



PASSIA



Painting by Eman Abu Arra,  
*The Last Return* (2017 - digital art, 200 x 250 cm)

# THE NAKBA: 75 YEARS ON

## INTRODUCTION

As Palestinians mourn the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what is commonly known as *Al-Nakba* i.e., the expulsion and dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes in 1948 and the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, Palestinians still struggle for their freedom, rights, and independence.

The Nakba remains the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and is engraved in the hearts and minds of all Palestinians. Since that first wave of displacement, entire generations of Palestinians have been born scattered around the world, but no matter where they live, their call for freedom and self-determination has never ceased. To this date, Palestinians have defied all Zionist and Israeli attempts to force them out of the country; in fact, their numbers have now exceeded that of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

Despite all Israeli attempts at erasing or distorting their history and memory, despite all political setbacks and failed negotiations, and despite all involvement of the international community providing little but a broad base for continuing oppression and theft of their land, Palestinians remain steadfast and determined to resist occupation. Despite the suffering they have endured for the past 75 years, they have proven that they will not relinquish their historical and legal right of return to their homeland nor their demand that Israel acknowledges its moral and political responsibility for this ongoing tragedy and the gross injustice inflicted on them.

This bulletin is the revised and updated edition of a similar bulletin published by PASSIA in 2018; it presents the Palestinian narrative of the history of the events preceding and surrounding the *Nakba* and shows that the Nakba was not merely a historical event, but is an ongoing process of Israel's settler-colonialist strategy, dispossessing indigenous Palestinians and segregating them under Israeli control to this day.

<sup>1</sup> The number of Palestinians and Israelis was estimated to be equal at the end of 2022 (PCBS, Palestinians at the End of 2022, December 2022). According to Professor of Geography at Haifa University Arnon Soffer, Jews were even less than 47% of the population in historical Palestine ("Jews now a 47% minority in Israel and the territories, demographer says", *Times of Israel*, 30 August 2022).

### Contents:

Historical Background - Prelude to the Nakba .....	2
Revisiting the Events of 1948 and its Aftermath .....	8
The Nakba in Jerusalem .....	11
Continuous Nakba .....	12
Conclusion .....	15
Further Material on the Nakba .....	16

## The Nakba in a Nutshell

The Nakba (Arabic for “disaster” or “catastrophe”) refers to the deliberate, systematic and violent mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and homeland by Zionist/Israeli forces, which resulted in the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, as well as the destruction and confiscation of their property during the period leading to and following the creation of the state of Israel (1947-49). During this period, over 750,000 Palestinians were expelled and not allowed to return, over 400 of their villages were destroyed, and many others resettled by Jews. ‘Nakba Day’ is commemorated annually on 15 May, the day after Israel proclaimed its independence in 1948.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND – PRELUDE TO THE NAKBA

The roots of the Palestine problem date back to the late 19th Century when Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire, and they are closely linked to the emergence of both Western colonial interests over the resources of the Middle East and of Jewish nationalism in the form of political Zionism. Led by Theodor Herzl, the supporters of this new movement organized the first **Zionist Congress in 1897** in Basel, where they established Zionist institutions with the goal to bring Jews to Palestine.<sup>2</sup> The process of Zionist colonization of Palestine – “the promised land” – thus began long before 1948. At that time, about two-thirds of the Palestinian population was rural and lived mainly from agriculture, while the remaining one-thirds lived in towns (e.g., Nazareth, Nablus, Hebron, Ramleh, Lydda and Gaza). Most villages were independent social, political, and economic units. With Jewish immigration, competition for resources began, as did efforts to eliminate the “inferior” indigenous culture and replace it with a superior settler society.<sup>3</sup>

“If I wanted to sum up the Basel Congress in one word – which I wouldn’t do in this way publicly – it would be: In Basel, I founded the Jewish state.”

Theodore Herzl,  
Diary entry, 3 September 1897.

During World War I, the Western Allies pinpointed the weakness of the Turkish Ottoman Empire – an ally of Germany – which stemmed in part from the Arab people’s “awakening” and rising call for independence. In **1915**, the British government commissioned Sir Henry MacMahon to correspond with the Hashemite leader Sharif Hussein ibn Ali of Mecca (known as **Hussein-McMahon correspondence**) to encourage him to ally with Britain against the Ottomans in return for British support for Arab independence and a unified kingdom under Hashemite leadership. This assurance contributed to the outbreak of the Arab Revolt for independence from Ottoman rule in June **1916**.



Sir Henry MacMahon



Sharif Hussein

That same year, the French and British laid down their interests in another – secret, as it contradicted prior assurances – agreement (**Sykes-Picot Agreement** after its negotiators, the British orientalist Sir Mark Sykes and the former French Consul General in Beirut Charles Georges Picot), which divided the post-war territory of the Ottoman Empire: Russia would assume control of Constantinople, the Bosphorus Strait, and most of the provinces close to the Caucasus; France, Syria (including Lebanon); and Britain, Iraq and Jordan. Palestine was to be divided with France controlling the north and Britain the Haifa-Akko area. The rest of the country (excluding the Negev) was to be placed under international administration. The repercussions of Sykes-Picot, which reflected clearly the European orientalist thinking on Arabs and their capacity for development, still contribute to the political instability in the contemporary Middle East.



Sir Mark Sykes



Charles G. Picot

<sup>2</sup> Although a first wave of Jewish immigration (or *aliyah*) had already begun as early as 1882, mainly from Eastern Europe.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Said, Edward, “Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims,” *Social Text*, No. 1. (Winter, 1979), pp. 7-58; <https://racismandnationalconsciousnessresources.files.wordpress.com/2008/11/edward-said-zionism-from-the-standpoint-of-its-victims.pdf>.



*The Syces-Picot Agreement*

Meanwhile, World War I continued, and on 11 December 1917, the British Army entered Jerusalem under General Allenby, **ending 400 years of Ottoman rule**. Britain then established the Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (OETA), which was in control until 1920.



*Commission led by Henry King and Charles Crane (seated)*

Palestine distinctly a Jewish commonwealth should be given up,” stating “To subject a people so minded to unlimited Jewish immigration, and to steady financial and social pressure to surrender the land, would be a gross violation of the principle just quoted, and of the peoples’ rights though it kept within the forms of law...”.

Britain, meanwhile, realizing that its three pledges (the 1915 MacMahon-Hussein Correspondence, the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the 1917 Balfour Declaration) were contradictory, encouraged their allies – the Arab national movement under Amir Faisal, and the Zionist movement under Chaim Weizmann – to formulate an agreement on Arab-Jewish relations.

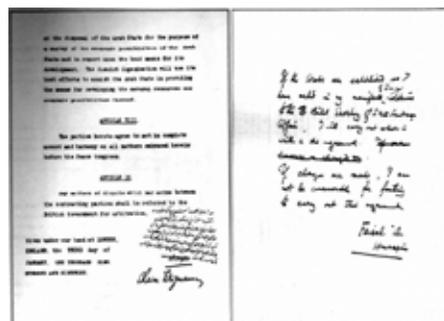
As Faisal knew no English and Weizmann no Arabic, British intermediaries, including T.E. Lawrence, drafted the documents according to their own interpretation. Faisal added conditions in Arabic to the English document. In January 1919, the **Faisal-Weizmann Agreement** was signed (but remained unpublished until 1936), providing for Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment of a unified, independent Arab state.

Another key year is **1917**, when then British Foreign Minister, Arthur Balfour, was persuaded to write a letter on 2 November (later referred to as the **Balfour Declaration**) to Baron Lionel Walter de Rothschild, promising Britain’s support for “the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine”. The letter was later included in the 1922 British Mandate document. While it also stated that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”, it primarily gave the Zionist Movement a great boost.



