

## **A Very Brief, Preposterously Selective, But Hopefully Helpful Timeline of Some Relevant Moments**

Having lovingly carved up the conquered Ottoman Empire territories between themselves after World War I, France and Britain agreed that Britain would control Palestine and Transjordan.

**2 November 1917:** Balfour Declaration—"His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country".

**1920:** San Remo Conference decides to assign the Mandate for Palestine (and Transjordan) under the League of Nations to Britain; the Mandate power officially came into operation in 1923

**1936-39:** Palestinian general strike and revolt

**1937:** Peel Commission Report – recommendation by a British Royal Commission outlining a partition plan with a Jewish state on 20% of Mandatory Palestine and an Arab area joined with Transjordan on another 70%. A narrow strip including Jerusalem and Bethlehem would continue to be ruled by Britain. The plan, as you might guess, was not adopted.

**1939:** White Paper on Palestine – major British limitation on Jewish immigration and land purchase and announcement of new policy for government of Palestine, rejecting the feasibility of partition

**29 November 1947:** United Nations General Assembly votes to endorse the UN Partition Plan for a Jewish state and an Arab state, with Jerusalem as an internationalized city (see map).

**30 November 1947:** Civil war breaks out in Palestine

**December 1947-March 1948:** "First wave" flight - exodus of upper and middle class Palestinian families, especially from Haifa and Jaffa (major urban centers of Palestine)

**March 1948:** Plan D produced by Haganah

**14 May 1948:** The British officially leave Palestine

**15 May 1948:** Proclamation of the State of Israel  
Entry into Palestine by armies of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Egypt

**April-June 1948:** "Second Wave" Palestinian exodus

**9 - 18 July 1948:** "Third Wave" Palestinian exodus (the "Ten Days")

**October –November 1948:** "Fourth Wave" Palestinian exodus

**11 December 1948:** UN Resolution 194 "Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their 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 of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible..."

**7 January 1949:** End of hostilities ("end" being rather a relative term in this area, obviously...)

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# THE BIRTH OF THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE PROBLEM REVISITED

