

Pam-
Palestine

**ARAB
AND
JEWISH
REFUGEES -
PROBLEMS
AND
PROSPECT**

by
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ARAB AND JEWISH REFUGEES -- PROBLEMS AND PROSPECT *

By Karl Baehr

I have been an observer of the Palestine refugee problem since its inception. During each of the past three years I have conducted Christian study tour groups through the area, visiting the camps and United Nations officials. Then too, I was in Israel shortly after the Israel-Arab war came to an end. While there, I had the opportunity to interview Arab and Jewish leaders about the flight of the refugees, noting the multiple causes for this population upheaval. To recall the setting of the problem, one need only mention the chaotic state of the British Mandate after World War II, the tragic immensity of the Jewish refugee problem, the unwillingness of the Arab states to cooperate with any plan which would fulfill the letter and spirit of the League of Nations Mandate, and the final rejection by the Arab states of the United Nations Partition decision, which valiantly tried to steer a compromise course between the claims of Jews and Arabs.

War Breeds Refugees

The Arab war against the United Nations decision created not only the Arab refugee problem, numbering today by U. N. count some 880,000, but made inevitable the expansion of the Jewish refugee problem, for it made untenable the position of substantial Jewish communities in the Arab world. Thus the ancient Jewish community of Yemen, numbering 50,000, abandoned its home of affliction to come to Israel. Likewise, 120,000 Jews of Iraq left the "waters of Babylon" to find security and hope in Israel. In all, some 350,000 Jews from Moslem countries have now joined their brethren in Israel, and the end is not yet.

Who bears responsibility for these tragedies?

While the United Nations was not responsible for the human tragedy, because its recommendations had been rejected

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by the Arab states, that international agency, nevertheless, felt that it should do all in its power to ameliorate human suffering.

United Nations & United States Give Aid

The United Nations, however, did not see fit to include within this consciousness of responsibility the Jewish refugees from Europe and the Arab Moslem lands. For the first several years, the full burden of the responsibility fell upon the World Jewish Community, which felt a profound sense of obligation to offer comfort and shelter to these victims of social upheavals and war.

Not alone did the United Nations accept responsibility for bringing relief to the Arab refugees; the United States Government took active leadership in the U. N. to bring into existence a well-conceived and financed relief and resettlement program. During the past years, the United States has contributed \$153,513,000 to this program. Moreover, the U. S., feeling a humane obligation to assist the Jewish community in resolving what was in every degree and logic a world responsibility, has in the past two Mutual Security Acts, made substantial contributions to Israel to help in the absorption of approximately 750,000 Jewish refugees and displaced peoples.

This year, the Government of the United States is again faced with the same Middle East refugee problem and the necessity to contribute more funds towards its resolution. It is only natural and reasonable for this committee to probe the question: "How long must this aid continue? When does our human and moral obligation end?"

Jewish Refugees Being Integrated Successfully

In Israel, the situation is pregnant with hope. Our American experts, with whom I talked in Israel only a few weeks ago, who are administering the aid provided under the Mutual Security Act, confess to a profound spiritual experience as they help to implement the many projects which increase production, create new jobs and in a hundred ways help in the difficult but exciting job of rebuilding a wasted land and redeeming rejected peoples. Literally, the Bible is, with American aid, being fulfilled in Israel today. The desert is rejoicing and beginning to blossom as the rose; the rugged and austere wilderness of the Negev is once again

giving forth ore, copper and manganese, and may soon spout oil; the Dead Sea is providing potash, which as fertilizer is bringing life to barren soils. A new road -- a wonderful feat of engineering -- now connects Beersheba with the long inactive potash plant at the southern end of the Dead Sea. If help continues, a railroad may soon connect Tel Aviv with the Red Sea, opening a new port and the possibilities of exploiting the mineral and fishing potentials of this long-forgotten no-man's land. Israel is compressing the task of building an industrial and democratic civilization into the shortest time possible. The reason? -- the integration of refugees into a productive and largely self-sustaining economy. One may expect, therefore, that a date for the termination of U. S. Governmental aid can be expected.

Arab Refugee Integration Likewise Possible

With the Arab refugee problem, the picture is depressing, though the potentials for the successful resolution of this problem are on hand:

First, there are the funds for relief and resettlement supplied by the U. N. -- \$250,000,000 for a three year program, of which the U.S. Government has already allocated \$110,000,000 -- much of it not yet expended for specific development and resettlement projects.