*Arthur Balfour and the Balfour Declaration*

In January **1919**, the first **Palestinian National Congress** met in Jerusalem and sent two memoranda to the post-War Paris peace conference at Versailles, rejecting the Balfour Declaration and demanding independence. In March, the conference decided to send an international commission of inquiry and in June-July 1919, the Americans Henry King and Charles Crane (known as the **King-Crane Commission**) examined the situation in Palestine. Their report, which was kept secret for three years and remained unpublished until 1947, warned against the consequences of unrestricted Jewish immigration and Zionist plans, recommending that “the project for making Palestine distinctly a Jewish commonwealth should be given up,”



*Last page of the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement*



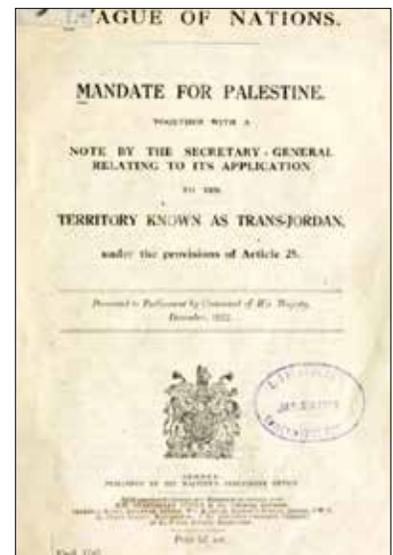
*Chaim Weizmann Amir Faisal*

In April 1920, the post-World War I **San Remo Conference** awarded the mandate for Syria and Lebanon to France and that of Palestine, Transjordan and Mesopotamia (Iraq) to Britain, and the new League of Nations gave Britain mandated control of Palestine. Jewish Herbert Samuel<sup>4</sup> was appointed as first British High Commissioner of Palestine (until 1925). That same year, Amir Faisal was proclaimed King of Syria and Chaim Weizmann was elected president of the Zionist Organization. Meanwhile, tensions over Jewish immigration peaked in an anti-Zionist **Nabi Musa uprising** during the annual Muslim festival at the site of the Mosque of Prophet Musa near Jericho in early April 1920. The **Palin Commission of Inquiry**, which was sent to examine the rioting (led by Major-General Palin), was very critical of the Zionists, stating in its report that they caused the “alienation and exasperation of the feelings of the population of Palestine”.

As Palestinians increased their resistance to the British and Zionists, especially with riots in Jaffa in early May 1921, Britain tasked the Chief Justice of Palestine, Sir Thomas Haycraft, to look into the recent violence. The **Haycraft Commission's** report, published in October 1921, attributed the disturbances to Arab fears about increasing Jewish colonization, and led to the issuance of the **Churchill White Paper** of June 1922 (named after the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill), which noted that Arab hostility stemmed from Jewish immigration and Zionist policy and reasserted British support for the idea of a Jewish national home in Palestine, for which “it is necessary that the Jewish community in Palestine should be able to increase its numbers by immigration.” However, it also stated that Palestine should not become “as Jewish as England is English”, but rather see the establishment of “a center in which Jewish people as a whole may take, on grounds of religion and race, an interest and a pride,” but without exceeding the economic absorptive capacity of the country.

Without the consent of Palestinians, the League of Nations Council formally approved the **British Mandate for Palestine** on 24 July 1922; it came officially into effect on 29 September 1923 (when the Treaty of Lausanne with Turkey came into force). Its text said nothing about the national rights of the largely Arab inhabitants. Arab-Jewish tensions remained high and escalated in September 1928 when British authorities removed a screen placed by Jews at the Western Wall to separate male and female worshippers, a move Palestinians denounced as a change in the site's *status quo*. The incident was politicized over the following months and led to widespread violence in August 1929, in which 133 Jews and at least 116 Palestinians were killed.<sup>5</sup>

Britain subsequently dispatched the **Shaw Commission**, led by British judge Sir Walter Shaw, to investigate the violence and re-examine the immigration policy. Its March 1930 report concluded that Palestinian violence resulted from their fear of Zionist immigration and land purchases and recommended limitations on both.



British Mandate for Palestine document

“This immigration cannot be so great in volume as to exceed whatever may be the economic capacity of the country at the time to absorb new arrivals. It is essential to ensure that the immigrants should not be a burden upon the people of Palestine as a whole, and that they should not deprive any section of the present population of their employment.”

From the Passfield White Paper, October 1930

The follow-up **Hope-Simpson Commission** of Inquiry (officially “*Palestine: Report on Immigration, Land Settlement, and Development*”), conducted by British diplomat Sir John Hope-Simpson to explore the economic absorptive capacity of Palestine, also recommended restrictions to Jewish immigration and land acquisition, as it was causing a growing population of landless Arabs and threatened Palestinian agriculture. The recommendations of both Commissions were adopted by the **Passfield White Paper** (after British Colonial Secretary Lord Sidney Webb Passfield) in October 1930, but after strong Zionists protests, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald sent a ‘**Black Letter**’ to Chaim Weizmann largely nullifying the document’s immigration clauses.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel’s policies are widely seen as having set the foundations for a Jewish takeover of Palestine as he denied Palestinians a cohesive authority, while allowing the Jews to build institutions and granting them the right to levy taxes. His appointments of rival Nashashibis and Husseinis to positions of authority weakened the Palestinian political resistance to Zionism, and his land administration set the precedent for a system of expropriation which is still employed by the Israeli government today. During his tenure, the Jewish population in Palestine doubled while Palestinian institutions were closed and Palestinian flags banned.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August, 1929* (Shaw Commission Report), London, 1930, p. 65.

In October 1933, the **Arab Executive Committee**, a body set up in December 1920 to represent and defend the Palestinian cause,<sup>6</sup> called for a general strike to protest ongoing British pro-Zionist policies and the influx of large numbers of Jews.<sup>7</sup> British police violently suppressed disturbances but tensions remained high, and in April 1936 came the onset of the Palestinian **Great Revolt**: a widespread national uprising against the British, demanding independence and an end to Zionist colonization. National Committees as well as the **Arab Higher Committee**, chaired by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin Al-Husseini, were established and a **general strike** (April-October 1936) was adopted.



*Members of the Arab Higher Committee*



*Disturbances in Jaffa during the Great Revolt*

In order to investigate the 1936 riots and the overall situation, the **Peel Commission**, led by William Robert Wellesley, Earl Peel was appointed. Its report in July **1937** concluded that the Mandate was unworkable, that both sides could not live in peace together in one state, and that Palestine should be partitioned into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with a British-controlled corridor from Jerusalem to the coast at Jaffa. The plan was rejected by the Arabs, with the exception of Amir Abdullah of Transjordan, and split the Zionist movement. As a result, the Great Revolt resumed, and led the British to dissolve the Arab Higher Committee and all National Committees, arrest many of their members, and deport some of them to Seychelles Islands. In November 1937, while the Palestinians were practically left without leadership, the Jewish paramilitary **Irgun** embarked on a series of indiscriminate attacks against Palestinian civilians, who began organizing as guerrilla fighters.



*Lord Peel reading his opening speech*

In April **1938**, the British Palestine Partition Commission (better known as **Woodhead Commission** after its chair, British civil servant Sir John Woodhead), held hearings - boycotted by Palestinians - to study the practicability of the Peel Commission recommendations, concluding that partition was not workable. After all of its three proposals (published in November 1938) were rejected by the Zionists due to the limited scope of the proposed Jewish state, the British called for a conference on Palestine.

The **St. James Roundtable Conference** with British, Jewish, Palestinian and Arab participants took place from 7 February-17 March **1939** at St. James's Palace in London, but failed to produce an agreement on immigration and land sales. The British government subsequently laid down its own policy in the **MacDonald White Paper** (named after Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald) on 17 May 1939, disclaiming any intention to create a Jewish state, placing restrictions on Jewish immigration and land purchase, and envisaging an independent state in

<sup>6</sup> The AHC held seven congresses, sent several delegations to Europe, mainly London, to present the Palestinian case against Jewish immigration, and led the Palestinian political movement until it was dissolved by the British in 1934.

<sup>7</sup> This was the period of the so-called fifth *aliyah*, which brought with over 250,000 people the biggest wave of immigrants to Palestine, mostly from Europe, where National Socialists were, particularly in Germany, on an alarming rise.

