

The Palestinian 'Refugee' Problem and the Missing Peace

by Joseph S. Spoerl (April 2018)



PA leader Mahmoud Abbas

It has become increasingly common for politicians, academics, and journalists the world over to blame Israel for the absence of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, with a nearly obsessive focus on Israeli “settlements” in the West Bank as the alleged root of the conflict.[\[1\]](#) A problem with this viewpoint is that it ignores other important obstacles to peace that the Palestinians themselves have created, for example their demand for the “right of return” of the Palestinian “refugees.” This issue is not widely understood and deserves more attention than it gets from the mainstream media in the West. An effective way of enhancing our understanding of the Palestinian “refugee problem” is to compare and contrast it with similar refugee problems in other parts of the world. In what follows, I will compare and contrast the very different approaches taken by Palestinians and Germans to the painful dislocations that avoidable wars of their own causing inflicted on these two peoples in the 1940s.

Part I: The post-1945 German Refugee Problem and Its Resolution

At the end of World War II, the Soviet military drove over fifteen million German civilians permanently out of territories that had been ethnically German for some eight hundred years, including all the territories east of the Oder and Neisse rivers, which demarcate Germany's eastern border today. The vacated territories included East and West Prussia, Pomerania, eastern Brandenburg, Silesia, and the Sudetenland (today parts of Russia, Poland, and the Czech Republic). So violent were these expulsions that over two million of those expelled died before they could reach safe haven in Austria, East Germany, or West Germany.[\[2\]](#) These expulsions were motivated partly by revenge for the genocidal brutality of the Nazi German armies, partly by the geopolitical ambitions of the Soviet leadership, and partly by the conviction that ethnically homogeneous countries would be more stable and easier to govern.[\[3\]](#)

About nine million of these German refugees ended up in West Germany, forming 16 percent of the West German population.[\[4\]](#) West Germany went to great lengths to re-settle the refugees, granting them citizenship and passing a special tax to compensate them for the property they had lost in the eastern territories.[\[5\]](#)

The West German government at first adopted the position that Germany should be restored as a unified country within the boundaries it had had in 1937.[\[6\]](#) In October 1965, however, the bishops of the German Lutheran Church published an open letter to the West German government advocating the formal renunciation of the eastern territories and the opening of a

dialogue between Germans and Poles to overcome their differences stemming from World War II. The Polish bishops responded with a letter of their own stating, "Let us try to forget! No polemics, no more Cold War ... We forgive and we ask you also to forgive." [\[7\]](#) Given the horrific destruction that Germany had inflicted on Poland in World War II, the Polish bishops' letter was truly remarkable. Historian Ulrich Merten writes, "This exchange of letters had a profound effect on German public opinion, which now began to favor a normalization of relations with Poland by accepting the Oder-Neisse line as Germany's eastern border." [\[8\]](#)

In 1969, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt introduced a new "*Ostpolitik*" or Eastern Policy which aimed at better ties with East Germany and the Soviet bloc. As Chancellor Brandt said in 1969, "We want to be a nation of good neighbors." [\[9\]](#) West Germany signed treaties with the Soviet Union and Poland in 1970 and with Czechoslovakia in 1973 in which it renounced any use of force to settle disputes and affirmed the inviolability of the existing national frontiers. In his historic visit to Warsaw in 1970, Chancellor Brandt dramatically knelt before the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to express Germany's renunciation of its Nazi past. [\[10\]](#) After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the reunification of Germany, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl signed another treaty in 1990 in which the newly unified Germany again formally accepted the post-1945 borders between itself and its eastern neighbors. [\[11\]](#)

Part II: Imagining a Different Post-1945 History in Central Europe

Imagine, however, if the German people and their leaders had behaved differently after 1945. Suppose they had refused to accept the injustice of fifteen million German civilians being ethnically cleansed from their ancestral homes, with two million of them murdered in the process, including women and children, and Germany being stripped of provinces that had been ethnically German since the Middle Ages. Suppose the Germans had insisted on keeping the refugees in refugee camps near the borders of Poland and Czechoslovakia and had allowed those camps to become bases for terrorist groups to attack these countries. Imagine if these German terrorist groups attacked Russian, Polish, and Czech civilians both in their own countries and worldwide.

