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PALESTINIAN REFUGEES: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND SOCIAL AND

HEALTH PROBLEMS

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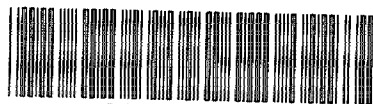
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The Palestinian problem represents one of the most acute and intricate problems in the world today. There has been, and still is, much interest in the plight of the Palestinian refugees. This interest, coming from many different and sometimes opposite quarters, has not been due to humanitarian reasons only, such as the interest in the refugees of the African famine, but has economic, religious and political causes as well.

The Middle East is not just a trading route but also an area rich in natural resources and a huge market for manufactured goods. Palestine is land holy not only for Jews but equally so for Christians and Muslims. The region, therefore, represents a flash point between East and West which may start a third world war, or in the event of a war, would offer the power in control a distinct advantage. "It is a region", wrote S G Thicknesse in 1949 in a booklet for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, "whose strategic importance in the present 'cold war' needs no emphasis... The Middle East was never strategically weaker than it is now, and this is a time where the need for strength and stability was probably never more urgent"<sup>(1)</sup>.

Writing of the European refugees in the Daily Graphic in 1949 Lord Woolton states "I believe the problem of the refugee and displaced person more



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deadly than the problem of the atom bomb - and certainly one that causes more lasting misery"<sup>(2)</sup>. This has also been true in the Middle East. Thicknesse adds "...with the added burden of three quarters of a million unemployed and destitute Palestinian refugees, the Arab States... will not ...be brought to make peace with Israel until some solution of the Arab refugee problem has been found and agreed upon"<sup>(3)</sup>.

### Superpower Agreement

At the end of the Second World War, between 1945-48, the interests of the two emerging Superpowers, the United States of America and the Soviet Union coincided regarding certain world issues. Momentarily, in historical terms, their interests in the Middle East overlapped with the political ambitions of the Zionist movement in Palestine. Sir John Glubb, the British commander of Jordan's Arab Legion between 1939 and 1956, found it a "striking fact" that the "United States and Soviet Russia worked hand in hand"<sup>(4)</sup>. Glubb goes on to quote Menachem Begin, the one time leader of the Jewish terrorist group, the Irgun, who wrote "As a result of World War Two, the power which was oppressing us [Britain] was confronted with a hostile power in the East and not a very friendly power in the West... It is noteworthy that the American, Warren Austin, in supporting the demand for the replacement of British rule in Eretz [Greater] Israel by a new regime, used language almost identical with that of the Russian Gromyko"<sup>(5)</sup>.

Both superpowers, emerging from relative political isolation, were looking for a foothold in the Middle East. Both were trying to limit British influence in the region and both had large Jewish communities to take into consideration, especially after the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe.

The US Government envisaged a Jewish state in Palestine as a foothold in an area ruled by Sheikhs and Kings whose total allegiance was for the weakened British empire. The Jewish state would fulfill two other purposes: to direct potential Jewish refugees away from its shores and to satisfy the ever growing Zionist lobby in the US. On 19 December 1944 an article in the New York Post concluded: "It would be better for the United States to have Palestine reopened to the Jews than to have millions of them coming here after the war as unassimilated refugees". Lord Halifax the British Foreign Secretary reported after a visit to the US in 1944 that "the average citizen does not want them [Jews] in the United States and salves his conscience by advocating their admission to Palestine"<sup>(6)</sup>.

The strength of the Zionist lobby in the US can be best illustrated by the attendance of prominent figures who addressed an all-day Zionist conference in Washington in March 1944. Among these were Henry Wallace, the Vice-President, Senators Robert Taft and Robert Wagner and various other church and labour representatives most of whom spoke enthusiastically in favour of the official Zionist programme<sup>(7)</sup>.

In his book 'The Palestine Triangle' Bethell explains that in 1944 the American President Roosevelt had to bear in mind that eight months later there would be a presidential election and that several million Jewish votes would be influenced by his attitude<sup>(8)</sup>. As for President Truman who succeeded him, he could not offend the Jewish voters of New York City, one third of the total electorate<sup>(9)</sup>.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union also perceived a Jewish State as its only potential foothold in a region dominated by 'imperialism and reaction'. There were clearly visible socialist tendencies within the Zionist movement in Palestine, that manifested themselves in the strong labour and trade

union movement ( Histadrut) and in the establishment of kibutzim and moshav ( communal industrial and farming settlements). In addition, the creation of a Jewish state would have greatly embarrassed Britain and affected her standing in the region which will open new possibilities there. Glubb writes: "Both the USA and Russia were still attacking the British administration in Palestine... From the Russian point of view, the Middle East has been a preserve of Western Powers. To support any measure which would destroy the prestige of the US and Britain in a vital part of the world was to the Russians an obvious move". (10)