# THE NAKBA: 75 YEARS ON



Palestine with a two-thirds Arab majority within 10 years. This marked the end of British commitment to the Jews under the Balfour Declaration and was rejected by the Zionist movement (as well as by the Arab Higher Committee for not going far enough), but remained British policy until 1947.

In response to the MacDonald White Paper, the Zionists launched a bloody **anti-British and anti-Palestinian campaign** with the aim of driving both out of Palestine and paving the way for the establishment of the Zionist state. In the early 1940s, the head of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, David Ben Gurion, mobilized American Jewry and in 1942, the **Biltmore Conference** of American Zionists formulated the idea of a 'Jewish Commonwealth' in Palestine - endorsed by the US Congress and House of Representatives in 1944 and 1945 respectively.



*Arab delegation at the St. James Roundtable Conference, London, 1939*

Meanwhile, **World War II** had broken out on 1 September 1939 and the tragedy of the Holocaust under the Nazi regime created an urgency of finding a viable solution. A joint **Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry** was appointed in November **1945** to associate the USA with responsibility for the Palestine Question and to examine continued Jewish immigration into Palestine. Its May 1946 report recommended immigration of 100,000 Jewish refugees, the cessation of the 1940 Land Transfer Regulations, and adoption of a (UN) trusteeship for Palestine. After Britain and the Arab League rejected the proposal, search for a solution on the basis of federalization or cantonization began. An **Arab League** meeting in **Bludan**, Syria, on 11-12 June 1946, warned Britain and the US that their continued disregard of Arab rights in Palestine would adversely affect their oil and other interests in the Arab world. It also discussed ways of assisting the Palestinians, including dispatching forces in the case of war.

The July **1946 Morrison-Grady Plan** (by British Deputy Prime Minister Herbert Morrison and US Ambassador Henry Grady) then proposed a federal solution in which the British Mandate would be converted into a trusteeship and the country divided into Jewish and Arab provinces, as well as two districts (Jerusalem and Negev). In September 1946, the Palestine **Roundtable Conference** in London rejected the plan with Arab delegates proposing a unitary state of Palestine, in which Jews would have full civil rights.



*Bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem*

After the situation on the ground further deteriorated, including increasing terrorist attacks against British targets by Jewish underground groups (such as the **bombing of the King David Hotel** in Jerusalem), Britain announced in February **1947** that it would cease its Mandate and hand the Palestine "problem" over to the newly formed United Nations. This was comparable to announcing an American mandate for Palestine since the US had taken clear sides and most UN member nations at the time depended heavily on US aid to rebuild their shattered post-war economies, so the US could count on a majority of the votes.

On 28 April **1947**, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) opened a special session on Palestine and on 15 May, a **Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP)** was appointed to investigate the situation on the ground and propose solutions. Its report was published on 3 September, with a minority of the members recommending a federal solution and the majority recommending partition and an international status for Jerusalem. The **UNSCOP majority report** was adopted as **UNGA Resolution 181** on 29 November 1947; it called for the partition



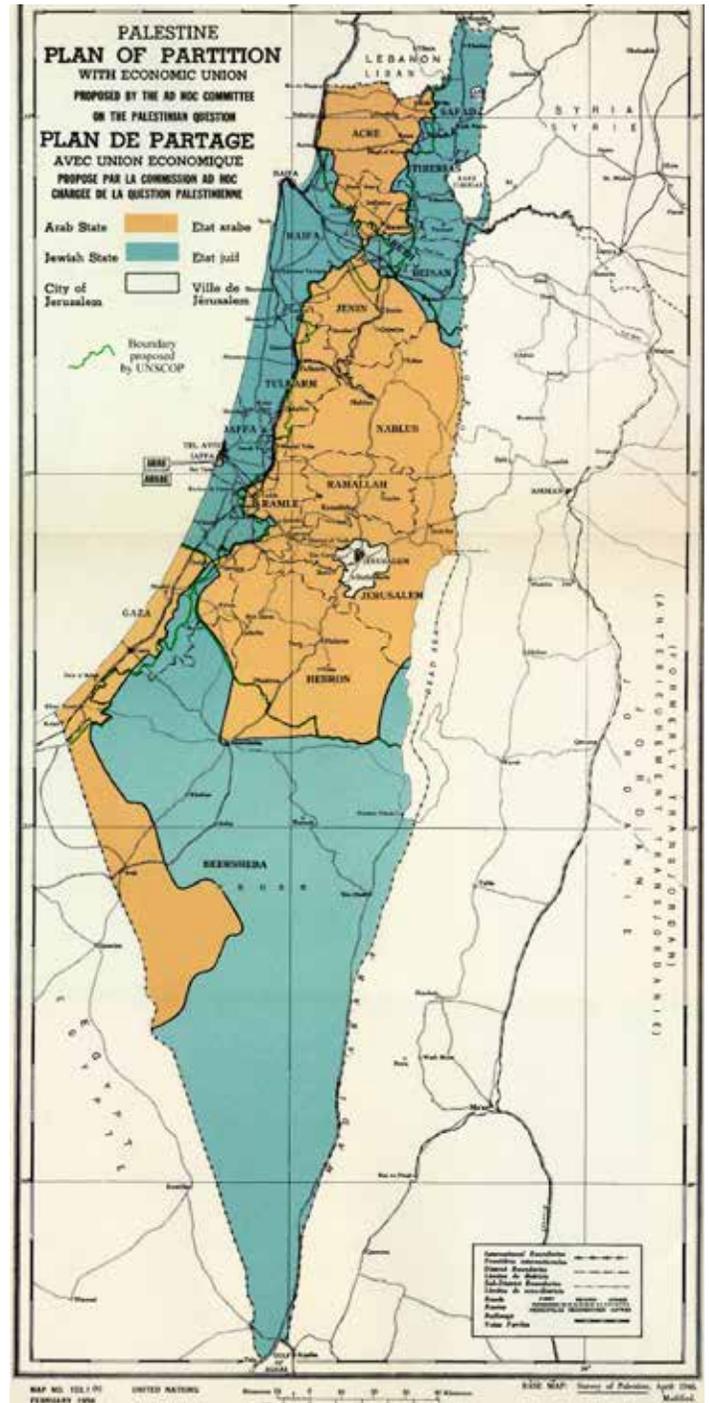
*Jews celebrating the passing of the Partition Resolution in Tel Aviv*

of Palestine, allocating 56.47% of the territory to a Jewish state (although Jews accounted for no more than one third of the population - mostly recent immigrants from Europe - and possessed only 7% of the privately owned land) and only 42.88% to the Arab state, while placing Jerusalem (and Bethlehem) under a corpus separatum (in 0.65% of Palestine), to be administered by the UN Trusteeship Council.<sup>8</sup>

With UNGA Resolution 181 the European states hoped to get rid of a problem that they had created, but could not (anymore) solve. Most Jews welcomed the **Partition Resolution** as an achievement (i.e., international legal recognition for a Jewish state in Palestine), but did not intend to adhere to the proposed borders, which, as Ben-Gurion put it, “will be determined by force and not by the partition resolution”.<sup>9</sup> Palestinians and other Arabs rejected the resolution outright, considering it unacceptable that Palestinians should give up more than half their country to newly arrived European immigrants. With the news about the passing of the Partition Plan, a resurgence of violence broke out between Arabs and Jews, setting off the large-scale dispossession of Palestinians and their disintegration and fragmentation as a society.



*UNSCOP Members*



*Original Map of the Partition Plan*

<sup>8</sup> International Court of Justice, *Advisory Opinion Proceedings on Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 2004, available at <http://palestineun.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/ICJ-writtenstatementenglish.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Pappé, Ilan, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications Ltd., 2006, p. 37. Zochrot, *Encountering the Nakba*, 2018 (PowerPoint presentation); <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>.