Suppose further that the Germans had cultivated a large majority of the U.N. General Assembly to support them in their claim to a "right of return" to formerly German territories in Eastern Europe and that a multitude of U.N. agencies and committees began to agitate on behalf of the refugees and to direct U.N. funds to the German refugee camps, relieving the German government of the financial burden of caring for the refugees. Imagine that a special U.N. Agency was set up to serve the refugees and that this agency then decided unilaterally, with tacit support from the U.N. General Assembly, to define a special category of "German refugees," different from all other refugee populations in the world, so that these German refugees would pass on their refugee status to their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, etc., in perpetuity, thus guaranteeing that the "German refugee problem" would grow larger and larger with every passing year and making it more and more impossible to envision any future peace treaty in which Poland, Russia, or Czechoslovakia would acknowledge a "right of return" for the "refugees" in exchange for a permanent end to the conflict. Suppose that German leaders nonetheless continued insisting that the "right of

return" and the "right" to receive compensation from Poland, Russia, and Czechoslovakia for the losses suffered in 1945 was an inalienable and non-negotiable right of each and every individual "refugee" that no German leader had the right to relinquish. Imagine that German-Americans rallied to this cause, insisting that the "right of return" of the "refugees" be implemented. Finally, let us imagine that Germans and their leaders developed a mentality of grievance and victimhood, blaming others for German suffering but never blaming themselves for being the authors of their own downfall in World War II.

Had the Germans and their leaders been so irresponsible as to do these things, and had other countries been so irresponsible as to aid and abet them, we can say with great confidence that Europe would be worse off today. Its post-1945 history would have been marked by chronic violence and instability, by frequent wars and the constant threat of war. The constant violence and instability would surely have made Central Europe a much poorer place, since investors crave security and predictability above all else. Fortunately, Germany's leaders did the responsible thing, in part no doubt because they knew that the victorious Western democracies and the Soviet Union would never have tolerated the irresponsible behavior imagined in our brief thought-experiment.

Part III: Palestinian History from 1947 to the Present

The wisdom shown by the Germans and their European and Western allies after 1945 has not been matched by the Palestinians and their supporters in the Arab, Islamic, and developing worlds.

In fact, the Palestinians have been allowed to get away with every single one of the actions that we attributed to the Germans in our fictional re-imagination of post-1945 European history.

In 1947, the Palestinian leadership, aided and abetted by the Arab League, rejected any possibility of peaceful compromise with the Zionists in Palestine, opting instead for war as their preferred means of ensuring that all of Palestine would become a purely Arab state.[\[12\]](#) “You will achieve nothing with talk of compromise or peace,” the Arab League General Secretary Abdul Rahman Azzam told UN and Zionist diplomats in 1947. “For us, there is only one test, the test of strength.”[\[13\]](#) When the British sent diplomats to Cairo in 1947 to broker a peaceful compromise over Palestine, the top Palestinian leader, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, spurned their efforts and told them that “as soon as the British forces were withdrawn, the Arabs should with one accord fall upon the Jews and destroy them.”[\[14\]](#) In March 1948, al-Husseini told an interviewer in a Jaffa newspaper that the Arabs did not intend merely to prevent partition but “would continue fighting until the Zionists were annihilated and the whole of Palestine became a purely Arab state.”[\[15\]](#) Already in 1918, al-Husseini had told I. A. Abbady, a Hebrew translator for the British in Palestine: “Remember, Abbady . . . this was and will remain an Arab land. We do not mind you Jewish natives of the country, but those alien invaders, the Zionists, will be massacred to the last man.”[\[16\]](#) Benny Morris writes:

The Palestinian national movement’s leader in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, Haj Amin al-Husseini, consistently rejected territorial compromise and espoused a solution to the Palestine problem that posited all of Palestine as an Arab state and allowed for a Jewish minority composed only

of those who had lived in the country before 1914 (or, in a variant, 1917).[\[17\]](#)

This would have meant expelling (or killing) the vast majority of the Jews living in Palestine by 1948. However, al-Husseini's lip service to accepting the pre-1917 Jews in Palestine cannot be taken seriously. After all, he played a central role in fomenting bloody pogroms against all the Jews in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, including the 1929 pogrom that uprooted the ancient Jewish community of Hebron.[\[18\]](#) Al-Husseini was also the main instigator of the pogrom against the 2500-year-old Jewish community of Baghdad in 1941.[\[19\]](#)

In contrast, the Zionists were open to compromise, accepting the U.N. partition resolution of November 29, 1947, as they had accepted the Peel Commission partition proposal ten years earlier (a compromise that the Arabs also rejected out of hand).[\[20\]](#)