Describing Gromyko's speech at the United Nations General Assembly on 14 May 1947, Bethell writes: "Britain did not foresee that the Soviet Union was planning a diplomatic volte-face, a dramatic change of policy carefully calculated as the best way to crush once and for all Britain's privileged Middle East position" (11). It was only after its creation in 1948 that Stalin, who according to Isaac Deutscher acted as "godparent to the new state of Israel" (12), realised "how little he could expect to gain from Israel" (13). Deutscher adds that Stalin's motives "were not far to seek: the Zionist revolt in Palestine marked a stage in the dissolution of the British Empire..." but soon after Israel became "a western outpost in the Middle East and Stalin blamed its leaders for their ingratitude" (14).

In general, it is only when the Superpowers of the day come to an agreement that historical impossibilities become realities, be they good, bad, absurd or ugly. In this instance, implicit agreement between the USA and the USSR ensured that a Jewish state was established in Palestine, which in turn meant that a Palestinian refugee problem was also created. Rodinson comments: "One of the points on which the endeavors of the two blocks, the United States and the Soviet Union, were in agreement was the decision to partition Palestine taken in November 1947, and to recognise the new State of Israel

in May 1948" (15).

### Jewish Immigration to Palestine

Since November 1917, when the British forces entered Palestine and until November 1947, when the Partition plan of Palestine was adopted by UN General Assembly, its Jewish population increased ten-fold, from about 60,000 (16) to nearly 650,000 (17). This increase was mainly achieved through immigration in fulfillment of the Balfour Declaration given in November 1917 by Arthur Balfour, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Lord Rothschild expressing his Government's support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (18).

Earlier, in a letter to the Sharif Hussein of Mecca in 1915, the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry MacMahon had pledged his Government's support for an independent Arab state in territories interpreted by Arabs and Palestinians to be inclusive of Palestine. Bethell writes: "The British Government... had pledged promises of independence for both Arabs and Jews in Palestine that were mutually exclusive" (19). The British Colonial Secretary in 1939, Malcolm MacDonald, wrote in a Cabinet paper: "It is impossible to escape the conclusion that the authors of the various declarations made to Jews and Arabs during the [First World] war, which are really difficult to reconcile, were rather confused about the whole business. I doubt whether they realised fully how many Arabs were living in Palestine at the time when they made their promises to the Jews..." (20).

The Jewish immigration to Palestine had occurred as a result of racial discrimination in Europe that manifested itself in the form of anti-semitism. Between 1920 and 1924, 43,684 Jewish immigrants entered Palestine; from

1925-30, immigration totalled 49,885. Between 1931-36, however, 177,894 Jews entered the Holy Land <sup>(21)</sup>. Whereas many of the Jewish immigrants were merely seeking security and shelter, others came to promote the Zionist idea and with the intention of establishing a Jewish state in the land declared to be 'land without a people for a people without a land'.<sup>(22)</sup>

On the other hand, the Arab population increased two-fold in the same period ( 1917-1947) from about 600,000 to 1,350,000<sup>(23)</sup>. To them Jewish immigrants allowed to enter Palestine by the British Mandatory Government against their wishes, represented not only unwanted refugees per se, but also a population with hostile ambitions aiming to expel them and turn their homeland into a Jewish state. It was therefore inevitable that violence would erupt; this occurred regularly, especially in 1920, 1921, 1929 and 1936-39 <sup>(24)</sup>. Four principal British Commissions of inquiries were appointed as a result of the disturbances: Palin (1920), Haycraft (1921), Shaw (1930) and Peel (1937). Hadawi concludes that their findings were invariably the same, namely "Arab disappointment at the non-fulfillment of the promise of independence" given to them during the First World War, and "Arab belief that the Balfour Declaration implied a denial of the right of self determination and their fear that the establishment of 'a national home for the Jews' in Palestine will lead to their ultimate dispossession of their homes and homeland" <sup>(25)</sup>.

### The Partition Plan

Following the adoption of the Partition Plan by the UN General Assembly in November 1947, hostilities between Arab and Jewish communities erupted on a massive scale. "The Partition Plan", according to Hadawi, "divided Palestine into six principal parts, three were allocated to the Jewish state and

three... to the Arab state" with an international zone under UN jurisdiction. (26) Gilmour, in his book The Ordeal of the Palestinians, adds that only in one sub-district did Jews own more land than Arabs. "The absurdity" he continues, "of the [Partition] plan can be demonstrated by the fact that even in the proposed Jewish state there were more Arabs than Jews... Questions of right and principle were forgotten and the idea that a people should have a say in determining its own future was completely discarded" (27).

