

## **What kind of solution would you suggest to solve the Palestinian Refugee Problem?**

Palestinian Refugee Problem is also made up of multiple different problems, for example the standard of living in refugee camps is often very poor. In some cases refugees living outside of Palestine do not enjoy equal status as ordinary citizens (such as in Lebanon). If this was the main reason then the refugee problem would be relatively simple to solve, it would be a matter of integrating refugees into their host societies and improving their living conditions. Funding could be drawn from the international aid budgets of sympathetic countries and within a few years the refugee camps could be renovated to provide good quality housing.

This approach assumes that social unrest and conflict arises out of material factors such as poverty. If people have a nice place to live, high quality education and healthcare, and a good job, they will be content and won't want to return to their homeland. Some host countries treat Palestinian refugees with suspicion because they retain their identity as Palestinians. This is dangerous for the host countries because refugees could act as a fifth column against the government (as in Jordan) or destabilise the balance of ethnic groups (as in Lebanon). In this case Palestinian refugees would only be trusted in their host countries if they renounced their Palestinian identity, and in return they would receive full citizenship of the host country. There might even be room for Israel to provide compensation to the refugees in exchange for them giving up their right to return.

In a few generations the historical legacy of the Nakhsba would be forgotten and the descendants of the refugees could enjoy happy lives as citizens of their host countries. It effectively normalises the refugee issue and accepts the Nakhsba as an irreversible fact. This is unfair as it places the burden of the refugees on their host countries and dismisses the historical debt taken on by Israel when it originally expelled the Palestinians.

This approach also dismisses the intrinsic value of the right to return. Those brought up in refugee camps are very aware of their refugee status and they don't forget the Nakhsba. This causes problems because even if all their material needs are catered for there still remains a desire to return to their homeland. So the correct solution would be to repatriate the refugees in historic Palestine within the borders of Israel. However, repatriating the refugees brings up the much bigger problem of Israel as Jewish state. At the time of writing there are 4.9 million refugees registered with UNRWA,<sup>1</sup> and the Jewish population of Israel is 6 million.<sup>2</sup> If the refugees return to their places of origin they would significantly alter the balance of Palestinians to Jews and Israel would likely cease to exist as a Jewish state.

A halfway solution would be to evacuate the settlements and accommodate refugees in the empty buildings. Unfortunately the settlement population is 350,150<sup>3</sup> which would only accommodate 7% of the total refugee population. This might be an acceptable option in case the West Bank was ever to gain real independence from Israel. The repatriation of refugees to the settlements would also count as a 'symbolic return' and could be used to help those refugees living in the worst conditions.

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1 <http://www.unrwa.org/userfiles/2013042435340.pdf>

2 [http://www1.cbs.gov.il/www/hodaot2013n/11\\_13\\_097e.pdf](http://www1.cbs.gov.il/www/hodaot2013n/11_13_097e.pdf)

3 <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/settlepop.html>

## **Why were Arabs and Palestinians defeated in 1948?**

One of the main reasons was that Britain gave tacit support for the Zionist project. For example when British troops withdrew in 1947 they left behind their arms to be used by Jews. They also established the Jewish Brigade in the Second World War, which created a well-trained and well-armed Jewish fighting force. There were some Palestinians who fought in the British Army too, but they were disarmed and disbanded after the war was over. The creation of the Haganah also enjoyed implicit support from Britain thanks to its role in suppressing the revolt of 1936-39. However, British support was conditional and there were some more extreme groups such as Irgun or the Stern Gang who were openly hostile to the British occupation.

The Zionist forces benefited greatly from arms supplied by Czechoslovakia. By contrast the Palestinian people were unarmed, they only had a small number of very old rifles left over from the revolt of 1936-39. Ironically the Zionists also used Messerschmitt aeroplanes to counter Egyptian air power. In general the Zionists were much better equipped than the Palestinian population.