## Revisiting the Events of 1948 and its Aftermath

Following the UN Partition Plan and by the end of 1947, attacks by Zionist forces and their blocking of supply routes had already led to the expulsion and flight of tens of thousands of Palestinians.<sup>10</sup> In early January 1948, volunteers of the **Arab Liberation Army** came from neighboring countries to help, but as they were as poorly equipped and trained as the Palestinian fighters, defeat by the much larger and stronger armed Jewish forces<sup>11</sup> was only a matter of time.

On 10 March 1948, the Zionist leadership under Ben-Gurion approved “**Plan Dalet**” (or “Plan D”), the blueprint for the forcible depopulation of Palestine.<sup>12</sup> This master plan consisted of several military operations<sup>13</sup> that amounted to ethnic cleansing – expelling Palestinians and occupying their land. In most localities (83%), the population exodus was directly caused by Zionist military action,<sup>14</sup> such as targeted bombing of civilians, and attacks and **massacres** by Zionist militias on Palestinian cities and villages,<sup>15</sup> such as **Deir Yassin** (see below), which prompted the flight of Palestinians from other locations throughout the country.<sup>16</sup>



Members of the Arab Liberation Army

Mounting operations against enemy population centers (...) divided into the following categories:

- Destruction of villages (setting fire to, blowing up, and planting mines in the debris), especially those population centers which are difficult to control continuously.
- Mounting search and control operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the village and conducting a search inside it. In the event of resistance, the armed force must be destroyed and the population must be expelled outside the borders of the state.

From the Text of Plan Dalet, 10 March 1948: para. 6 (b) 4.



Aftermath of the Deir Yassin Massacre

<sup>10</sup> *The Nakba – Flight and Expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948*, Exhibition Catalogue, available at <https://www.zochrot.org/writable/uploads/old/uploads/uploads/aa0d1cda57550fb0ad815d606cb1ccb1.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> There were 2,000-3,000 Palestinian-led guerrillas and 2,000-4,000 mainly Syrian and Iraqi Arab Liberation Army volunteers. See Abu Sitta, Salman, *Atlas of Palestine 1948*, London: Palestine Land Society, 2004; Flapan, Simha, *The Birth of Israel – Myth and Realities*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1987. The Zionist side had the 30,000-strong Haganah, Lehi and Etzel (or Irgun) militias as well as 20,000 Zionist auxiliary forces from various settlements. See Pappé, Ilan, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> For details on Plan Dalet see: <https://imeu.org/article/plan-dalet>; for the full text see <http://www.jmcc.org/Documentsandmaps.aspx?id=755>.

<sup>13</sup> Including Operation Nachshon (Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road), Operation Chametz (Tel Aviv-Jaffa area), Operation Shfifon (Old City of Jerusalem), Operation Dekel (Nazareth and Lower Galilee), Operation Dani and Kedem (East Jerusalem), and Operation Yoav (Negev and Gaza).

<sup>14</sup> Zochrot, *Encountering the Nakba, 2018* (PowerPoint presentation).

<sup>15</sup> The atrocities against the Palestinians around that time will not be listed here in detail but have been well-documented by Israeli researchers, including those dubbed the ‘revisionist’ or ‘new historians’, who used archival materials released in the 1980s to contest Israel’s version of the events around the Nakba, uncovering the generally-held “myths” such as that most Palestinians had left their homes voluntarily or that a poorly armed Jewish community was confronted by a highly armed Arab army. See for example, Flapan, Simha, *The Birth of Israel*, *op. cit.*; Segev, Tom, *1949 - The First Israelis*, New York/London: Free Press MacMillan, 1986; Schlaim, Avi, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988; Pappé, Ilan, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, *op. cit.*, and *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1992; and Morris, Benny, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, Cambridge University Press, 1987. It is worth noting however, that most files relating to the 1948 Palestinian exodus remain sealed in the Israeli archives, although they should have - according to Israeli law - been declassified long ago. At times, files that were previously declassified are no longer available to researchers. See Akevot, “These Matters are Unpleasant”, October 2021, [https://www.akevot.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/These-Matters-are-Unpleasant-Akevot-Institute-Report\\_EN-October-2021.pdf](https://www.akevot.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/These-Matters-are-Unpleasant-Akevot-Institute-Report_EN-October-2021.pdf); see also [https://www.akevot.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021-12-10\\_Haaretz\\_EN\\_cabinet-meetings48.pdf](https://www.akevot.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021-12-10_Haaretz_EN_cabinet-meetings48.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> For eyewitness accounts see the interactive map of the Palestinian Oral History Archive: <https://libraries.aub.edu.lb/poha-viewer/map/en/>. See also: *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba*, ed. by Abdo, N. and N. Masalha, London: Zed Books, 2018.

On 14 May 1948, the Jewish Agency formed a provisional government and **proclaimed the State of Israel**. In the course of the subsequent **War of 1948**, Jewish forces, which were three (British sources) to over five (Palestinian sources) times more numerous than the Arab troops<sup>17</sup>, took over half of the intended Arab State, while Jordan took control of the West Bank and Egypt of the Gaza Strip. Over 400<sup>18</sup> villages in Palestine were depopulated or destroyed by Israeli forces. Some 150,000 Palestinians remained inside what became Israel's borders, a quarter of them also **internally displaced**<sup>19</sup>; they were granted Israeli citizenship but were governed by undemocratic military rule until 1966, requiring permits to leave their villages and towns, and stripped of up to 70% of their land.<sup>20</sup> The UN Conciliation Commission estimated that **726,000 Palestinians** (75% of the Arab population of Palestine) had fled, or were expelled, from what became Israel - approximately half of them between passage of the UN Partition Plan in November 1947 and the establishment of Israel in mid-May 1948. Some 25,000 others had become so-called "borderline cases": they still lived at home, but with no means of income because they were separated from their lands by the armistice lines.<sup>21</sup> Two-thirds of the refugees found themselves in the 22.8% of historical Palestine that was controlled by Arab forces after the War (the West Bank and Gaza), the remainder had fled to neighboring Arab countries. Israel had gained sovereignty over 78% of Palestine - 23% more than allocated to the Jewish state under the UN Partition Plan.



*David Ben Gurion proclaiming Israel's independence*



*Fleeing Palestinians*

On 11 December 1948, the UN General Assembly passed **Resolution 194**, calling for the establishment of a tri-lateral (France, Turkey and the US) **UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine** to facilitate peace between Israel and the Arab states and define principles for returning Palestine refugees to their homes.<sup>22</sup> Article 11 stipulates that "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 which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible."<sup>23</sup> Even before Resolution 194 was passed, the UN mediator for Palestine, Count Folke Bernadotte, wrote, "It would be an offence against the principles of elementary justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right of return to their homes while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine, and, indeed, at least offer the threat of permanent replacement of the Arab refugees who have been rooted in the land for centuries."<sup>24</sup> A day later, he was assassinated by members of

<sup>17</sup> Flapan, Simha, *The Birth of Israel*, *op. cit.*, p. 193. It should be noted that the formal establishment of the "Israeli Defense Forces" was declared by Prime Minister Ben Gurion on 31 May 1948, and the next day, Irgun commander Menachem Begin signed an agreement amalgamating the latter with the official army.

<sup>18</sup> Some sources count 530 locations, e.g., Zochrot, *Encountering the Nakba*, 2018 (PowerPoint presentation); Abu Sitta, S., *The Palestinian Nakba 1948: The Register of Depopulated Localities in Palestine*, London, 2000. For an interactive map of the destroyed villages, see [https://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Jerusalem\\_528/SatelliteView.html](https://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Jerusalem_528/SatelliteView.html).

<sup>19</sup> Today, Palestinian citizens of Israel number almost 2 million (CBS, Statistical Abstract 2022). Of these, an estimated 439,171 are internally displaced, including their descendants (also known as the "Present Absentees", allowed to live in Israel but not in their original communities), whom Israel still does not recognize. See BADIL, *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2019-2021*, Bethlehem, 2022, p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Cook, Jonathan, *Disappearing Palestine*, 2008, p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> UN, *First Interim Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East*, 16 November 1949.