The Partition Plan needed two-thirds majority at the General Assembly to be adopted. Despite USA-USSR agreement, this was not automatically obtainable but needed a lot of persuasion. Gilmour writes: "The United States... was determined to force its policy through the General Assembly. When it became uncertain whether the scheme [partition] would attract a sufficient majority, the Americans reacted strongly. Haiti, Liberia, the Philippines, Chile, Ethiopia and Greece - all of which opposed partition - were given concentrated doses of political and economical pressure. All, except Greece, were 'persuaded' to change their minds. The delegate from the Philippines was placed in a ridiculous position: after making a passionate speech against partition, his country ended up by voting in favour of it" (28).

#### The Full-Scale War in 1948

During the ensuing war of 1948, the immigrant minority managed to oust the indigenous majority. This was due to several factors. Apart from political and diplomatic support from both Superpowers, Israel was receiving arms and ammunition from East (29) and West (30). The Zionist forces were better organised trained and equipped, while the Arab forces were totally disorganised and lacked a unified command. Glbb estimates the total Arab forces fighting in Palestine at 21,500 against a Jewish figure of 65,000 (31). A CIA report describing the military situation after the first truce was declared on 18 July

1948, states that "the Jews may now be strong enough to launch a full-scale offensive against the Arab forces in Palestine... The Arabs logistical position generally is very bad and their ammunition supply is exceedingly low. It is estimated that they could not continue to fight, even on the previous moderate scale, for more than two to three months" (32). The report estimates the total Arab forces in Palestine to be 27,000 while the total Israeli forces estimate is 97,800.

In addition, most Arab leaders directly involved in the 1948 war, especially those under the influence of the British such as the Kings of Trans-Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, have probably acquiesced to the partition of Palestine before the start of the all-out war on 15 May 1948 and had sent their armies into Palestine not to crush the Jewish state but to salvage the parts allocated to the Arabs. Glubb recollects a conversation between Tawfiq Pasha Abu Elhuda the Jordanian Prime Minister and Mr Ernest Bevin, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the spring of 1948 in which he acted as the translator (33). Abu Elhuda proposes to "send the Arab Legion [of Trans-Jordan] across the Jordan [river] when the British mandate ended, and to occupy that part of Palestine awarded to the Arabs which was contiguous with the frontier of Trans-Jordan". Bevin, considered by Golda Meir, the late Israeli Prime Minister, to be "a little insane, or just anti-semitic, or both" (34), said to Abu Elhuda: "It seems the obvious thing to do, but do not go and invade areas allocated to the Jews". The Trans-Jordanian Prime Minister assured Bevin: "We should not have the forces to do so, even if we so desired". This British message underlined above, was probably transmitted to all British-influenced Arab leaders. In confirmation, Glubb also adds: "We in Trans-Jordan ... favoured partition... If such a plan had been adopted, fighting would have been avoided. Any necessary exchanges of population could have been carried out without unnecessary hardship..." (35).



Rodinson mentions that King Abdullah of Jordan made "several attempts to reach an understanding with the Zionists over partition of Palestine and even looked beyond this. While talks which he had with Golda Myerson [Meir] on the eve of the outbreak of the war may not have resulted in a signed pact, the strategy followed by his troops could easily be interpreted as dictated by a tacit agreement with Ben Gurion" (36), who later became Israel's first Prime Minister.

### Palestinian Exodus

Between November 1947 and October 1948, nearly one million Palestinian Arabs were displaced; at least three quarters became refugees in Jordan ( and the West Bank), Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iraq (37). There has been much dispute over why the Palestinians had left their homes to become refugees. Official Zionist policy has maintained that there was no intention on behalf of the Jews to force the Arabs out, but the latter had left voluntarily in response to calls from their leaders asking them to leave the battle zones until the Arab armies were victorious. (38) The Palestinian refugees have always maintained that they fled out of fear or were forced out by the Zionist forces.

Count Folke Bernadotte, the mediator sent out to Palestine by the UN, stated shortly before his assassination by Jewish terrorist, that the exodus of the Palestinians "resulted from panic created by fighting in their communities, by rumours concerning real or alleged acts of terrorism, or expulsion" (39). The most famous massacre that took place in the village of Deir Yassin was certainly read. Gilmour writes: "After 254 civilians in Deir Yassin had been deliberately massacred in cold blood... survivors were publicly paraded through Jerusalem in order to spread terror among other sections of the community" (40).