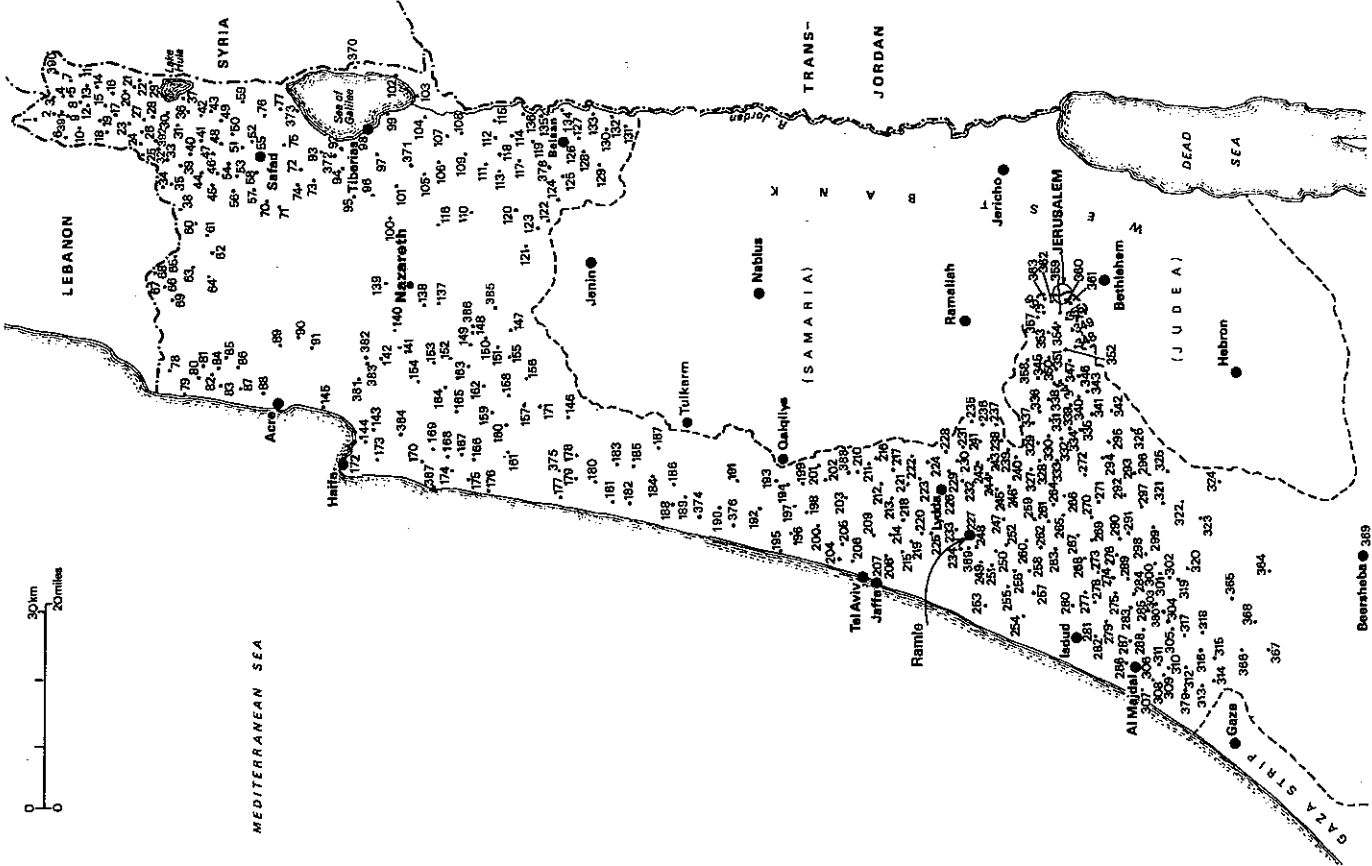
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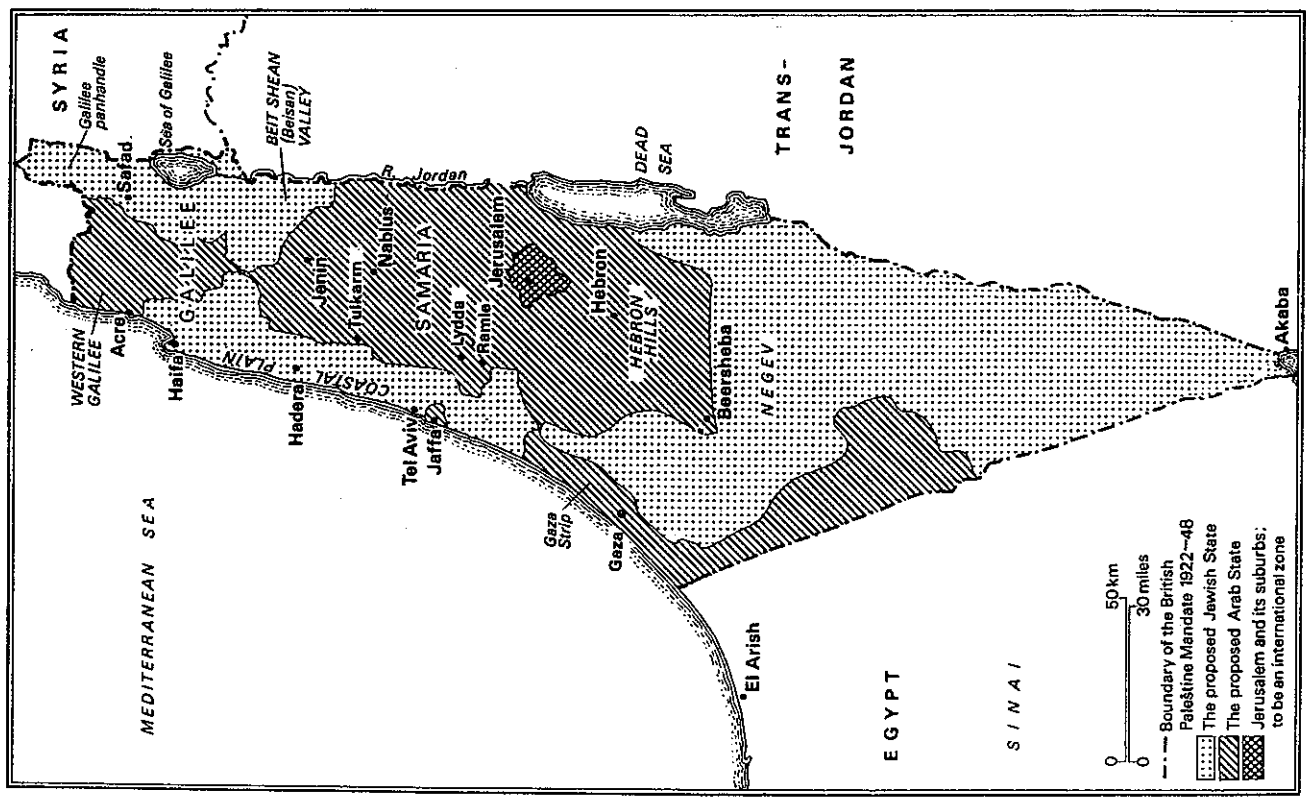