<sup>22</sup> The UNCCP was mainly active until 1951 but failed to achieve progress on any major issue due to the irreconcilable differences between the parties and Israel's stiff refusal to abide by UN Resolution 181 (II) or to comply with Article 11 of UN Resolution 194 (III). The commission still exists merely as a functional, if not symbolic, body based in New York.

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that Israel was admitted to the UN on 11 May 1949 (UNGA Resolution 273) on the premises that it "unreservedly accepts the obligations of the United Nations Charter and undertakes to honor them," and taking into account UNGA Resolutions 181 (Partition Plan) and 194 (Right of Return). However, since then Israeli policy and practice countered those resolutions.

<sup>24</sup> UNGA, "Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine," 16 September 1948, Doc. A/648. Part One, Section V, Paragraph 6.

the Jewish Zionist Stern Gang due to his diplomatic efforts to modify the Palestine partition. The right of return is also stipulated in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, which the UNGA adopted just one day before Resolution 194 and which states that “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1949, Israel actually signed separate **armistice agreements** with Egypt (24 February), Lebanon (23 March), Jordan (3 April), and Syria (20 July), but the plight and dispossession of the Palestinians continued. On 12 December 1949, the Israeli cabinet passed the “**Emergency Regulation Relative to Property of Absentees**,” which allowed it to confiscate all property of the “absent” refugees without compensation,<sup>26</sup> and adopted new land laws to facilitate the **expropriation of refugee property** and its transfer to the state and the Jewish National Fund.<sup>27</sup> It is estimated that Israel expropriated some 4,244,776 of acres of Palestinian land,<sup>28</sup> which partially was handed over to Jewish agricultural communities and for the use of Kibbutzim.<sup>29</sup> Over 70% of the **depopulated villages** were totally and 22% largely destroyed<sup>30</sup> to prevent the return of their Palestinian owners, while the remainder were taken over by Jewish settlers (e.g., Ein Karem village in West Jerusalem) or remained depopulated (e.g., Lifta). The Israeli army often shot Palestinians trying to return to their villages.<sup>31</sup> Over two-thirds of the forests and parks established by the Jewish National Fund are located on the ruins of destroyed villages.<sup>32</sup> In the words of Israeli historian Ilan Pappé: “In these forests Nakba denial is so pervasive, and has been achieved so effectively, that they have become a main area of struggle for Palestinian refugees wishing to commemorate the villages that lie beneath them.”<sup>33</sup> According to a 1952 report, Israel had also expropriated 73,000 rooms in abandoned houses, 7,800 shops, workshops and warehouses, and 5 million Palestinian pounds in bank accounts.<sup>34</sup> Within what had become Israel only about 81 Palestinian villages emerged intact<sup>35</sup> and formerly mixed towns (e.g., Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias) became largely Jewish with small Palestinian minorities. At the same time, Israel began a process of “**de-Arabization**” in order to present the state as naturally Israeli and denying its Arab heritage,<sup>36</sup> replacing Arabic names of sights and places with Hebrew ones. For example, the site of the depopulated village of Lifta is now called Mei Naftoah nature reserve, claiming this was the anti-Jewish name of the place.



Depopulated Lifta

<sup>25</sup> For more on the right of return in international law see, for example, <https://imeu.org/article/the-right-of-return-palestinian-refugees>, [https://www.badil.org/phocadownload/Badil\\_docs/Working\\_Papers/Brief-No-08.htm](https://www.badil.org/phocadownload/Badil_docs/Working_Papers/Brief-No-08.htm).

<sup>26</sup> “Any property of an absentee is hereby vested in the custodian [...] and any right possessed by the absentee in his property shall automatically devolve on the custodian with effect from such vesting.” “Absentees are persons [...] who have left the town or village in which they customarily resided in Eretz Israel (i.e., Palestine).”

<sup>27</sup> A UNCCP study on losses conducted from 1953-62 identified 6,057,032 dunums of individually-owned land abandoned by refugees, worth at least \$824,780,808 (in 1948 dollars), not including collectively-owned village land, grazing land, lands for public uses, etc. In addition, there were losses worth between \$70,122,000 and \$169,538,070 (1948 dollars) in moveable property such as cash and jewelry, farm animals and tools, household furnishings and factory inventories, automobiles, etc. A later study by Yusif Sayigh placed the amount of lost refugee property much higher, estimating the abandoned 6,611,250 dunums of land and real estate at \$1,625,702,000 (in 1948 dollars), some 173,000 buildings at \$954,304,000, and moveable property at \$453,375,000. See Fischbach, Michael R., *Records of Dispossession: Palestinian Refugee Property and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, New York, 2003. Finally, Sami Hadawi and Atif Kubursi calculated that the refugees lost 19,031,012 dunums of land worth \$2,131,467,000 (in 1948 dollars). Hadawi, Sami, *Palestinian Rights & Losses in 1948. A Comprehensive Study. Part V: An Economic Assessment of Total Palestinian Losses*, London: Saqi Books, 1988, p. 113, 187.

<sup>28</sup> Khalidi, Walid, *All That Remains - The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Institute for Palestine Studies, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2006. For maps of depopulated/destroyed Palestinian locations see <https://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Maps/Story1261.html>, or, interactive, [http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Jerusalem\\_528/SatelliteView.html](http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Jerusalem_528/SatelliteView.html) and [https://www.zochrot.org/villages/nakba\\_map/en?target=6&Nakba\\_Map](https://www.zochrot.org/villages/nakba_map/en?target=6&Nakba_Map).

<sup>29</sup> Cook, Jonathan, *Disappearing Palestine*, 2008, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Masalha, Nur, “Remembering the Palestinian Nakba: Commemoration, Oral History and Narratives of Memory”, *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 7/2 (2008): 123-156.

<sup>31</sup> Zochrot, *Encountering the Nakba*, 2018 (PowerPoint presentation).

<sup>32</sup> Bronstein, Eitan, “Most JNF - KKL forests and sites are located on the ruins of Palestinian village,” April 2014, available at [https://www.zochrot.org/publication\\_articles/view/55963/en?Most\\_JNF\\_KKL\\_forests\\_and\\_sites\\_are\\_located\\_on\\_the\\_ruins\\_of\\_Palestinian\\_villages](https://www.zochrot.org/publication_articles/view/55963/en?Most_JNF_KKL_forests_and_sites_are_located_on_the_ruins_of_Palestinian_villages).

<sup>33</sup> Pappé, Ilan, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, op. cit., p. 227.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by Flapan, Simha, *The Birth of Israel*, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>35</sup> Salman Abu Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine 1948*, op. cit.; see also Shai, Aron, “The Fate of Abandoned Arab Villages in Israel, 1965-1969,” *History and Memory* 18, no. 2 (2006): 86-106.

<sup>36</sup> Only 5% of places depicted on British Mandate maps in 1948 were in Hebrew. See Kadman, N., *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Israel and the Depopulated Palestinian Villages of 1948*, Indiana University Press, 2015, p. 94.

In the following years, the Palestine Question was primarily addressed as the serious refugee problem the Nakba had caused. In November 1948, UNGA Resolution 212 (III) established the UN Relief for Palestine Refugees as an emergency agency, and a year later, UNGA Resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 created the **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)** to provide education, health, and relief services and set up temporary (!) camps for Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In 1950, 914,221 refugees were registered with UNRWA.

## The Nakba in Jerusalem

As an administrative and political center under both the Ottomans and the British Mandate period, Jerusalem was deeply impacted by Zionism and Jewish immigration and a frequent scene of Jewish-Arab violence, including the August 1929 Al-Buraq disturbances; the 1936 Great Arab Revolt; terror acts by Jewish underground forces, such as the 1946 blowing up of the British Headquarters in the King David Hotel; and heavy fighting before and during the 1948 War.

**Deir Yassin** village on the western outskirts of Jerusalem was attacked by Irgun and Stern Gang units on 9 April 1948 – despite a non-aggression pact with the Haganah. During the assault over 200 villagers were murdered, including many women and children, and the remaining inhabitants were expelled. Houses were looted and destroyed. News of the massacre prompted the mass flight of Palestinians from other locations. For details see: <https://www.deiryassin.org/>.