Second, the land resources for vast resettlement projects are available, particularly in Syria and Iraq. In fact, agronomists and population experts pretty largely agree that Syria and Iraq could absorb all the refugees and still have room for hundreds and hundreds of thousands of more people. It is pointed out that the productive resources of these underdeveloped areas cannot now be exploited for lack of labor -- for lack of people!

Third, there is the willingness on the part of Israel to make compensation for the land abandoned by the Arab refugees, and thus to facilitate their resettlement in Arab lands.

A fourth favorable factor to be noted is the vast income from oil in several Arab kingdoms. Both gift and investment resources are available to help the refugees -- resources which could create a kind of Tigris-Euphrates Valley Authority that would bring a state of well-being to the refugees and to

squalid millions in this potentially lush garden spot. Fortunately, several Arab states, notably Iraq and Kuwait, are moving in the direction of using surplus oil income in such productive capital investments.

The reasons these favorable factors have not combined to resolve the cancerous Arab refugee problem are simple to observe, but difficult to overcome.

Arab Refugees Victims of Economic and Political Warfare Against Israel

The basic reason is that the Arab states have not accepted the existence of Israel. The armistice agreements are in force, but they are serving not as a necessary prelude toward a signed peace, but as a cover behind which economic and political warfare may be carried on against Israel. The hope, frequently and candidly expressed by Arab leaders, is that Israel will be brought to her knees by means of these non-military pressures. Thus an economic boycott is being enforced against Israel -- a boycott which is even being extended to German firms that may be supplying Israel goods in fulfillment of the recently signed reparations agreement between the West German Government and Israel. A blockade is in effect, Egypt refusing to permit Israel-bound goods to pass through the Suez Canal, despite the ruling of the U. N. Security Council of September 1951.

America, too, has figured in this economic struggle, for visiting Arab dignitaries, consular and embassy officials and their supporters in America (notably the American Friends of the Middle East) in essence have been calling for reduced economic aid to Israel, to make the Arab boycott and blockade more effective.

Various arguments have been advanced to induce America to end or limit her aid to Israel. These arguments are given with an emotional impact, but they are in a large measure synthetic, deliberately drummed up to produce a calculated effect. Thus, the Arab world is described as rushing headlong toward Communism, because America has shown this friendship toward Israel. Also the Arab nations are, it is vigorously asserted, contemplating the nationalization of the oil resources of the area -- something which hardly needs to be discussed if the Soviets are to be invited into the area. The fact is that the loudest advocates of these propositions will,

if pressed, immediately admit that there would be no advantage whatsoever in embracing Communism -- in fact, the situation would be made worse. They will admit that Russia as well as the United States voted with the great majority for partition -- and that only now Russia is changing her tune, not because she is basically interested in the Arabs or in Arabic civilization but because she sees a propaganda situation to exploit.

America, on the other hand, cannot, and will not, be so dishonest. She has pledged her support to both Israel and the Arab states. To follow a sell-out policy for either Jews or Arabs would be to deny the basic American principle of fair play and of a democratic concern for people in need, no matter what their background, race or religion. Few Arab leaders, unfortunately, have come to understand this principle. And so the Arab struggle to get the U. S. Government to reverse itself and reject Israel goes on with increased rather than decreased vigor.

Wild Shots in the Political Battle

The political campaign against Israel centers in the U. N. and in the Arab refugee camps. It is a campaign which hardly appeals to our sense of fair play. The Arabs insist they are at war with Israel, they demand that Israel cede territory, and yet they demand that Israel admit to a smaller area a large number of Arabs who would be available to cooperate in the threatened second round.

They insist that Israel compensate for Arab property, yet they carry on a blockade to cripple Israel's economy and they make compensation impossible. (For their part, they have always refused to discuss compensation for Jewish property abandoned in Arab countries.)

The Arabs are not sincere in their new line which calls upon Israel to comply with the 1947 Partition decision. Surely they are estopped by equity to invoke that decision, for it was the Arab states which went to war to destroy it, and it was in the very resistance to that decision that they brought about the Arab exodus.