As the Arabs of Palestine initiated a war of indiscriminate attacks on Jewish civilians in late 1947, they were led by Hajj Amin al-Husseini, a man with a well-known history of Jew-hatred, incitement of genocide, and collaboration with the Nazis.[\[21\]](#) Al-Husseini enjoyed the support of the General Secretary of the Arab League, the Egyptian Abdul Rahman Azzam (or Azzam Pasha), who had supported al-Husseini in his takeover of the Arab Higher Committee, the top political body representing the Arabs of Palestine.[\[22\]](#) Azzam did not care that al-Husseini had openly called for genocide against the Jews in Arabic-language broadcasts for Nazi radio during World War II.[\[23\]](#) In fact, Azzam joined al-Husseini in making genocidal threats of his own against the Jews of Palestine. In October 1947, Azzam was quoted in an Egyptian newspaper as

predicting that the impending war over Palestine “will be a war of extermination and momentous massacre.”[\[24\]](#) Benny Morris writes that during the period 1945-1948, based on the pro-Nazi record of the Palestinian leadership, “Palestine’s Jews believed that the Palestinians intended to slaughter them in a second Holocaust.”[\[25\]](#)

In the resulting war, the Jews of Palestine managed to avert genocide by defeating both the Palestinian Arab militias which were led by men who had worked with the Nazis in Germany during the war (Abdul Qadir al-Husseini, Fawzi al-Qawuqji, and Hassan Salameh)[\[26\]](#)—and the Arab nations of Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, whose armies invaded Palestine in 1948. The Jews of Palestine suffered enormous casualties in this war: almost one percent of the entire Jewish population was killed and two percent seriously wounded.[\[27\]](#) If the United States suffered equivalent casualties in a war today, it would mean almost nine and a half million Americans killed or maimed.

Official U.N. statistics say that 726,000 Palestinians became refugees in 1947-49,[\[28\]](#) a displacement that the Palestinians refer to as the *nakba*, an Arabic word meaning catastrophe or disaster. (Some historians, however, argue that the real number was lower.[\[29\]](#)) The Palestinian leader Saeb Erekat has written, “This period of dispossession, known to Palestinians as al-Nakba or ‘the catastrophe,’ is the seminal Palestinian experience and source of our collective identity.”[\[30\]](#) A central component of Palestinian culture today is an intense feeling of victimhood that places all the blame for the *nakba* on the Zionists and none at all on the Palestinian Arabs themselves, even though it was the adamant refusal of the pro-Nazi Palestinian leadership to accept any peaceful compromise in 1947 that led to the war and the ensuing Palestinian refugee problem.[\[31\]](#)

Of the original 726,000 refugees, at most a mere eight percent or around 58,000 are still alive today,[\[32\]](#) perhaps as few as 30,000,[\[33\]](#) and the number is rapidly dwindling towards zero. However, UNRWA, the U.N. Agency set up in 1949-50 to provide relief to the Palestinian refugees, maintains a list of over five million "registered Palestinian refugees," because in 1982 it decided to count all patrilineal descendants of the original 1948 refugees in perpetuity as "refugees."[\[34\]](#) It made this decision because UNRWA has been taken over by the Palestinians themselves: of over 30,000 UNRWA employees, all but 200 are themselves registered Palestinian "refugees."[\[35\]](#) No other refugee population in the world is defined by genetic descent in perpetuity from some earlier group of refugees. James G. Lindsay, former top legal counsel at UNRWA, writes: "UNRWA's definition of a refugee is a wholly internal creation, one used by no other agency or organization in the world."[\[36\]](#) International law stipulates that refugees who receive citizenship or its functional equivalent after having been displaced from their country of origin are *ipso facto* no longer refugees.[\[37\]](#) Yet the two million registered Palestinian refugees who live in Jordan and enjoy Jordanian citizenship are still counted as refugees by UNRWA, as are the two million who live in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, where the newly-proclaimed state of Palestine could easily grant them passports and thus make them non-refugees. The half million or so "refugees" who ended up in Syria were not given Syrian passports, but the Syrian state gave them the functional equivalent of citizenship, so they too cannot really be counted as refugees.[\[38\]](#)

Early in its history when it was still under heavy U.S. influence, UNRWA attempted to re-settle Palestinian refugees permanently in other countries when it became clear that they were not going to be allowed back into Israel proper. However,

both the refugees themselves and the Arab states rejected these efforts and refused to give up on the plan of returning to Israel.[\[39\]](#) Israel's decision not to re-admit the 726,000 refugees was itself a reaction to the state of war that continued to exist with its Arab neighbors, which for decades refused to sign any peace treaty with Israel. Indeed, Syrian and Egyptian leaders in 1949 openly spoke of using any repatriated refugees as a fifth column with which Israel could be destroyed.[\[40\]](#) It is no wonder that Israel refused to accept such repatriation.