In December 1947, Haganah and Irgun forces increased their **military operations** in the Jerusalem area, which culminated with the launch of ‘Plan Dalet’ in March/April 1948. The village of Lifta, strategically located at the city’s entrance, was attacked and completely cleansed of its 2,500 Palestinian inhabitants by 11 January 1948. Beit Naqquba was occupied on 1 April. Al-Qastal was occupied on 3 April, then shortly retaken by Palestinian guerillas in a battle on 8 April (during which Jerusalem commander ‘Abdul Qader Al-Husseini was killed), and eventually reoccupied the day after (while most fighters attended Hussein’s funeral). On that same day, the most notorious massacre took place in **Deir Yassin** (see box), while Qalunya, Nitaf, and Saris on the hills west of Jerusalem were violently depopulated on 11, 15, and 16 April respectively.

“From your entry into Jerusalem, through Lifta, Romema... there are no Arabs - 100 percent Jews. Since Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, it has not been as Jewish as it is now. In many Arab neighborhoods in the west one sees not a single Arab. I do not assume that this will change ...”

David Ben-Gurion,  
addressing the Mapai Council,  
8 February 1948.

Unlike Israel’s conventional version of the fall of **Arab West Jerusalem** – depicting self-defending Jews countering attacks by Palestinians and their Arab allies and the subsequent settling of abandoned houses with homeless Jewish refugees – it was here, too, Zionist attacks (such as the bombing of the Semiramis Hotel in Qatamon in January 1948) that caused a great sense of fear among Palestinians, many of whom fled their homes in panic. By the time the State of Israel was proclaimed on 14 May 1948, some 30,000 Palestinians had left or were expelled by Zionist forces from their homes in West Jerusalem neighborhoods – Abu Tor, Musrara, Baq’a, Talbiyya, Qatamon, the Greek and German Colony<sup>37</sup> – while most of its remaining surrounding villages fell in July (“Operation Danny” to capture territory east of Tel Aviv and relieve the Jewish population and forces in Jerusalem) and October 1948 (“Operation Ha-Har” to extend the Jerusalem Corridor to the south).<sup>38</sup> With the Palestinians’ flight or expulsion, extensive looting of their property began.<sup>39</sup>



*Palestinian guerillas with Jerusalem commander Abdul Qader Hussein (standing, center)*

<sup>37</sup> Krystall, Nathan, “The De-Arabization of West Jerusalem 1947-50,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (1997/1998), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> For a list of villages and neighborhoods see <http://www.palestineremembered.com/JerusalemTownSnapshot.html>.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Aderet, Odeh, “Like a swarm of locusts,” *Haaretz*, 2 October 2020, available at <https://www.akevot.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Haaretz-Eng-Looting-of-Palestinian-Property.pdf>.

The newly established Israeli army suffered only one major loss: in late May 1948, it was forced to surrender to the Transjordanian Arab Legion in the **Old City's** Jewish Quarter. With the UN-arranged ceasefire on 17 July 1948, Israel controlled the city's western part and Transjordan the eastern part, while some areas remained no-man's land. A month later, Israel's provisional government declared West Jerusalem "territory occupied by the State of Israel" subject to Israeli law.<sup>40</sup>

Although UNGA Resolution 194 of 11 December 1948 not only called for the return of Palestinian refugees but also for the internationalization of Jerusalem, and despite opposition from Britain and the US, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion announced soon after the **transfer of government institutions** from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The Knesset and the Prime Minister's Office were transferred immediately, other government offices followed gradually (e.g., the Foreign Ministry in 1953). On 2 February 1949, the Israeli government declared that it no longer considered West Jerusalem as occupied territory and by June 1949, all of West Jerusalem's formerly Arab districts were settled by Jews.<sup>41</sup> In December (seven months after being admitted to the UN on the premise of accepting UN Resolutions 181 and 194), the Knesset drafted a resolution to declare Jerusalem Israel's capital, which it then adopted by a vote of 60-2 on 23 January 1950.



*Bombing of the Semiramis Hotel, Jerusalem*



*Members of the Arab Legion after the Jews evacuated the Jewish neighborhood of the Old City*

## Continuous Nakba

The process of displacement and dispossession did not stop following the events of 1947-1949; on the contrary: ever since, Israel has spared no effort in consolidating its control and further subjugating and oppressing the undesired Palestinian populace. It continued to confiscate land, often declaring it "state land", so that by 1962, 93% of the land inside Israel was controlled by the Israel Lands Administration, while Palestinian citizens only owned 4% of the total.<sup>42</sup>

The Israeli government also passed several laws to ensure that the newly created state retained a Jewish majority: the **Law of Return** (1950) grants Jews from anywhere in the world the right to settle in Israel and immediately become a citizen<sup>43</sup>. The **Entry into Israel Law** (1952) governs the entry into Israel of non-citizens and was also designed to prevent the return of Palestinian refugees. The **Absentees' Property Law** (1950) grants the government "custodianship" over lands and property belonging to Palestinian refugees, with no compensation for the owners. An "absentee" was defined as any Palestinian who left his or her home after November 1947, even if he or she remained within what became Israel's borders.<sup>44</sup> The **Israeli Nationality Law** (1952), effectively denationalized the Palestinians who had fled or were expelled, seized their property and ultimately transferred it to the State of Israel. The **Land Law** (1960) bars the transfer of land held by the state to non-Jews.

Israeli military assaults continued as well, most prominently with **massacres** in Qibya (October 1953 – at least 69 killed), Qalqilya (October 1956 – 83 killed), Kufr Qassem (October 1956, 48 dead), Khan Younis and Rafah

<sup>40</sup> Krystall, Nathan, "The De-Arabization of West Jerusalem 1947-50," *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> According to some estimates, about 10,000 mostly fully furnished Arab homes were occupied. See, for example, Cattani, Henry, *Jerusalem*, London: Croom Helm, 1981, p. 61.

<sup>42</sup> Fischbach, Michael R., "Land," in Philip Mattar, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, revised ed., New York, 2005, p. 295.

<sup>43</sup> Between 1948 and 1952 alone, some 738,891 new immigrants arrived, 377,251 from Muslim, 307,082 from Communist and 33,706 from Western countries. See <http://israelsdocuments.blogspot.co.il/2013/04/immigrants-to-israel-1948-1952.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Between 1947 and 1949, an estimated 17,178,000 dunums of land were expropriated from Palestinians. Between 1950 and 1966, 700,000 dunums were expropriated from Palestinians who remained within the territory of the new state. BADIL, *Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (2010-2012)*, Vol. VII, 2012.

(November 1956 – 250 and 111 killed); the subsequent occupation of the Gaza Strip (until March 1957); and an attack on As-Samu' village (November 1966 – 16 killed); all of which culminated in the **Six-Day War** in June 1967, during which Israel occupied the remaining 22% of historic Palestine, i.e., the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem (along with the Syrian Golan Heights and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula). During and after the War, which Palestinians refer to as “the Naksa” (“setback” in Arabic), Israel carried out a second wave of expulsions of Palestinians from their homeland, this time displacing about 300,000 Palestinians, including some 175,000 UNRWA-registered refugees who became refugees for a second time. In violation of international law, Israel declared its jurisdiction over what is now the OPT on 27 June and formally annexed East Jerusalem on 28 June 1967.