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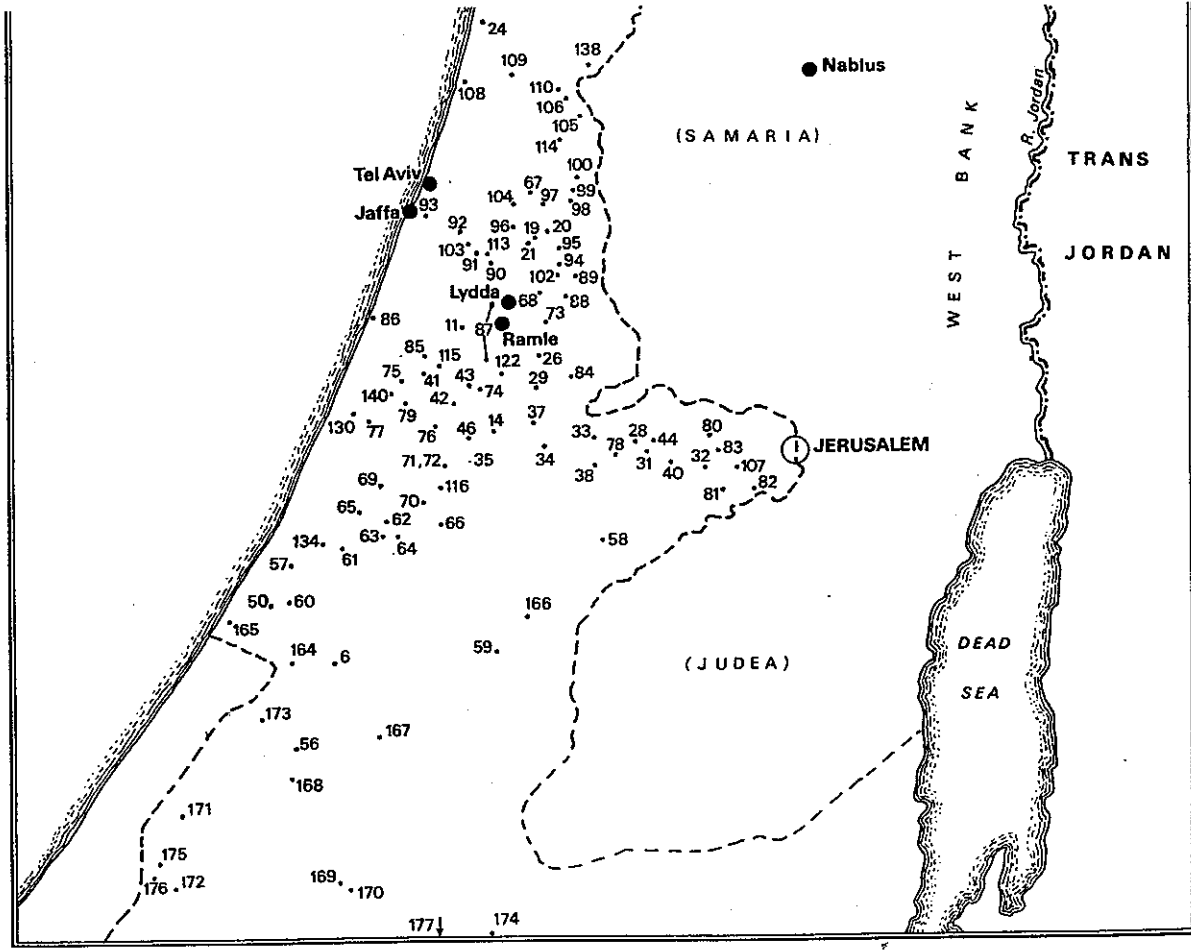
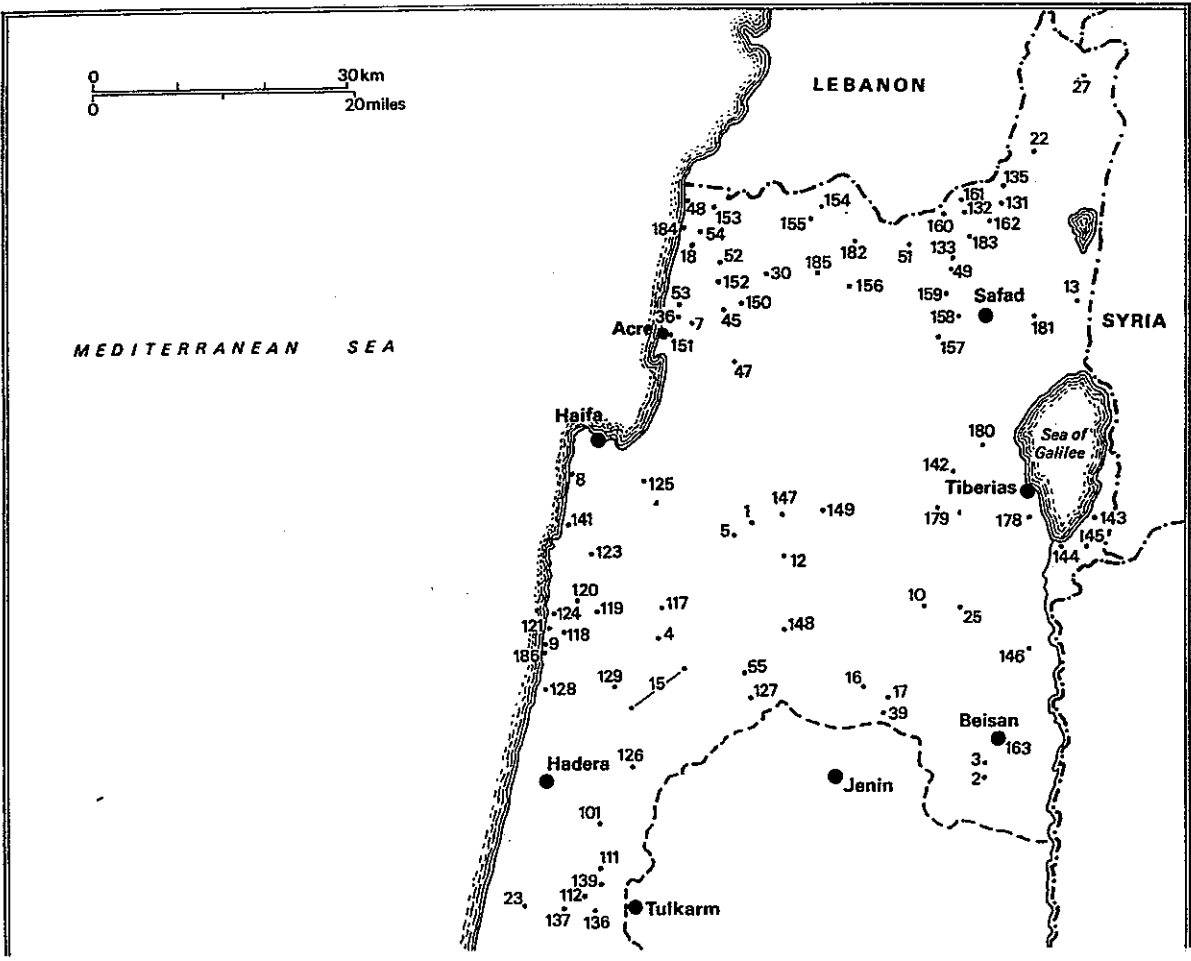