Top Palestinian leaders both of the Fatah Party and of Hamas and the other Palestinian parties continue to insist that all of these "refugees" have an inalienable moral and legal right—passed down to their children in perpetuity—to return to the homes vacated by the original refugees in 1948 in Israel proper, *and* to receive financial compensation for the losses they incurred then.[\[41\]](#) Neither Palestinians nor other Arabs or Muslims consider that they owe any compensation to the Jewish state for the decades of violence and the enormous financial costs they have inflicted on the Jewish people of Israel, or that they owe any apology or compensation to the 850,000 Jews who were violently driven from Arab countries and Iran after 1947 and whose descendants now constitute one-half of the Jewish population of Israel.[\[42\]](#) (By one estimate, the Jews forced out of just three countries—Iraq, Egypt, and Morocco—were dispossessed of land totaling more than five times the size of modern Israel.[\[43\]](#))

The UNRWA schools that teach nearly a half million "registered refugees" each year and the Palestinian Authority schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip all teach the "right of return" (by violent means if necessary) as a central part of their curriculum.[\[44\]](#) The genocidal anti-Jewish rhetoric of Hajj

Amin al-Husseini has become a central part of Palestinian political discourse, especially but not only of Hamas.[\[45\]](#) Islamic legal scholars affiliated both with Fatah and Hamas continue to preach the doctrine, rooted in classical sharia, that Palestine, having once been ruled by Muslims, remains in perpetuity Islamic land and that Muslims must “liberate” every inch of it.[\[46\]](#) The Draft Constitution of Palestine of 2003 stipulates that the “right of return” is “imperishable” and that “no one can abolish” it.[\[47\]](#) The Palestinian Basic Law, the *de facto* constitution of the Palestinian Authority, also affirms the “right of return.”[\[48\]](#)

A large majority of the General Assembly of the United Nations has become reflexively pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli, so much so that the General Assembly has passed twenty times more resolutions condemning Israel than any other single country.[\[49\]](#) We may infer from this that the majority of nations in the U.N. consider Israel to be twenty times worse than any other country on earth, including North Korea, Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Russia or China. UNRWA leaders, who answer to the General Assembly, are unabashedly pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli and make no pretense of maintaining the political neutrality that one should expect from international civil servants.[\[50\]](#) UNRWA officials have also, unsurprisingly, adopted the Palestinian position on the “right of return.”[\[51\]](#) The U.N. Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations recently granted official “observer” status to the “Palestinian Return Centre,” a group based in the United Kingdom that agitates for the “right of return.”[\[52\]](#)

Looking beyond the U.N., it has become increasingly common for Western intellectuals, academics, and activists to embrace the Palestinian narrative and to affirm the “right of return,” accepting without question the Palestinian position, ratified

by UNRWA, that Palestinian refugee status is inheritable in perpetuity.[\[53\]](#) The movement for “BDS”—boycotting, divesting from, and sanctioning Israel—takes as one of its central goals the implementation of the “right of return.”[\[54\]](#) In March 2012, Harvard University hosted a conference on the so-called “one-state solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a “solution” that would mean implementing the “right of return.”[\[55\]](#) Many Palestinian-Americans have also adopted the position that the “right of return” must be implemented.[\[56\]](#) Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is committed to the violent destruction of Israel and the “right of return,” has even managed to create a front organization here in the United States, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which many American leaders are willing to accept as a legitimate organization so as not to appear “intolerant” or “Islamophobic.”[\[57\]](#) In April 2015, the annual “Palestinian Diaspora in Europe” conference was held in Berlin and issued a concluding statement asserting that the “right of return” of the “refugees” to Israel proper is “valid for all eternity,” “not subject to negotiation,” and both a “group and personal right.”[\[58\]](#) On Feb. 26, 2017, five thousand Palestinians from all over the world met in Istanbul to demand the “right of return” for over six million Palestinians living in diaspora.[\[59\]](#)