Palestinians in the newly occupied territories were **denied political or civil rights** while their lands were relentlessly confiscated and colonized with Jewish **settlers**, whose number reached 465,400 at the end of 2021, living in 132 settlements and 146 outposts<sup>45</sup> – excluding Jerusalem, where another 220,000 settlers live. Settlers account for 4.9% of Israel’s and for 14% of the West Bank population.<sup>46</sup>

Today, Israel controls over 85% of the area of historic Palestine<sup>47</sup> as well as 85% of Palestinian water<sup>48</sup>, yet, it still continues to expand its grip on **Palestinian land and other natural resources**, with – as Palestinians and many observers believe – the ultimate goal to eventually annex the entire territory.<sup>49</sup> Israel has uprooted thousands of productive trees and destroyed large amounts of cultivated and crop areas. Palestinians face routine violence and **human rights violations** by Israeli forces and authorities, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary

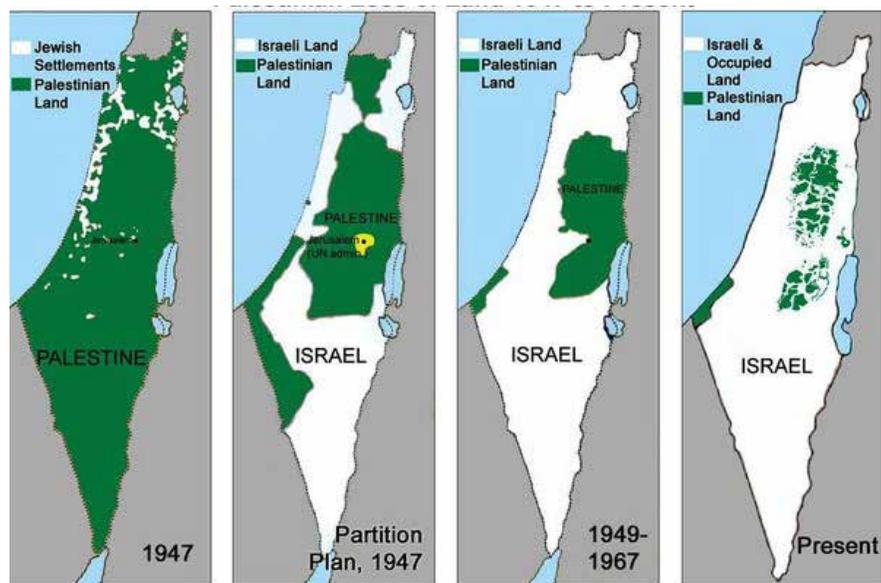
detention, torture, excessive use of force, and collective punishment.<sup>50</sup> Israel also pursues an aggressive **house demolition** policy, which has seen over 56,500 houses in the OPT, including Jerusalem, destroyed since 1967 alone, leading to the displacement of hundreds of people every year. Furthermore, Israel has stripped over 100,000 residents of Gaza, some 140,000 residents of the West Bank,<sup>51</sup> and over 14,727 Palestinian Jerusalemites of their **residency rights**.<sup>52</sup>



Demolition of a Palestinian home

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli **blockade** since 2007, which has resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, and movement in the West Bank is severely restricted by checkpoints, the separation barrier, and the closure and permit regime associated with it. In East Jerusalem, Israel completely rejects indigenous claims to territory and denies Palestinians building permits and any other pathways for development, expelling them from their homes, extending settlements and establishing settler enclaves in the heart of Palestinian neighborhoods, such as Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, with a self-confidence that is based on their perceived Jewish superiority.<sup>53</sup>

### Palestinian Loss of Land Since 1947



<sup>45</sup> CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2022*.

<sup>46</sup> <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population>.

<sup>47</sup> PCBS, Press Release on the 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Commemoration of the Palestinian Nakba, May 2022.

<sup>48</sup> PCBS, Press Release on the on the Occasion of World Water Day, 22 March 2021.

<sup>49</sup> See <https://www.yesh-din.org/en/legislation/> for a database on Israeli laws and bills that promote annexation.

<sup>50</sup> Recent examples include the violent rampage of hundreds of Israeli settlers in Huwara (27 February 2023), the 3-week-long military siege on Jericho (April/May 2023), as well as regular raids and assassinations in the West Bank, and air strikes on Gaza.

<sup>51</sup> “Israel admits it revoked residency rights of quarter million Palestinians since 1967,” Haaretz, 12 June 2012.

<sup>52</sup> HaMoked: [https://hamoked.org/files/2022/1665741\\_eng.pdf](https://hamoked.org/files/2022/1665741_eng.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Sabbagh-Khoury, Areej “But if I don’t steal it, someone else is gonna steal it – Israeli Settler-Colonial Accumulation by Dispossession,” *Middle East Report* 302 (Spring 2022), <https://merip.org/2022/05/but-if-i-dont-steal-it-someone-else-is-gonna-steal-it-israeli-settler-colonial-accumulation-by-dispossession/>.

The Nakba still continues not only in the occupied territories but wherever Palestinians exist. The two million **Palestinian citizens of Israel** – 20% of the Israeli population – are forced to live as second-class citizens in their own homeland. They not only face systematic discrimination in sectors such as housing, education, employment, and family reunification, but also an Israeli legal system that bluntly privileges Jewish citizens over non-Jews.<sup>54</sup> Israel’s settler-colonialism does not stop here: in July 2018, the so-called **Nation-State Law** (formally: Basic Law: Israel – The Nation-State of the Jewish People) placed Israel’s Jewish character before its democratic nature,<sup>55</sup> in complete disregard of the Arab minority and its rights, even downgrading the Arabic language from being one of the country’s official languages to one holding “special status”. Palestinians see the law as the mere culmination of both decades-long Judaization efforts aimed at marginalizing Palestinians, their history, and heritage, and of the solidification of colonial political hierarchies that prioritize Jewish-Israeli access to rights, space and power.

**Bedouins** in the Negev Desert, numbering some 258,000 and residing mainly in impoverished conditions in 35 unrecognized villages<sup>56</sup>, are excluded from Israeli government development and planning, making them highly vulnerable to house demolitions, loss of land and “threats of eviction to make way for more Jewish-only towns, military bases, and other major infrastructure projects that exclude the Bedouin people and their development interests.”<sup>57</sup>



The Bedouin village of Umm Al-Hiran in the Negev

The **Palestinian Diaspora** also remains subject to restricted and often fully prohibited access to their homeland as a result of Israeli policies. This does not only apply to the almost 6 million Palestinian **refugees** in the region, who continue to be denied their internationally-recognized right of return, restitution, and compensation<sup>58</sup>, but also to some 800,000 people<sup>59</sup> living in **exile** in other countries, who often can enter Palestine/Israel only on an Israeli tourist visa and are regularly subject to harassment and arbitrary “entry denial” because of their Palestinian origin.<sup>60</sup>

### Palestinian Refugees Today

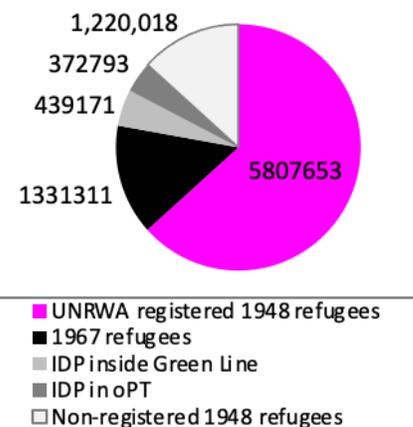
Today, UNRWA still provides services and humanitarian relief to over 5.9 million registered Palestinian refugees,<sup>1</sup> of which some 28.4% live inside one of the 58 refugee camps in the region. In Palestine, registered refugees account for 42% of the total population (West Bank: 26.3%, Gaza: 66%).<sup>2</sup>

At the end of 2021, there were some 9.1 million displaced Palestinians (66.7% of the worldwide Palestinian population), of which approx. 8.3 million were refugees and 812,000 internally displaced persons:

<sup>1</sup> For statistics and details on the situation of the Palestinian refugees today see <https://www.unrwa.org/> and [https://www.badil.org/cached\\_uploads/view/2022/10/31/survey2021-eng-1667209836.pdf](https://www.badil.org/cached_uploads/view/2022/10/31/survey2021-eng-1667209836.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> PCBS, *Press Release, 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Commemoration of the Palestinian Nakba*, May 2022.

### Palestinian Refugees and their Descendants, 2021



Source: Badil, *NAKBA Statement: 73 years of Nakba and 73 years of Resistance*, May 2022.

<sup>54</sup> Palestinian citizens of Israel are subject to over 50 laws that discriminate against them, see Adalah’s Discriminatory Laws Database at <https://www.adalah.org/en/law/index>. See also: See, for example, <https://www.972mag.com/even-inside-israel-colonialism-is-far-from-over/>.