According to the Palestine Post ( now The Jerusalem Post) in Haifa Israel's forces in a thirty hour battle "crushed all resistance, occupied major buildings forcing thousands of Arabs to flee by the only open escape route- the sea" (41). Yitshak Rabin, the former Israeli Prime Minister recounts how Ben Gurion ordered the expulsion of the Arab inhabitants of the towns of Lydda and Ramleh. "We walked outside", he wrote, "Ben Gurion accompanying us. Allon repeated his question 'What is to be done with the population?' BG waved his hand in a gesture which said 'Drive them out'..."(42)

Erskine Childers, an Irish scholar who went to Israel in 1958 as a guest of its government, tried to substantiate the official Israeli version of the reason behind the Palestinian Exodus, alleging that the refugees followed instructions broadcast by their leaders. As the Israelis were unable to produce evidence of the broadcasts, Childers examined American and British monitoring records of all Middle East broadcasts throughout 1948. "There was not a single order", he reported, "or appeal, or suggestion about evacuation from Palestine from any Arab radio station inside or outside Palestine, in 1948. There is repeated monitored records of Arab appeals, even flat orders, to the civilians to stay put" (43), Glubb offers further evidence: "Voluntary emigrants", he writes, "do not leave their houses with only the clothes they stand up in. People who have decided to move house do not do so in such a hurry that they lose other members of their family" (44). Indeed, there are many stories of refugee families locking their front door and leaving with very few items of clothing with them. Some still hang to their front door keys to date- thirty eight years later.

#### Attempting to Return

To begin with, the vast majority of the refugees were under the impression that they would be allowed back to their homes as soon as hostilities end.

But, as Glubb indicates "when the armistice was signed [in 1949] some of the refugees innocently thought that they could now go home again... The majority went to try to rescue some of their belongings, or to look for missing relatives... The Israelis were ruthless... the great majority gave it [returning] up and made no further attempt to return home." (45).

In December 1948, the UN General Assembly resolved that "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with neighbours 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 or damage to property which under the principles of international law should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible". This resolution has never been implemented.

#### Initial Needs of the Refugees

Initially a relief agency, the United Nations Relief for Palestinian Refugees ( UNRPR ) was set up in November 1948, to cater for the immediate short-term needs of the refugee population and to coordinate and expand the already existing relief programme of the Arab Governments and the volunteer agencies then caring for the exiles. (46) Camps were beginning to be set up and refugee families were given tents, blankets, some clothing, food rations and basic medical attention.

In 1949, UNRPR was distributing some 960,000 food rations, although the Economic Survey Mission put the number of those who fled from Israel and were unable to return at 726,000 scattered as follows: Arab Palestine West Bank, 280,000; Gaza, 190,000; Lebanon, 100,000; Syria, 75,000; Jordan, 70,000; Egypt, 7,000 and Iraq 4,000. (47)

Thicknesse, who estimated the refugees at 713,000, classified them into

four groups: (a) refugees with means, which is "a very small group numbering around 8,000" and, with few exceptions, capable of looking after themselves; (b) refugees in villages and towns numbering around 250,000, most of which have nothing but refugee rations; (c) refugees in caves, numbering around 30,000 and "living in holes in the rocks and miserable encampments... These do not receive UN refugee supplies and are rapidly degenerating"; and (d) refugee in camps which number around 430,000 and live in "semi-organised camps or ... in schools, mosques and other public buildings". Thicknesse describes the latter group as "uniformally wretched but... have some sort of shelter and exist on UN rations..." (48). Thicknesse adds that "it must be emphasised that this UN relief... has been able to do no more than provide a bare subsistence minimum."

Moved by the desperate flight of the refugees, Count Bernadotte warned the General Assembly in his report of September 1948 that "the choice is between saving the lives of many thousands of people now or permitting them to die"(49). "From every point", writes Dr Buehrig, "food, water, sanitation, shelter, clothing and bedding, the situation was critical"(50).

Although Bernadotte managed to obtain some contributions for supplementary feeding, blankets and medical supplies, by the time he was assassinated, the Acting Mediator, Ralph Bunche, reported that "the situation had further deteriorated"(51). One year later, in December 1949, a new body, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), was set up, presumably to deal with the semi-permanent atmosphere that the Palestinian refugee problem had started to assume. It had been assumed by pro-Israeli governments who have given the largest contributions to UNRWA that the Arab refugees expelled outside the borders of the Jewish state would integrate relatively quickly in the countries of asylum. Many westerners saw all Arabs as one and the same and that the problem was basically one

of rehabilitation and resettlement through economic assistance to the refugees. Some optimists even envisaged that the refugee camps would be more or less empty within five to ten years.

Thicknesse wrote in 1949: "It is obvious that if the problem of the Arab refugees is to be solved... skill and aid must be forthcoming on a very large scale"<sup>(52)</sup>. In the same spirit, Dr Buehrig adds: "UNRWA had in addition to relief, a major objective uncommon to international organizations: that of creating employment, an objective designed to bring about permanent settlement of the refugees"<sup>(53)</sup>. The annual report of the Director of UNRWA of 1959-60 outlines its function as "relief and rehabilitation"<sup>(54)</sup>.