It is clear, from Palestinian leaders themselves, that the “right of return” of the “refugees” is a major reason why Palestinians and Israelis have never been able to reach a peace agreement.[\[60\]](#) On July 30, 2000, only five days after the end of the failed peace talks at Camp David, Mahmoud Abbas said: “We were not prepared to limit the number of refugees who would be allowed to return, even if they had proposed a number of three million refugees.”[\[61\]](#) On November 24, 2000 Abbas said: “We made it clear to the Israelis that the Right of Return means a return to Israel and not to the Palestinian

state . . . because it is from there that [the Palestinians] were driven out and it is there that their property is found.”[\[62\]](#) Abbas’ comments are consistent with President Clinton’s assertion that the 2000 peace talks failed primarily due to the Palestinians’ demand for the “right of return” of the “refugees.”[\[63\]](#) Unfortunately, nothing has changed since 2000. On November 30, 2014, Mahmoud Abbas, speaking now as Palestinian Authority President, said: “We cannot recognize a Jewish state... [because] There are six million refugees who wish to return”[\[64\]](#) On September 16 and 17, 2016, Abbas made the same claim again, insisting that “There are six million Palestinian refugees who are waiting to receive what they are entitled to, [waiting] to be allowed to return to their homes”[\[65\]](#)

To Western and Israeli audiences, however, Abbas often conveys a different message. For example, to a group of Israelis visiting Ramallah on Feb. 16, 2014, Abbas said the following: “There is propaganda that claims that Abu Mazen [i.e. Mahmoud Abbas] wants five million refugees to return to Israel in order to destroy it. This is baseless . . . we do not wish to flood Israel with millions and change its demographic makeup.”[\[66\]](#) But now consider statements he made to Palestinian audiences in the months immediately before and after this statement. On January 11, 2014, Abbas told a delegation of Arab visitors from East Jerusalem: “The Palestinian refugees’ right to return to the 1948 borders [i.e. Israel proper] is a personal right, like marriage. Each Palestinian will decide what he wants to do.”[\[67\]](#) On March 7, 2014, Abbas made a similar statement to Palestinian students in Ramallah: “You are returning to the state of Israel. After all, the refugees, numbered at five million, and their children, were all expelled from the 1948 territories [i.e. Israel proper] If you want to return to Israel and receive an Israeli citizenship or not—you are free to

decide.” [\[68\]](#)

Ignoring the preponderant evidence summarized here, pro-Palestinian apologists like Robert Malley (formerly a top Obama Administration advisor on the Mideast [\[69\]](#)) have minimized Palestinian stubbornness on the “right of return” so as to shift the blame for the failure of the peace talks away from the Palestinians and onto the Israelis and Americans. [\[70\]](#) The mistake in Malley’s thinking is his assertion that the Palestinians want only an acknowledgement in principle of the “right of return,” while essentially giving up on the implementation of this right. [\[71\]](#) In fact, however, as Yotam Feldner and Aluma Solnik have demonstrated,

. . . [T]he Palestinian demand for the implementation of the right of return is a real demand and not one expressed merely for domestic consumption or a negotiation tactic. Statements by Palestinian officials that convey a willingness to make a significant compromise on the issue of the refugees are very rare. It is a mistake to rely on such statements . . . and to ignore the years of Palestinian emphasis on the national and individual ethos of refugees’ return. [\[72\]](#)

A public opinion poll in 2011 found that only 34% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip support the “two-state solution,” while 66% said the Palestinians’ real goal should be to start with a two-state solution but then move to it all being one Palestinian state, [\[73\]](#) which would appear to be the real point of the “return” of millions of “refugees” to Israel proper. Some public opinion polls in the Palestinian territories may show support for the “two-state solution,” but a lot hinges on what questions the pollsters ask. In a survey