I have questioned Arab leaders in Jordan, and they acknowledge that Jordan is not willing to give up the central area of Palestine which it seized in the Arab invasion in

1948. Thus the independent Arab state, envisaged in the 1947 decision, could not come into existence. Who then would get the territory which Arabs want Israel to give up? Would it be Syria and Lebanon, since Jordan and Egypt have already enriched themselves territorially? None of these nations, it should be emphasized, had any right, under the Partition decision, to any Palestine soil. None has any right to it, today.

I have heard Arabs say that Israel has too many people and that they fear that Israel is going to commit aggression to expand. And I have heard the same Arabs tell me the same day that this same Israel should be made smaller and should be forced to take in even more people.

It has been suggested that if Israel could offer to give shelter to all the Jews who might escape from Communist anti-Semitism, it should be in a position to take back the Arab refugees. But if Israel was set up to provide a homeland for Jewish refugees, it does not make sense to make it impossible for it to fulfill the very purpose of its existence.

It has even been suggested that Israel might make the offer to take back refugees, knowing that the Arabs really don't want to come back and wouldn't accept the invitation. It seems to me that no country in the world should be asked by us to trifle with its national security.

Arab Refugees Propaganda Pawns

The political picture within the Arab refugee camps is important to an understanding of the problem.

In April of 1952, Sir Alexander Galloway, then head of the U.N.R.W.A. for Jordan, said to our Study Tour group, "It is perfectly clear that the Arab nations do not want to solve the Arab refugee problem. They want to keep it as an open sore, as an affront against the United Nations, and as a weapon against Israel." Then by way of emphasis he said, "Arab leaders don't give a damn whether the refugees live or die."

This simple fact has been more and more clearly demonstrated as I have on repeated occasions visited the refugee camps. Close supervision of the refugee centers is being maintained by the Arab League so that the presentations from camp to camp vary in no detail. It is only as one breaks away from

these formal presentations that one begins to get individual reactions and varied opinions. And most visitors have neither the time nor the inclination to try to dig beneath the emotional presentations.

For example, after a hysterical speech by a middle-aged man in a Lebanese camp who stated he would accept nothing but a return to Palestine and to all of his possessions, an elderly man said privately, "Don't pay any attention to him. He does this every time we have visitors. He didn't lose anything in Palestine. I lost four fields, but I wouldn't go back. I'd accept resettlement -- a new life if the chance came." In Lebanon, unfortunately, there isn't much opportunity for resettlement or jobs, for a local unemployment problem exists. To protect native labor, a law has been passed against the employment of refugees.

Most of those who would accept resettlement, however, aren't off relief today, because the propaganda rampant in the camps is such that they fear to leave their refugee status. This is the propaganda: "If you accept resettlement, you will lose all rights to your property in Palestine." For those with property, this is a powerful deterrent. For the majority --- who owned little or nothing in Palestine -- the line is, "If you accept resettlement, you lose all right to return to Palestine."

Communists and Mufti-ites Active in Camps

Various groups are functioning in the camps. Each uses a propaganda line to advance its own interests. The Mufti group, headed by Haj Amin el Husseini, the collaborator with Hitler, is very active in fomenting dissensions and hatred against Israel and the West. The Communists are also at work. Indeed, there appears to be close cooperation between the Mufti forces and the Communists. The Arab League, too, has its agents that circulate among the camps.

With such propaganda forces at work, it is no wonder that the U.N.R.W.A. has been able to accomplish so little. Much of the criticism of the U.N. efforts, are, in my opinion, unjustified. They have done a remarkable job under the most difficult and trying of circumstances.

Health of Refugees Relatively Good

For example, the health of the refugees is, on the

average, better than the settled Arabs among whom they live. You may remember the survey undertaken jointly about a year ago by the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization. They reported that "no serious malnutrition" existed. Comparing the lot of the refugees with that of neighboring villagers, the report stated the "refugees are rather well off because at least they receive a basic ration (1,600 calories and forty grams of protein)." It might be noted at this point that it is precisely because of the relatively good food and health standards observed among the refugee groups (good by Middle East, not American standards) that the U.N. has had so much trouble trying to prevent newcomers from joining the camps and the relief roles. Officials state quite frankly that there is no way of knowing exactly how many on the relief roles are bona fide refugees from Palestine. The number who left the part of Palestine that is now Israel could not have been more than 650,000. The remainder have often been referred to as "resident" or "economic" refugees.