UNRWA was therefore envisaged as a tool of resettlement of refugees in the Arab countries surrounding Palestine. The US Government, one of the most ardent supporters of Israel, contributed over \$27 million out of a total of \$38.5 million in 1950, six months after UNRWA was established<sup>(55)</sup>.

The UN Economic Survey Mission that visited the Middle East in the fall of 1949 based its report on the theory that the economic distress of the refugees was related directly to the economic weakness of the Arab countries. It proposed that as a start each of the Arab countries would undertake an initial pilot project which would set a pattern and fit into an expanded development programme. "It was their recommendation" states Stevens "that led to the transformation of UNRPR into UNRWA... with the object of substituting jobs for relief"<sup>(56)</sup>. Glubb agrees: "The activities of UNRWA were two fold. He writes, "Its first duty was to keep the refugees alive by collecting them in camps, issuing tents, supplying rations... Its second duty was to resettle them in life"<sup>(57)</sup>.

UNRWA's Initial Services

UNRWA defined a refugee as "a person usually resident in Palestine who has lost his home and his livelihood as a result of the hostilities and who is in need"<sup>(58)</sup>. "This", states Stevens, "limits the number of displaced Arabs eligible for UNRWA aid. It did not include those who still live in their houses but are cut off from their means of livelihood,"<sup>(59)</sup> which she estimated at 130,000. As stated earlier UNRPR was distributing 960,000 rations in 1949 although the number of refugees was estimated at 726,000.

Buehrig suggests that the numbers were confused "because the educated amongst them [the refugees] and those possessing urban skills were not dependent on relief... many of them were never included on the relief rolls...". On the other hand there were those individuals who registered themselves in more than one region, or under several names, by increasing the number of their family, or by registering false births and hiding deaths<sup>(60)</sup>. Offering further explanation to this initially high figure of 1949, the Chairman of the United Nations Co-ordination Commission for Palestine states that "the influx of these destitute families into already crowded areas, notably Arab Palestine, the Gaza Strip and the western part of the Kingdom of Jordan, has aggregated the already depressed standard of life in these regions. This may help to account for the 940,000 rations now issued daily against the 652,000 recommended in this report"<sup>(61)</sup>. However, the number of rations distributed by UNRWA has remained higher than the estimated number of refugees, amounting to 960,021 in 1949. This figure dropped slightly to less than 900,000 in the next and subsequent three years, but rose again to over 900,000 in June 1955<sup>(62)</sup>.

### Food Rations

Rations were among the first forms of relief to be distributed by UNRWA, but "the 1500 calories provided for the refugees per day in summer and the 1600 calories in winter" according to Hadawi, "are below the minimum required for an individual. These do not include meat, vegetables or fruits..."<sup>(63)</sup>.

The rations, while adequate for short-term relief, were completely insufficient for long-term existence "enough to ward off starvation, little more"<sup>(64)</sup>. Even in the first few months of UNRWA's activity, many refugees found these rations inadequate and had to supplement them with food purchased from the refugees own and very limited purse. Others had to do without and many cases of mal and under-nourishment were seen, forcing UNRWA to start a programme of supplementary feeding for the most vulnerable groups in the community<sup>(65)</sup>.

### Shelter

With regard to sheltering the refugees, UNRWA supplied tents and helped in the construction of tin shacks and mud huts that formed the refugee shanty-twon like camps. Describing those camps, Gilmour writes: "Nobody who ever visited a Palestinian camp can forget... squalid sheds, their roofs of tin or corrugated iron... The camps were set... on any available land... Some were places in the desert... or rough, barren land or on old campsites once used by the French and British armies. At the begining, the refugees were herded into barracks, several families to a room, or packed closely in tents... There was little sanitation, no sewage and only basic medical facilities"<sup>(66)</sup>.

Stevens adds that "about a third of the refugees are sheltered in barracks or tents in camps run by UNRWA... The 65% of the refugees... who are not in camps present an indescribable spectacle of degradation and misery. It is this group who inhabit, in family groups, one room at best, or outdoor caves at the worst. The cellars and areaways of hundreds of Arab towns are filled with these ragged remnants of families, subsisting on basic rations issued at the rate of \$2 a head per month."<sup>(67)</sup>

An UNRWA report states that in the year up to June 1950, 267,598 refugees of an estimated number of 800,000 were sheltered by the Agency in 30,580 tents and 10,930 huts, an average of around seven persons per the one-roomed hut/tent. The ratio of hut:tent has steadily risen over the years. By June 1960, there were 421,518 refugees living in 149 tents and 103,616 huts an average of about four person per hut<sup>(68)</sup>. After the June 1967 war, the tents were back again as 300,000 old and new refugees fled the hostilities in the West Bank for the relative safety of the East Bank of Jordan.<sup>(69)</sup>