MAP 2



MAP 1

0 0  
 50 km  
 30 miles  
 - - - - Boundary of the British  
 Palestine Mandate 1922-48  
 [Dotted pattern] The proposed Jewish State  
 [Hatched pattern] The proposed Arab State  
 [Cross-hatched pattern] Jerusalem and its suburbs;  
 to be an international zone



MAP 3

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## Introduction to revised edition

In 1988 CUP published the first edition of this work, which sought to describe the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem that, along with the establishment of the State of Israel, was the major political consequence of the 1948 war. The study examined how and why, over November 1947–October 1950, an estimated 600,000 to 760,000 Palestinian Arabs departed their homes, moving to other parts of Palestine (i.e., the West Bank and Gaza Strip) or abroad, primarily to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> There are today on the United Nations rolls close to four million Palestinian refugees (the Palestinian Authority says five million). About one third live in so-called refugee 'camps', which in reality are concrete-structured slum neighbourhoods on the peripheries of cities (Nablus, Gaza, Ramallah, Beirut, Damascus, Amman, etc.).

Perhaps curiously, little serious historiography had been produced, both in the four decades before the publication of the original version of this book or since, on why and how these Palestinians became refugees. Soon after 1948, several chronicles were published by Palestinian exiles, including 'Arif al 'Arif's *Al-Nakba, 1947–1952*' (the catastrophe 1947–1952) and Haj Muhammad Nimr al Khatib's *Min Athar al Nakba*<sup>3</sup> (following the catastrophe). About a decade after the event, Walid Khalidi, a Palestinian scholar, published two academic essays, 'The Fall of Haifa'<sup>4</sup> and 'Why Did the Palestinians Leave?'<sup>5</sup> that shed fresh light on aspects of the subject. The first major piece of research on the origin of the refugee problem, based mainly on open United Nations documentation and newspapers, was a doctoral study by an Israeli scholar, Rony Gabbay, *A Political Study of the Arab–Jewish Conflict: The Arab Refugee Problem (a Case Study)*,<sup>6</sup> published in 1959. Two decades later, a Palestinian scholar, Nafez Nazza, published *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee 1948*,<sup>7</sup> a path-breaking regional study but based almost completely on interviews in the Beirut-area refugee camps conducted in the early 1970s. A few years later, Israeli sociologist Baruch

Kimmerling's published *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*,<sup>8</sup> which contributed to understanding what had happened. During the decades after 1948, a number of Israelis and Palestinians produced serious essays and stories that illuminated the exodus, combining personal recollection and objective analysis – most prominently, Ephraim Kleiman's 'Khirbet Khiz'ah and Other Unpleasant Memories',<sup>9</sup> S. Yizhar's 'The Story of Khirbet Khiza',<sup>10</sup> and Elias Shoufani's 'The Fall of a Village'.<sup>11</sup>

All had suffered from the relative paucity of archival materials. In recent years, a number of young Israeli scholars produced MA and PhD theses and articles on the exodus in particular areas of Palestine and Yoav Gelber published *Palestine 1948: War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*,<sup>12</sup> which in part dealt with the subject under discussion.

The Palestinian refugee problem and its consequences have shaken the Middle East and acutely troubled the world for more than five decades. Terrorist or guerrilla incursions into Israel by these refugees have helped trigger at least three conventional Arab–Israeli wars, in 1956, 1967 and 1982, and Palestinian terrorism, especially attacks on airline passengers and aircraft hijackings during the 1970s and 1980s, have caused chaos and instability worldwide. More recently, since 2000, Palestinian rebellion (the Second Intifada), largely powered by the refugee camps, has scuppered the Israeli–Arab peace process and destabilised the Middle East.

The centrality in the conflict of the refugee problem was convincingly demonstrated in the Israeli–Palestinian–American negotiations of July 2000–January 2001 ('Camp David' and after), when the refugees emerged as the single most important and intractable issue, with the Arabs insisting on their 'right to return' to their lost homes and lands and Israel rejecting that demand, arguing that its implementation would bring about the Jewish State's demise.

The question of what in 1948 turned hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into refugees has been a fundamental propaganda issue between Israel and the Arab states ever since. The general Arab claim, that the Jews expelled Palestine's Arabs with predetermined and preplanning, as part of a systematic, grand political–military design, has served to underline the Arab portrayal of Israel as a vicious, immoral robber state. The official Israeli narrative, that the Palestinians fled 'voluntarily' (meaning not as a result of Jewish compulsion) or that they were asked or ordered to do so by their leaders and by the leaders of the Arab states, helped leave intact the new state's self-image as the haven of a much persecuted people, a body politic more just, moral and deserving of the West's sympathy and help than the surrounding sea of reactionary, semi-feudal, dictatorial Arab societies.

The publication of the first edition of this book in 1988 provoked a great deal of anger and controversy. My conclusions appeared to satisfy no one (except the few who like their history complex and nuanced). The book failed to endorse either the official Palestinian or Israeli narratives and, indeed, tended to undermine both. I was vilified alternatively as a 'propagandist for the Palestine Liberation Organisation' and as a 'sophisticated Zionist propagandist'; more rarely, as merely a bad historian.