The W.H.O. and F.A.O. report also noted that refugee mothers have been introduced to Vitamin D and advanced concepts of baby care. Virtually none of the benefits of nutritional and medicinal guidance are available to the Arab peoples outside the refugee camps. As could be expected under such circumstances, the birth rate in the camps is at least as high as outside, but the infant mortality rate is much lower.

Educational Standards an Improvement

It is worth noting, too, that while not every refugee child is receiving educational opportunities, a larger proportion are in school than in surrounding areas, or than had been in school in Palestine. Under the Palestine Mandate only 32.5% of the Arab children (Christian and Moslem) ages 5 - 14 were in school, whereas in various camps (especially in Lebanon) the percentage is now as high as 80% and at least 40% of all refugee children are in school. More educational facilities are being provided right along.

In any event, the United Nations deserves high praise for the commendable job it has done. And our own State Department and Congress likewise deserve praise for having supplied both funds and personnel to help make this achievement possible. Various voluntary relief agencies -- the American

Middle East Relief, Lutheran World Federation, Catholic Pontifical Mission, Church World Service, etc. -- have made substantial and invaluable contributions to this overall relief program.

The relative excellence of the care given the refugees ironically is still another powerful factor in causing them not to want to surrender their refugee status and fend for themselves. Moreover, in areas favorable for resettlement and job opportunities such as Syria, where fully half of the 80,000 refugees are employed, the Arab governments will not permit the U.N. to drop these self-supporting refugees from the relief roles. This fact is perhaps one of the most convincing evidences that the Arab governments do not wish to bring the problem to an end.

When asked what he felt the solution to the problem was, Sir Alexander Galloway in essence said: Give each of the Arab nations where the refugees are to be found, an agreed upon sum of money for their care and resettlement and then let them handle it. If, he continued, the U.N. had done this immediately after the conflict -- explaining to the Arab states "we are sorry it happened, but here is a sum of money for you to take care of the refugees" -- the problem might have been solved long ago. The Arab states would have had to do something constructive about the problem, or lose status in the eyes of the world. This way, said Sir Alexander, the burden is on the U.N. and the governments that support the U.N., and we are powerless to solve it.

Resettlement in Arab Lands the One Solution

This solution may or may not be practical now. One proposition, however, is certain -- a proposition almost universally accepted by authorities who have carefully studied the problems of the area -- that is, that any repatriation of the refugees into Israel is impossible. It is economically, and even more important, culturally, impossible for Israel to solve both Jewish and Arab refugee problems. Therefore, in the interest of the refugees themselves -- as well as the economies of the several Arab countries -- resettlement should be undertaken speedily. Only in this manner can the financial burden in the forecastable future be taken from the United Nations, and, as a result, from the back of the American taxpayer.

Büt, and here we run into the political and economic war

against Israel, how soon will the Arab nations accept the logic of these facts? The moment they accept such logic, they will also have accepted the facts necessary to inspire a peace settlement with Israel.

America's Role: To Aid Both Jews and Arabs

America's role, it seems to me, must be to continue to help both Israel and the several Arab states. She must be forthright and uncompromising at this point, for unless she is, the Arab nations will continue their vain hope that Israel can still be crushed and so long as that hope remains alive, the Arab refugees will be condemned to a camp existence, the worst feature of which is neither a lack of food nor of health advantages -- it is their idleness. Above all, America must insist upon resettlement as the only logical and humanitarian solution. To entertain political solutions involving territorial changes or compulsory repatriation will serve only to postpone the day when the Arab world will recognize that it must assume, in cooperation with the United Nations, its own proper share of responsibility. We must not raise false hopes.

While this picture is depressing, I don't feel that absolute pessimism is warranted. There are young Arab leaders -- quiet at this moment -- who see the great and challenging potentials of the Arab world and who are convinced that their enemies are neither Israel nor the West, but rather antiquated and oppressive systems of land tenure, widespread illiteracy and disease and wasting land and human resources.

There is no valid reason why a revived and creative Arab civilization cannot be built in the years ahead upon the solid foundation of resources, which desert research and other scientific studies have indicated underlie this great underdeveloped region of the world. Historians may, in years to come, point to the Arab refugee situation as having been the key factor in the revival of Arabic civilization and the rebuilding of the area. In Biblical terms, we might say that God is able to cause even the evil which men do to serve Him.

If our American aid for the refugees can be made to fit into such a great goal, it will be infinitely worthwhile. Impoverished and oppressed people will be redeemed and democracy will be the victor.