<sup>55</sup> *Inter alia*, it defines Israel as “the historical homeland of the Jewish people” (Article 1a), states that the “right to national self-determination in the state of Israel is unique to the Jewish people” (Article 1c), and that “the development of Jewish settlement [w]as a national value” (Article 7).

<sup>56</sup> See *Bedouin Citizens of Israel in the Naqab (Negev): A Primer*, Haifa: Adalah, 2019, available at [https://www.adalah.org/uploads/uploads/Bedouin\\_Naqab\\_Citizens\\_Primer.pdf](https://www.adalah.org/uploads/uploads/Bedouin_Naqab_Citizens_Primer.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> UN human rights experts’ warnings, see OHCHR, “Israel: UN experts urge authorities to cease eviction and demolition of Bedouin village,” 3 June 2022, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/israel-un-experts-urge-authorities-cess-eviction-and-demolition-bedouin>.

<sup>58</sup> All of which has been explicitly acknowledged in peace agreements in Cambodia, Rwanda, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Guatemala, Northern Ireland, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Burundi, and Darfur, <https://imeu.org/article/ten-facts-about-the-nakba>.

<sup>59</sup> PCBS, *Press Release on International Population Day*, 11 July 2022

<sup>60</sup> See <https://www.righttoenter.ps/> for details and case studies.

---

## CONCLUSION

---

The Nakba was not a one-time occurrence, but rather part of a larger colonial settler plan for the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Arab population from Palestine that continues today – not only in the memories of loss and defeat but in many other forms as well. The events of the past still shape present-day Palestinian life, perpetuating the refugee problem, disintegrating an entire society, thwarting economic development, and keeping a nation broadly dependent upon international aid for survival.

One wonders what contributed to this perpetuation of the Nakba – 75 years on. Intentional international exceptionalism regarding international law – especially the West’s complicity in the injustices of the Israeli state despite a well-documented history of ethnic cleansing and rights denial, not least due to the West’s omnipresent guilt for the Holocaust - are equally part of the problem as are the interests of many countries, including Arab, in strong relations with the economically and militarily mighty Israel (the so-called Abraham Accords being a prime example<sup>61</sup>).

In addition, the fact that Israeli narratives “still promulgate the story that Palestinians fled out of unfounded panic, and present expulsion and massacres as esoteric transgressions or rare cases of necessary evil”<sup>62</sup> undoubtedly have an impact. The Nakba is not only absent from Israeli school textbooks, maps, and signs of places around the country, but its commemoration has even been criminalized with the so-called Nakba Law.<sup>63</sup> Members of the current right-wing Israeli government even recite the old myth of Palestinian non-existence, with Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich telling an audience that there was “no such thing as Palestinians because there’s no such thing as the Palestinian people.”<sup>64</sup>

With no prospect of freedom and political independence or of being citizens with equal rights in sight, with policies on the ground that contain all the elements defining apartheid in international law,<sup>65</sup> and with a world that has failed to act in accordance with international law to bring an end to the tragedy of Palestine, the Nakba continues.

However, Israel’s attempt to obliterate historical memory has failed: despite all its attempts to the contrary, the Palestinian narrative and connection to the homeland remains deep-rooted in the identity of the Palestinian people and has kept their struggle for rights, self-determination and dignity alive. Moreover, against all odds Palestinians remain, 75 years after their mass expulsion, steadfast in their quest for historical justice and for statehood. In all these years, they have defied abundant “Israelization” attempts, Israeli aggression, and international ignorance. They resisted the occupation and could not be deterred from pursuing their goal to return and build their independent state. They have succeeded in keeping their just cause in the headlines while exposing Israel as an openly human rights violating settler-colonial entity amounting to “apartheid as prohibited in international law.”<sup>66</sup> Over 14 million Palestinians all over the world – and their ever-growing international support base – continue to struggle in pursuit of justice.

Thus, the Nakba is also a story of Palestinian *sumud* (steadfastness), resistance, and collective national identity, and it is those “achievements” and not the “catastrophe” itself, which should – 75 years on – be kept in mind.

---

<sup>61</sup> Quasi dual normalization agreements signed between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan in 2020/2021, enabling the establishment of full diplomatic relations.

<sup>62</sup> Peled-Elhanan, Nurit, *Palestine in Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education*, 2012.

<sup>63</sup> Passed in the Knesset on 22 March 2011 formally as ‘Budget Foundations Law – Amendment No. 40’, it authorizes the Israeli Finance Minister to reduce state funding or support to an institution if it holds an activity that rejects the existence of Israel as a “Jewish and democratic state” or commemorates “Israel’s Independence Day or the day on which the state was established as a day of mourning,” as Palestinians traditionally do as an integral part of their Nakba commemorations. See Human Rights Watch (2011) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/30/israel-new-laws-marginalize-palestinian-arab-citizens> and <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/israel-nakba-palestine-150514080431980.html>.

<sup>64</sup> “Israel’s Smotrich: There is no such thing as a Palestinian people,” <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-734835>.

<sup>65</sup> The 1973 UN Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid defines the “crime of Apartheid” as “acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them” (Art. 2). Similarly, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (17 July 1998), defines it as acts “committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime”. (Art. 7 Crimes Against Humanity, paragraph 2 (h)).

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Amnesty International’s February 2022 report *Israel’s Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity*, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en/>.

## Further Material on the NAKBA

<https://www.palestineremembered.com/> (Important and very comprehensive website with great maps and lots of material/information on Palestinian destroyed or depopulated villages and towns).

<https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/160/nakba> (*Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question* which traces the history of modern Palestine, from the end of the Ottoman era to the present, including chronologies, biographies, documents, etc.)

<https://zochrot.org/> (Great resourceful website by the Israeli NGO Zochrot NGO that works towards acknowledgement and accountability for the (ongoing) injustices of the Nakba)

<http://www.al-nakba-history.com/> (education materials regarding the history of the 1948 and the continuing Nakba)

<https://palqura.com/> (Encyclopedia of villages depopulated/occupied in 1948 and occupied in 1967)

### Maps:

[https://www.zochrot.org/sections/view/18/en?Palestine\\_Maps](https://www.zochrot.org/sections/view/18/en?Palestine_Maps)

<https://today.visualizingpalestine.org/jerusalem/> (showing how the Nakba transformed Palestine)

<https://www.plands.org/en/maps-atlases/> (collection of Nakba-related maps and atlases)

### Oral history (testimonies and accounts of who Palestinians who witnessed and survived the Nakba):

<http://nakba-archive.org/> (oral history project that consists primarily of a video archive of first-generation Palestinians' experiences)

<https://libraries.aub.edu.lb/poha/> (Palestinian Oral History Archive – an archival collection that contains over 1,000 hours of testimonies with first generation Palestinians and other Palestinian communities in Lebanon)

### Photo & Film Materials:

<https://unrwa.photoshelter.com/galleries> (images and films about UNRWA's work and the situation of the refugees since 1948)

<https://www.palarchive.org/> (digital archive of the Palestinian Museum with thousands of photos and other archival resources from over 200 years of Palestinians history)

<https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2013/05/20135612348774619.html> (Al-Jazeera's excellent series of documentaries revolving around the Nakba)

### Refugees today:

<https://www.badil.org/> (BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights is an independent, human rights non-profit organization committed to defend and promote the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons)

<https://prc.org.uk/> (Palestinian Return Center which advocates for Palestinian refugees and the right of return)

<https://www.unrwa.org/> (website of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees with statistics, reports and information about UNRWA-registered refugees and camps)



### Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

Tel: +972-2-626-4426 / 628-6566 | Fax: +972-2-628 2819

Email: [passia@passia.org](mailto:passia@passia.org) | Hind Al-Husseini, Alley, 2 Wadi Al-Joz | P.O. Box 19545, Jerusalem / Al-Quds



Kindly supported by the  
**Friedrich Ebert Foundation  
(FES), Jerusalem**