I embarked upon the research not out of ideological commitment or political interest. I simply wanted to know what happened. Often, at some point in their career, journalists get an urge to write 'a book' and I had decided on a history of the Palmah, the strike force of the Haganah, the main militia of the Jewish community in Palestine, and, later, of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in 1948. I had always wanted to do military history and nothing serious had been done on this subject. In late 1982 I was privileged to be given access to the still classified papers of the Palmah's headquarters by the association of Palmah veterans, 'Dor Hapalmah'. But a few months later, perhaps sensing trouble, the veterans abruptly withdrew this access, and I realised I would be unable to write the planned history. Yet I had seen and read batches of documents, often marked 'top secret', that shed light on the creation of the refugee problem. I felt that there might be a good story there. Serendipity would have it that my interest in the subject had been ignited a few weeks earlier when, as a reporter, I had been sent to cover the Israeli invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon. It was there, in the ruins of Rashihiye Refugee Camp, outside Tyre, in June 1982, that I first met and interviewed refugees, originally from al Bassa, in the Galilee.

Historians, like generals, need luck. 1982 proved to be a pivotal year in the Israeli archives. The government began opening large amounts of documentation on 1948 at the Israel State Archive (ISA). Simultaneously, local and party political archives began organising and releasing materials. When I added these to the material I had seen in the Palmah Archive (PA), and material I was later to see in British and American archives and the United Nations Archive, I had a solid documentary basis on which to write the contemplated study.

But a major problem remained: Arab documentation. Unfortunately, the Palestinians failed to produce and preserve 'state papers' from 1947–1949, and the Arab states – all dictatorships of one sort or another (military juntas, absolute monarchies, etc.) – refused and continue to refuse access to their papers from the 1948 war, which they regarded and still regard as a humiliating catastrophe. In the course of the research and writing, I did my best to illuminate this 'area of darkness' by culling heavily from Jewish or Israeli intelligence material and British and American diplomatic dispatches dealing with the Arab world

and, specifically, with the evolving refugee problem. The intelligence and diplomatic material went some way towards filling out the picture of what was happening in the field, in the towns and villages of Palestine, in 1948. They were less enlightening about policy-making in the Arab capitals and military headquarters. But given the disarray, confusion and general absence of clear policy in those capitals concerning the evolving problem over November 1947 – June 1948, this paucity of information was not as important as at first seems. As it turned out, with regard to the refugees there was very little connection between what was happening in the field and what was discussed and, even, decided by the Arab leaders inside and outside Palestine.

I also made use of some Arab diaries, memoirs, and books based on interviews, to round out the picture. (A number of Israeli orientalist (though, strangely enough, no Arabs) later took me and the book to task for failing to cull Arab memoirs more thoroughly. But none was able to show how use of this ignored material would have substantially or even marginally altered or enhanced the picture that I was able to draw on the basis of the Israeli and Western archives.)

After careful thought, I refrained almost completely from using interviews, with Jews or Arabs, as sources of concrete information. My brief forays into interviewing had persuaded me of the undesirability of relying on human memories 40–50 years after the event to illuminate the past. The clincher came when I asked Yigael Yadin, the famous professor of archaeology who in 1948 had served as the Haganah\IDF head of operations (and often de facto chief of general staff), about the expulsion of the Arabs from the towns of Lydda and Ramle. 'What expulsion?' he asked – about what had been the biggest expulsion of the war. He did not deny that an expulsion had taken place; he merely said that he could not remember.

I believe in the value of documents. While contemporary documents may misinform, distort, omit or lie, they do so, in my experience, far less than interviewees recalling highly controversial events some 40–50 years ago. My limited experience with such interviews revealed enormous gaps of memory and terrible distortion and selectivity born of 'adopted' and 'rediscovered' memories, ideological certainties and commitments and political agendas. I have found interviews occasionally of use in providing 'colour' and in reconstructing a picture of prevailing conditions and, sometimes, feelings. But not in establishing 'facts'.

The value of oral testimony about 1948, if anything, has diminished with the passage of the 20 years since I first researched the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem. Memories have further faded and acquired memories, ideological precepts, and political agendas have grown if anything more intractable; intifadas and counter-intifadas have done nothing for the cause of salvaging historical truth.

But, thankfully, the liberalisation of Israeli archival practices has led during the past decade and a half to the release of an enormous amount of archival material that was closed when I wrote the first version of this study. More specifically, the ISA has declassified almost all the Israeli Cabinet protocols for 1948–1949 and the IDF Archive (IDFA) and the Haganah Archive (HA), which were both completely closed to anyone not employed by the Defence Ministry, have opened their doors and declassified hundreds of thousands of documents, a true boon for historians. While the IDFA, HA and ISA continue to keep sealed a certain amount of sensitive documentation, enough has recently been declassified and made available – including much if not most of the IDF operational and intelligence material from 1948 – to warrant a fresh look at what brought about the refugee problem.