#### Health Care

UNRWA established a network of clinics in the refugee camps, whose aim was the prevention of epidemics and the treatment of endemic diseases on a primary level. This primary health care programme was adequately carried during the 1950's and 1960's. Glubb states that UNRWA was "remarkably successful... in the direction of health"<sup>(70)</sup>, Buehrig notices that "even in periods of greatest vulnerability... the refugee population has never suffered an epidemic. The most serious quarantinable diseases were virtually absent: Cholera, Plague, Relapsing Fever, Small Pox, Typhus and Yellow Fever"<sup>(71)</sup>. Nevertheless there had been a lot of childhood



diseases such as mumps, measles, whooping cough, and chicken pox over the years. Also there were many cases of dysentery, trachoma and conjunctivitis.<sup>(72)</sup> As for hospitals, UNRWA administered very few. The preferred policy was to refer patients to other private or government hospitals. This was a satisfactory procedure until the refugee population became, in situations of conflict, unable to leave the security of the camp for hospital treatment.

### Education

With regard to education, especially primary and intermediate, UNRWA did well. Although the report of its Commissioner General of 1962-63 states that "the quality of education provided by the Agency and especially the quality of instruction, still remains less than satisfactory"<sup>(73)</sup>, "The worth of UNRWA-Unesco education programme to refugee children cannot be questioned. It has assisted thousands to overcome the handicaps of exile.", wrote Buehrig in 1971.<sup>(74)</sup> Vocational training centres were also established.<sup>(75)</sup>

UNRWA also provided a limited number of university scholarships. In this respect, Palestinian families went even further by investing their very small earnings in the education of their sons, and in many instances, their daughters. With education, a Palestinian would have an advantage that compensated for his/her refugee status. After finding employment he/she would send a good part of their earnings to the family in the camp.<sup>(76)</sup>

### Employment

In this regard UNRWA failed miserably, but one might add, for no fault of its own. Although Glubb puts some blame on the centralisation of the organisation in America and the delay caused by the referral of all local projects to New York,<sup>(77)</sup> it was simply impossible to find employment for a

refugee population in countries where there were very little prospects for work even for the countries' own citizens. Thicknesse has reviewed the prospects of resettlement through employment of refugees in the countries of first asylum.<sup>(78)</sup> He concluded that "a very serious difficulty has to be settled before any plans for the development of the Jordan valley [where refugees can be settled] can go ahead". "Lebanon", he added, "has a rapidly increasing population and limited resources, therefore there would be considerable opposition to the settlement of refugees on both economic and religious grounds... There is a good deal of unemployment in the country and this has led to the passing of laws against the employment of Palestinian refugees". "Egypt", he adds, "could not accept refugees for agricultural settlement with her present territories". As for Gaza "the land is sandy and poor". As for Syria, Thicknesse concludes that "besides the difficulties connected with political and social unrest... there is the enormous difficulty of finding the capital necessary for development schemes." For him, Iraq was "in a worse financial situation than the other Arab states."

Apart from purely economic reasons, there were other reasons why the refugees were not resettled in their exiles. Firstly, there was their great reluctance to integrate. Hadawi explains that the refugees "are unwilling to accept anything short of their full rights to their homes and country".<sup>(79)</sup> This is confirmed in the report of UNRWA Commissioner-General where it states that the great mass of refugees continues to believe that a grave injustice has been done to them and to express a desire to return to their homeland.<sup>(80)</sup> Second, in Jordan, the Monarchy relied on its bedouin population to rule over the refugees and their political ambitions, thereby treating them as second (or even third class citizens after the bedouins and the Circassians). Third, in Lebanon, there was a delicate sectarian balance that would have been totally upset had the Palestinians been allowed to integrate and, therefore, they had

to be kept outside the system. Forth, in Egypt, the Government which had no intention of annexing Gaza, kept the refugees in the strip offering them refugee travel documents only that needed a visa even to go to Egypt itself.

UNRWA has tried to resettle the refugees. It saw its objectives as centring on "two focal points of Relief, to alleviate suffering, and Works, to provide employment."<sup>(81)</sup> That was why UNRPR was transferred into UNRWA. Stevens wrote in 1952 that "road building projects were initiated with the cooperation of the local governments, and for the time in 1950 some 14,000 refugees were employed in this way".<sup>(82)</sup> "Unhappily", Stevens continued, "it soon became apparent that this form of assistance cost about five times the amount of direct relief".