The Arab countries fought a war outside their own territories, this put them in a weaker position as they had to keep a reserve for national defence. Zionists fighting a war on their own land had nothing to lose, nothing to defend, so all their forces were engaged in fighting.

The preparation period of 1947 was very important for the Zionists. The Zionist movement started taking land the day after the partition plan was announced and the British army began their withdrawal. Arab countries did not want to declare war on Britain, so they waited until all British troops had completely withdrawn before starting the counter-attack. This was a mistake as it gave the Zionist movement time to gather momentum and support.

Arab countries had ulterior motives: Syria and Jordan wanted to claim Palestine as part of their own territory. Jordan was also not interested in really fighting the Zionist project, the Jordanian Arab Legion was still under the command of British officers and this sometimes held it back from advancing.

Lastly the Palestinian cause lacked much international support. Jews had a lot of sympathy after the Holocaust and this gave legitimacy to the Zionist movement. The emerging Soviet-Chinese-Indian anti-imperialist umbrella was unwilling to lend its support to the Palestinians due to a sense that the new Israeli state could be won over to the socialist camp. They correctly supported the anti-colonial actions of the Zionist groups against British occupation but failed to support in turn the anti-colonial actions of the Palestinians against the Zionist groups. This left the Arab countries alone to defend Palestine in the international arena.

## **What kind of Palestinian state would there be now if it had escaped from the British mandate?**

In this scenario the Arab territories separate from the Ottoman Empire in 1918 but instead of being divided between Britain, France and Italy they simply gain independence as one bloc stretching from Iraq to Libya. I doubt they would remain unified under a single state however as the societies at the time were still largely feudal or semi-feudal. This would lead to fiefdoms and kingdoms which would separate the Arab territories into regional units. The Arab nationalist movement was certainly strong in the early 19th century but I doubt it would have been enough to overcome the established class interests without a modern revolution of the bourgeoisie. The transition to a dependent capitalist state in Palestine came under the supervision of Britain and maybe a 'national road to capitalism' would have produced a united Arab nation, I'm not sure.

It's also the case that there are geographically distinct regions which would form natural countries anyway, such as Egypt, Iraq and Syria. It would be difficult to predict the exact borders and they would likely follow different shapes to the straight lines drawn by the imperialist powers. I don't know enough about the Arabian Peninsula but I guess it would form into a single entity, especially as Hussein bin Ali was very keen on Arab unity. If bin Ali hadn't been overthrown by the British-backed Saud family the region would have turned out very differently.

Palestine also forms a natural country, it's bounded by the Mediterranean sea to the west, mount Lebanon to the north, the Jordan valley to the east and the Sinai desert to the south. It occupies an important strategic position as a land bridge between Africa and the Middle East. The coastline on the Mediterranean gives it access to all the countries on the boundary of South Europe and North Africa. Jerusalem is important in this context as a well-fortified city on a hill sitting in the centre of Palestine, which in turn sits at the centre of the Arab territory. Control of Jerusalem has more than just a religious significance, it has a high strategic importance. It's difficult for me to see how the imperialist countries would let such a territory gain independence without putting up a fight.

I think the situation for the Jews in Palestine would not have changed dramatically. Without the organised backing of Britain the Zionist project would have had difficulty gaining traction. Maybe Jews would enjoy some status as a protected minority, especially after the fascist Holocaust, but aside from that they would be treated like ordinary citizens. I think the religious differences between Jews, Muslims and Christians only cause conflicts as part of much more structural social problems. If Palestinian society turns out to be stable and prosperous then there's a much greater chance of tolerance and harmony between religious groups.

It's possible that without the interference of imperialist forces the Arab people might have formed an Arab Socialist Union, a tight federation of Arab Republics of which Palestine would be a member. On the other hand many of the socialist and pan-nationalist movements emerged as reactions against Zionism and imperialism. Without the presence of Israel the Palestinian people probably would have pursued an independent path of development and the impetus for regional integration would have tailed off.