of five polls by five different polling organizations from 2010, analyst David Pollock points out that the polls indicate support for the two-state solution, but “[a]t the same time, when presented with a choice of longer term options, clear majorities in both the West Bank and Gaza say ‘the actual [al-fi’li] goal should be to start with two states but then move it all [to] being one Palestinian state.’” [\[74\]](#) According to polls taken during the height of the “Al Aqsa Intifada” (2000-2004), most Palestinians expressed support for an Arab state in all of Palestine. [\[75\]](#) Asher Susser cites polling data indicating Palestinian support for the “two-state solution,” but he notes, “[f]or Palestinians, the two-state solution was never an ideal but an acceptance of an undesirable and fundamentally illegitimate reality . . . [I]n principle, for the Palestinians, the two-state solution was ‘pragmatic’ and thus open-ended, by definition.” [\[76\]](#) Polls by the Ramallah-based Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research show that since 2003, support by Palestinians for the “Clinton Parameters” regarding “refugees” has never reached 50%. Polling in December 2014 shows 40% supporting and 58% opposing a resolution of the “refugee” problem along the lines of the “Clinton Parameters,” which means 58% of Palestinians reject allowing Israel to have the final say on how many Palestinian “refugees” move to Israel proper. The same poll shows 51% of Palestinians opposing and only 48% supporting the two-state solution, with 60% opposing and only 38% supporting a permanent status agreement based on the Clinton Parameters, even though the Clinton Parameters represent arguably the best deal that any Israeli government could offer. [\[77\]](#) In December 2015, 62% of Palestinians opposed and only 36% supported a permanent settlement along the lines of the Clinton Parameters, with only 39% supporting and 60% opposing the Clinton Parameter on refugee settlement. [\[78\]](#) In a study of 400 surveys of Palestinian public opinion carried out by five Palestinian research centers, Daniel Polisar shows that “When given the chance, Palestinian majorities have consistently expressed the view that Jews have no right or claim to a state

anywhere between the Jordan and the Mediterranean.”[\[79\]](#) The demand for the so-called “right of return” must be understood within this context: What is really represents is a Palestinian rejection of Israel’s right to exist.

A 2014 report on the Palestinian “refugee” question by the International Crisis Group, based on extensive interviews with Palestinian “refugees,” stresses how central the “right of return” is to Palestinian society:

It is hard to overstate . . . how commonplace it is for Palestinians outside the political and intellectual elites to say that no Palestinian leader could garner popular support for an agreement that does not give each refugee the choice of where to settle, including, without limitation, in Israel.[note omitted] No small number predicted violence should the leadership concede on this point.[\[80\]](#)

In private conversations with Westerners or Israelis, members of the Palestinian elite may concede that the “right of return” is a pipe dream, but they dare not say this out loud in public (and in Arabic). The threat of violence mentioned above may explain why Palestinian leaders have done nothing to prepare the Palestinian grass roots for the painful compromises that would be necessary for peace based on the model of “two states for two peoples.” As the International Crisis Group report notes:

Crucially, however, the perception that the Palestinians would need to negotiate with Israel on the scope of refugee

return, and that the outcome of such talks would need to be largely consistent with Israel's demographic realities, never translated into a Palestinian preparedness to renounce or otherwise abandon the right of return as a national principle.[\[81\]](#)

This failure of Palestinian leaders to speak honestly with their own people about what peace with Israel would entail is one of the main reasons no peace agreement has been reached. As Asher Susser observes,

. . . [T]he refugee question cannot be resolved in secret. Positions that are not made public...are politically immaterial until they are brought into the open and defended in public, in a genuine effort to mobilize popular support. Nothing like that has taken place, not by any account. On the contrary, public statements by the Palestinian leadership were very consistent for years after Camp David in upholding the principle of the right of return and specifically rejecting resettlement (*tawtin*) in other countries.[\[82\]](#)

In this respect, Palestinian leaders merely reflect the values of the broader Palestinian community. In the words of Palestinian commentator Bassam Tawil, "Every Palestinian knows in his heart that we do not want a state of our own alongside of Israel, but rather *instead* of Israel. Palestinians have not relinquished, and will not relinquish, the right of return; deep down, they hope it will lead to Israel's demographic extinction and, on its ruins, the establishment of a State of Palestine."[\[83\]](#)

Conclusion

After 1945, the German people and their leaders eventually accepted responsibility for the Second World War. The German refugee problem—a problem of vast dimensions involving great human suffering—quickly disappeared as German leaders came to see the folly of demanding yet another round of destabilizing border shifts and population transfers in Central Europe. The Germans chose not to cling to their refugee status or to stress their own victimization. Instead, they chose to foster stability and peace in central Europe. The former refugees and their descendants are better off today than they would have been had the Germans chosen to reject the post-1945 status quo in Europe. They are, after all, citizens of one of the most stable and prosperous democracies in the world.