UNRWA's report of 1959-60 explicitly explains the job situation. "The simple truth", it states, "is that jobs at which the refugees could be employed do not exist today within the host countries. Nor could any large number of jobs be created in these countries... The fact has to be faced that for the majority of the refugees - two thirds of the total or more - the areas where they are presently located hold almost no prospect of their absorption into satisfactory, self-supporting employment" <sup>(83)</sup>. The report of the following year, 1960-61, sums up the future prospects of the refugees; it states: "Today... of the more than one million refugees now registered with the Agency, approximately half are adult and half are children, if one defines adulthood as starting at about 18 years. Of the 500,000 adults... three out of five matured to adulthood as refugees. In general those adults are more literate than their parents, but less skilled in the art of making a living, because most of them have not had an opportunity to learn a trade..." <sup>(84)</sup> UNRWA's report of 1963-64 takes it

even further: "A large number of adult male refugees (ie the potential bread-winner of the refugee community) were not only unemployed but were virtually unemployable...it is clear that a large part of the refugee community is still living today in dire poverty, often under pathetic and in some cases appalling conditions." (85)

### The Aftermath of the 1967 War

The failure of UNRWA on the employment front greatly added to the political dissatisfaction of the Palestinian refugees. Although the relief part of the Agency may be considered as, considering the circumstances, adequate, its works part was a total failure.

By 1968, two major incidents changed the face of the refugee camps, hence changing the prospects and the problems of the refugees. In June 1967, Israel occupied what was left of Palestine, together with Sinai and the Syrian Golan Heights, placing around 1,200,000 Palestinians under its military rule. During that short war, "over 300,000 persons, including some 120,000 registered refugees, are reported to have been rendered homeless or to have left their homes as a result of the hostilities" (86). They were driven by fear, in this case mostly imagined, or by memories of the stories of 1948. Soon after, the new refugees wanted to return. But amongst the 150,000 people that filled application forms issued by Israel to enable them to return to the occupied West Bank, only 14,150 were allowed back. (87)

Also in 1968, especially after the battle of Al-Karamah where Palestinian commandos scored their first major success against the attacking Israeli army, the refugee camps started to be militarised and the Palestine Liberation Organisation assumed the role of a government-in-exile.

PLO Rule

With its initial successes in fighting against the Israeli occupation, especially after the failure of the Arab armies, the PLO started obtaining large sums of money from Palestinian and Arab sources. Although some of these funds were spent on military projects, most of the cash was spent on solving some of the economic, social and medical problems of the Palestinians in the camps.

First, the different PLO institutions provided real employment, for the first time since 1948, in a wide range of departments and specialisations: military, economic, medical, educational, information, research and planning, folklore and art and political. Samed, the main economic institution established by the PLO in Lebanon, employed more than 5000 workers; the Palestine Red Crescent Society employed over 3000; the Political Department 2000; the Information Department 1000 etc. The military Department employed over 20,000 persons. By 1982, it was estimated that in Lebanon alone, the PLO had provided employment for around 50,000 refugees<sup>(88)</sup>, almost ten times the amount provided by UNRWA in that country.

Second, the PLO introduced a social welfare system, initially for its fighters and their families, but later to all its workers and their dependents. The families of those killed, injured or imprisoned would receive a monthly allowance<sup>(89)</sup>. Many refugee were awarded university placements and scholarships through the PLO, mainly in the socialist or third world countries. Families whose houses were destroyed in the fighting were given grants to rebuild and refurbish. PLO funds helped establish and strengthen trade unions, professional syndicates and cooperatives.<sup>(90)</sup>

Third, the Palestine Red Crescent Society became a ministry of Health establishing clinics in camps it was allowed into. It also established

hospitals in major Palestinian refugee centres. With the advent of the PLO, the medical needs of the refugees became different to their original ones. Apart from prevention and treatment of disease, which UNRWA was dealing with, there was a need for major surgery facilities, sophisticated operation theatres and skilled medical staff to cope with the victims of continuous war. By 1982, the PRCS had established 30 hospitals, over 100 clinics, 3 rehabilitation centres, 2 orthopaedic workshops and a nursing school. (91)

Lastly, another very essential need was fulfilled with the presence of the PLO: the political one. Running their affairs and, more-or-less, controlling their fate for the first time since 1948, gave the distitute refugees a tremendous sence of security and achievement. All that was not to last; for despite everything it brought to the camps, the PLO also brought destruction with it. That destruction was almost complete after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

### Israeli Rule

Following the 1967 war and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, UNRWA remained the main relief agency working in the refugee camps under occupation catering for about 700,000 refugees. Eighteen years later, while refugee needs significantly increased, UNRWA's facilities shrank. The Agency has become a political football for the major powers that contribute to its budget. Year after year these contributions have been reduced creating a financial crisis for UNRWA. As a result, the services provided have been deteriorating especially in the occupied territories (92). Educational, relief as well as medical services have been reduced .

## Conclusions

Thirty eight years after the Palestinians became refugees, none of their problems have been solved. None of their grievances have been responded to. They are still in their refugee camps that they thought of as temporary arrangement. They are still the main source of unrest in the Middle East. They will not accept anything less than repatriation and self determination in a state of their own. Israel, on the other hand, will accept nothing but their resettlement in countries outside mandated Palestine which it totally occupies.

