32-33, 36, in addition to the hyperlinked sources. For the intention of destroying Israel by advocates of the "right of return" for Palestinian Arab refugees, see Hertz, **Arab and Jewish Refugees**, 18, 40, 49.

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