I have no doubt that the eventual declassification of the material still untouched or newly sealed by the IDFA declassifiers, and the materials stored in the still-closed Israeli intelligence archives at Gelliot, will supply further revelations and new insights. But enough has been opened to give a good idea of what at least the materials in the IDFA and HA can reveal about what happened. The newly-opened documentation very substantially enriches the picture, and our understanding, of what happened in various parts of Palestine during 1948 – what happened week by week and month by month in Jaffa and Haifa and Jerusalem, and in the countryside; and, on the other hand – and this is a paradoxical conclusion which won't sit well with either Israeli or Palestinian propagandists and 'black-or-white historians' – they substantially increase both Israeli and Palestinian responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem. For what the new documents reveal is that there were both far more expulsions and atrocities by Israeli troops than tabulated in this book's first edition and, at the same time, far more orders and advice to various communities by Arab officials and officers to quit their villages or to at least send away their women, old folk and children, substantially fuelling the exodus. I have added a great many passages based on this material to this edition.

The other major innovation here is the addition of a new chapter on Zionist thinking about 'Transfer' – i.e., the organised, compensated, mutually agreed shift, or one-sided expulsion, of Arab communities out of Palestine – a subject accorded only four pages in the 1988 edition. Over the intervening years, I have concluded that pre-1948 'Transfer' thinking had a greater effect on what happened in 1948 than I had allowed for and, hence, deserved deeper treatment and more space. An additional reason for this deeper treatment was criticism of my original handling of the subject by both Arab and Israeli scholars: Arab historians like Nur Masalha<sup>13</sup> argued that the pre-1948 Zionist 'Transfer' thinking was a pillar of Zionist ideology and was tantamount to a master plan – which was then systematically implemented in 1948. Masalha

was eager to prove that Zionism was a robber ideology and Israel, an innately expansionist robber state. From the Israeli side, Shabtai Tevet<sup>14</sup> David Ben-Gurion's biographer, and Anita Shapira,<sup>15</sup> an historian of Zionism, argued that the Zionist leadership – including Ben-Gurion – had never supported the idea of transfer and had never taken the idea seriously, and that, therefore, there was no connection between the occasional propagation of the idea in the 1930s and 1940s and what happened to the Palestinians in 1947–1949. Both were driven by a desire to clear Israel of the charge of premeditation in what befell Palestine's Arabs.

As readers of the new chapter will see, the evidence for pre-1948 Zionist support for 'Transfer' really is unambiguous; but the connection between that support and what actually happened during the war is far more tenuous than Arab propagandists will allow.

I have also tried, in this revision, to integrate fresh insights and evidence published by a number of Israeli historians during the past 15 years. Unfortunately, no worthwhile historiography on 1948, comparable to that of, say, Uri Milstein and Yoav Gelber, has been produced by Palestinians, though I have occasionally referred to the essentially anthropological 'village series' produced by Bir Zeit University Press during the past two decades.

The Arab exodus from the areas that became the Jewish State at the end of the war occurred over the space of 20 months, from the end of November 1947 to July 1949, with several small appendages during the following months and years. It occurred in the course of a war marked by radically shifting circumstances and conditions in the various areas of the country. The exodus of the rich from Jaffa and Haifa over December 1947 to March 1948 was vastly different from the mass urban flight of April and early May; indeed, the multi-layered flight from Jaffa was markedly different from that from Haifa; and both had little in common with the expulsion and flight from Lydda and Ramle in July or from 'Eilabun, Dawayima and Kafr Bir'im in October–November 1948. To describe and explain the exodus I have had to describe and explain events and circumstances during the war's various stages and in different areas. Where necessary, and this is truer of this edition than of its predecessor, I have gone into considerable detail. Fortunately or unfortunately, the devil is in the details and an historian cannot avoid the devil.

The study generally proceeds chronologically, from the United Nations General Assembly Partition Resolution (No. 181) of 29 November 1947 to the collapse of the Lausanne peace conference in September 1949. In examining the exodus, the study proceeds geographically, from area to area. But the chronological-geographical flow is interrupted by a number of horizontal chapters dealing with specific subjects ('Transfer' and 'Blocking the return of the refugees').

A major criticism of the 1988 edition, especially by Israelis, was that the book lacked 'context' – that I had not given sufficient weight to the Holocaust, which had ended less than three years before the events described, and, more importantly, to the events of the 1948 war itself, which had in many ways shaped and moulded Israeli decision-making and actions, at local and national levels. Some critics noted that I devoted little space to describing Arab massacres of Jews in the course of 1948 (there were three such massacres). My response to this is twofold. First, this is not a history of the 1948 war or a history of what the Arabs did to the Jews but a history of how and why the Palestinian refugee problem came about. In this context, what Jews did to Arabs, including massacres, played a role; what Arabs did to Jews was barely relevant. Second, where possible, I did try to describe the context of hostilities – specific battles – that resulted in Palestinian flight or expulsion. In any event, in this current edition I have slightly expanded the discussion of the varying contexts in which the refugee problem was created.