The Palestinians and their leaders after 1949 chose a different path. To this day they refuse to accept responsibility for the war of 1947-49. Abetted by the Arab and Muslim nations and the U.N., they cling to their refugee status and perpetuate it from one generation to the next. While the German refugee population in the past seventy years has gone from 13,000,000 to zero, the Palestinian “registered refugees” have gone from 726,000 to over 5,000,000 (and even more if non-registered “refugees” are included[\[84\]](#)), with continued exponential growth guaranteed for years to come. Palestinian leaders refuse to acknowledge Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state, and they continue to insist on the “right of return,” even though this would mean flooding Israel with up to five or six million Arab immigrants, thus reducing the Jews to a minority in an Arab and Muslim majority land, something no Israeli government could ever accept.[\[85\]](#) The war

of 1947-49 has never really ended, but continues to grind on, with various Palestinian factions sharing the same ultimate goal of dismantling the Jewish state of Israel while differing only on the choice of tactics (warfare, terrorism, diplomatic isolation, boycotts, divestment, sanctions, international legal attacks, propaganda, etc.).

While German leaders after 1945 chose peace over continued conflict, Palestinian leaders continue to choose endless conflict over peaceful compromise. Those who blame only the Israelis for the absence of peace seem to forget that the Palestinians are agents who make choices over which Israelis have no control. Western journalists and politicians ought to pay more attention to those choices.

[1] For a recent piece of typical mainstream-media reporting, see the almost two-and-a-half-page spread in the *New York Times*: Jodi Rudoren and Jeremy Ashkenas, "As Israeli Settlements Take Root, So Do Complications," *The New York Times*, March 13, 2015, pp. A1, A10, A11, <http://www.nytimes.com/images/2015/03/13/nytfrontpage/scan.pdf>

[2] Ulrich Merten, *Forgotten Voices: The Expulsion of the Germans from Eastern Europe after World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ and London, UK: Transaction Publishers, 2012), p. 283. For an interesting array of maps and historic photos, see the author's website at www.forgottenvoices.net.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 2-7.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 283

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 284-287.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 288.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 289.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 289.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 290.

[10] *Ibid.* (See the photo at http://forgottenvoices.net/picture_33.html).

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 290-291.

[12] Anita Shapira, *Israel: A History* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012), p. 156. Shapira explains that the UN Resolution of Nov. 29, 1947 recognizing a Jewish state in one-half of Palestine “was perceived by the Arabs as a flagrant wrong... To them, recognition of the Jews’ national rights in Palestine was insufferable, and the only possible response was armed resistance.”

[13] Cited in Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History*, second revised edition (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 74-75. See also Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 577.

[14] Klaus Gensicke, *The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Nazis: The Berlin Years*, trans. Alexander Fraser Gunn (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011), p. 183.

[15] Benny Morris, *1948: The First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 408-409.

[16] I.A. Abbady, “Will Massacre All Zionists, Said Mufti 30 Years Ago,” *New York Post*, December 29, 1947.

[17] Morris, 1948, p. 408.

[18] Zvi Elpeleg, *The Grand Mufti: Haj Amin el-Hussaini, Founder of the Palestinian National Movement*, trans. David Harvey, ed. Shmuel Himelstein (London, UK and Portland, OR:

Frank Cass & Co, 1993), pp. 5-6, 10 (1920 riots), pp. 16-26 (1929 riots and flight of Jews from Hebron), pp. 41-50 (violence of 1936-1939).

[\[19\]](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

[\[20\]](#) On Zionist acceptance and Arab rejection of the 1937 Peel Commission partition proposal, see Shapira, *Israel*, pp. 85-87. On Zionist acceptance of the 1947 U.N. partition resolution, see *Ibid.* pp. 155-156. See also Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 32 (on Zionist acceptance and Arab rejection of the Peel Commission partition plan) and pp. 77-123 (on Zionist acceptance and Arab rejection of the U.N. Partition plan of November 1947).

[\[21\]](#) On al-Husseini's history of genocidal Jew-hatred and pro-Nazi collaboration, see Barry Rubin and Wolfgang Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014); Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Islam in Europa, Revolten im Mittelost* (Berlin: trafo Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013); Klaus Gensicke, *The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Nazis: The Berlin Years*, trans. Alexander Fraser Gunn (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011); Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Coppers, *Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews of Palestine*, trans. Krista Smith (New York: Enigma Books and Washington, DC: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2010); Matthias Kuntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism, and the Roots of 9/11*, trans. Colin Mead (New York: Telos Press, 2007); Andrew Bostom, *The Mufti's Islamic Jew-Hatred* (Washington, DC: Bravura Books, 2013).

[\[22\]](#) Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 23.