"The Middle East was never strategically weaker than it is now, and this is a time where the need for strength and stability was probably more urgent", wrote Thicknesse in 1949<sup>(93)</sup>. This statement holds true today. And from the turn of events it will probably hold true for a long time to come. While the Palestinian refugees still demand repatriation, Israel demands their resettlement , the most likely result is war and death.

Notes

- 1 Thicknesse, S G. Arab Refugees (Oxford,1949), 15.
- 2 Woolton, Lord. The Daily Graphic, 11 April 1949.
- 3 Thicknesse, *ibid*, 15.
- 4 Glubb, JB. A Soldier with the Arabs (London, 1957), 60.
- 5 Glubb, *ibid*, 45.
- 6 Foreign Office Records, FO 371 45378, Public Record Office, London.
- 7 Bethell,N. The Palestine Triangle (London,1979), 164.
- 8 Bethell, *ibid*, 164.
- 9 Bethell, *ibid*, 212.
- 10 Glubb, *ibid*, 62.
- 11 Bethell, *ibid*, 312.
- 12 Deutscher,I. Stalin (London,1974), 591.
- 13 Rodinson, M. Israel and the Arabs (New York, 1982), 122.
- 14 Deutscher, *ibid*, 591.
- 15 Rodinson, *ibid*, 55.
- 16 Estimated. Hadawi,S. Bitter Harvest (New York, 1979),44, puts the figure in 1918 at56,000. Bethell, *ibid*, 21, estimates it at 69,453 in 1919.
- 17 Estimated by Thicknesse, *ibid*, 1, at 640,000.
- 18 Bethell,*ibid*, 16.
- 19 Bethell, *ibid*, 19.
- 20 Cabinet Records 24 282, Public RecordOffice, London.
- 21 Alloush, N. The Palestinian National Movement (Beirut, 1974), 147 and 189. ( In Arabic).
- 22 Hadawi, *ibid*, 29.
- 23 Hadawi, *ibid*, 44, estimates Arab numbers at 700,000 in 1918 and 1,380,000 in 1948. Thicknesse, *ibid*, 1, estimates their number at 1,320,000 in 1947.



- 24 Hadawi, *ibid*, 46.
- 25 Hadawi, *ibid*, 46.
- 26 Hadawi, *ibid*, 71.
- 27 Gilmour, D. The Ordeal of the Palestinians ( London, 1982), 60.
- 28 Gilmour, *ibid*, 60.
- 29 Glubb, *ibid*, 211.
- 30 Fraser, T. The Middle East 1914-79 (London, 1980), 70.
- 31 Glubb, *ibid*, 211.
- 32 Fraser, *ibid*, 70.
- 33 Glubb, *ibid*, 65-66.
- 34 Bethell, *ibid*, 204.
- 35 Glubb, *ibid*, 59.
- 36 Rodinson, *ibid*, 48.
- 37 Thicknesse, *ibid*, 6.
- 38 Gilmour, *ibid*, 66.
- 39 UN document A/648 (1948), 14.
- 40 Gilmour, *ibid*, 67.
- 41 Palestine Post (Jerusalem), 23 April 1948.
- 42 Quoted in Gilmour, *ibid*, 73.
- 43 Childers, E. 'The Other Exodus', Spectator, 12 May 1961, 672.
- 44 Glubb, *ibid*, 251.
- 45 Glubb, *ibid*, 245.
- 46 Stevens, G G. 'Arab Refugees 1948-52', Middle East Journal, Summer 1952, 285.
- 47 Buehrig, E H. The UN and the Palestinian Refugees ( Indiana, 1971), 38.
- 48 Thicknesse, *ibid*, 8.
- 49 Buehrig, *ibid*, 26.
- 50 Buehrig, *ibid*, 27.
- 51 Buehrig, *ibid*, 28.
- 52 Thicknesse, *ibid*, 16.
- 53 Buehrig, *ibid*, 6.



- 84 UN Document 14(A/4861), 1.
- 85 UN Document 13(A/5813), 2.
- 86 UN Document 13(A/6713), 1.
- 87 UN Document 13(A/6713), 13.
- 88 Figure estimated by DR S Dabbagh, ex-Chairman of Palestine National Fund in a speech in Beirut, February 1982.
- 89 Arafat, F. Health and War (Cairo, 1984), 30. (In Arabic).
- 90 Amongst unions and syndicates established or strengthened with the rise of the PLO were: workers, women, students, journalists and writers, artists, engineers and doctors and pharmacists.
- 91 Palestine Red Crescent Society. Information Bulliten (Cairo, 1985), 3.
- 92 See Reports of Commissioner General of UNRWA 1973-85.
- 93 Thicknesse, *ibid*, 15.