[\[23\]](#) On al-Husseini's role in broadcasting anti-Semitic

propaganda for the Nazis in Arabic in World War II, including explicit incitement of genocide, see Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

[24] David Barnett and Efraim Karsh, "Azzam's Genocidal Threat," *Middle East Quarterly* 18 (2011): 85-88, <http://www.meforum.org/3082/azzam-genocide-threat>.

[25] Benny Morris, *One State, Two States: Resolving the Israel/Palestine Conflict* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 108.

[26] On the role of these three Palestinian Arabs as Nazi collaborators, see Barry Rubin and Wolfgang Schwanzitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, p. 199.

[27] Benny Morris, 1948, p. 406.

[28] Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years* (New York: Touchstone Books/Simon and Shuster, 1995), p. 364. On the early history of the effort to provide relief for the Palestinian Arab refugees, see Asaf Romirowsky and Alexander H. Joffe, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Alexander H. Joffe, "A Brief History of UNRWA to 1975: Organizational Adaptation and Changing Contexts," *Justice: The Magazine of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists*, Winter 2014-2015, No. 55, pp. 4-9; <http://intjewishlawyers.org/main/files/Justice%2055%20Final.pdf>.

[29] E.g. Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 264-272. Karsh estimates a total of between 583,000 and 609,000 refugees.

[30] Saeb Erekat, "The returning issue of Palestine's refugees," *The Guardian*, 10 December 2010,

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/dec/10/israel-palestine-refugee-rights>

[31] On the Palestinian tendency to blame everyone but themselves for their problems, see Romirowsky and Joffe, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief*, pp. 106-107. See also Dennis Ross, "Camp David: An Exchange," *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 20, 2001, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2001/sep/20/camp-david-an-exchange/>: "...in always feeling victimized they [the Palestinians] fall back on blaming everyone else for their predicament. It is never their fault. ... But by always blaming others, they never have to focus on their mistakes. And that perpetuates the avoidance of responsibility, not its assumption." Thomas Friedman also has observed of the PLO that it prefers "to play the victim, because the victim never has to criticize himself." Thomas L. Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), p. 169.

[32] Rephael Ben-Ari, "The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): An Agenda for Conflict," *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, Vol. 14, No. 24, July 20, 2014, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, <http://jcpa.org/article/un-relief-works-agency-unrwa/>. [Ben-Ari's source for the 8% figure is "A new type of settlement," *The Economist*, Oct. 12, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/node/21587846/print.>]

[33] <http://www.timesofisrael.com/us-senate-dramatically-redefines-definition-of-palestinian-refugees/>

[34] Rephael Ben-Ari, "The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): An Agenda for Conflict." See also James G. Lindsay, *Fixing UNRWA: Repairing the UN's Troubled System of Aid to Palestinian Refugees*. Policy Focus #91. Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2009.

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/fixing-unrwa-repairing-the-uns-troubled-system-of-aid-to-palestinian-refuge>.

[35] Lindsay, *Fixing UNRWA*, p. 31; Asaf Romirowsky, "UNRWA: The Crux of the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Justice: The Magazine of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists*, Winter 2014-2015, No. 55, pp. 10-14; <http://intjewishlawyers.org/main/files/Justice%2055%20Final.pdf>.

[36] James G. Lindsay, "UNRWA: Still Un-Fixed," *Justice: The Magazine of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists*, Winter 2014-2015, No. 55, pp. 15-23 at p. 15; <http://intjewishlawyers.org/main/files/Justice%2055%20Final.pdf>. See also Shabtai Shavit, "A Tale of Two 'Refugee' Organizations: UNRWA vs. UNHCR," *Justice: The Magazine of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists*, Winter 2014-2015, No. 55, pp. 34-37; <http://intjewishlawyers.org/main/files/Justice%2055%20Final.pdf>.

[37] Lindsay, "UNRWA: Still Un-Fixed," p. 15

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 17. The civil war in Syria since 2011 has turned many of them into real refugees – but for reasons having nothing to do with Israel or the Zionist movement.

[39] Lindsay, *Fixing UNRWA*, pp. 14, 23; Romirowsky and Joffe, *Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief*, pp. 147, 149, 150, 152, 180; Alex Joffe, "UNRWA Resists Resettlement," *Middle East Quarterly* 19:4 (Fall 2012), pp. 11-25, <http://www.meforum.org/3350/unrwa-resettlement>.

[40] Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 229.

[41] "The Catholic Patriarch Michel Sabbah on Jesus and Jihad," Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch

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