In general, it cannot be stressed too strongly that, while this is not a military history, the events it describes, cumulatively amounting to the Palestinian Arab exodus, occurred in wartime and were a product, direct and indirect, of that war, a war that the Palestinians started. The threat of battle and battle itself were the immediate backdrop to the various components of the exodus.

Throughout, when examining what happened, the reader must also recall the wider context – the clash of arms between Palestine's warring Jewish and Arab militias and, later, the armies of the Arab states and Israel; the intention of the Palestinian leadership and irregulars and, later, of most of the Arab states' leaders and armies in launching the hostilities in November–December 1947 and in invading Palestine in May 1948 to destroy the Jewish state and, possibly, the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) itself; the fears of the Yishuv that the Palestinians and the Arab states, if given the chance, intended to re-enact a Middle Eastern version of the Holocaust; and the extremely small dimensions, geographical and numerical, of the Yishuv (pop. 650,000) in comparison with the Palestinian Arabs (1.25 million) and the infinitely larger surrounding Arab hinterland, with tens of millions of people. At the same time, it is well to recall that, from late July 1948, it was clear to the Yishuv's leaders (and probably to most Arab leaders) that Israel had won its war for survival, at least in the short term, and that the subsequent IDF offensives were geared to securing the political-military future of the Jewish state in what continued to be a highly hostile and uncomfortable geopolitical environment and to rounding out its borders.

I believe this revised edition adds substantially to our understanding of what happened in 1948 and of the deep roots of Israeli–Arab enmity in our time.



## ENDNOTES

1. While most of these dislocated people did not become 'refugees' in the strict sense of the word – they were not exiled from their country but rather they moved or were moved from one part of the country to another – the world has come to accept the usage 'refugee' to describe those dislocated from their homes who ended up outside the country and in other parts of Palestine, and their progeny. For shorthand's sake, we shall do the same.
2. Al Maktaba al 'Asriya, Beirut and Sidon, 1956–1960.
3. Al Matba'a al 'Amumiya, Damascus, 1951.
4. *Middle East Forum*, XXXV\10, Dec. 1959.
5. *Middle East Forum*, XXXV\7, July 1959.
6. Libraire E. Droz, Geneva, and Libraire Minard, Paris, 1959.
7. Institute of Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1978.
8. Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1983.
9. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 40, 1986.
10. Sifriyat Poalim\Mishlat, Merhavia, 1949.
11. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 1\4, 1972.
12. Sussex Academic Press, Brighton, 2001.
13. Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*; and Masalha, 'A Critique of Benny Morris'.
14. Teveth, 'The Evolution of "Transfer" in Zionist Thinking'.
15. Shapira, *Land and Power*, 285–86. Criticism of my original handling of the transfer issue was also broached by Efraim Karsh, 'Fabricating-Israeli History, the "New Historians"': But his criticisms are of such brazen mendacity and distortion – regarding what I wrote and what is in the documentation – that they are not worthy of detailed treatment. Readers may regard the new chapter on 'Transfer' as an implicit rebuttal of what the various critics have written.

## 2

### The idea of 'transfer' in Zionist thinking before 1948

In July 1948, about midway in the first Arab-Israeli war, Britain's Foreign Secretary, Ernst Bevin, wrote that 'on a long term view . . . there may be something to be said for an exchange of populations between the areas assigned to the Arabs and the Jews respectively.'<sup>1</sup> A few days later, he expatiated:

It might be argued that the flight of large numbers of Arabs from the territory under Jewish administration had simplified the task of arriving at a stable settlement in Palestine since some transfers of population seems [sic] to be an essential condition for such a settlement.

But he then went on to argue that as there were only a handful of Jews living in the territory earmarked for Arab sovereignty in Palestine, there was no 'basis for an equitable exchange of population' and therefore Britain should pursue with the United Nations Mediator the possibility of a return of the displaced Palestinian Arabs to their homes.<sup>2</sup> By this time, 400,000-500,000 Arabs (and less than five thousand Jews) had been displaced in the fighting.

But the logic propelling Bevin's thinking, before he pulled on the reins, was highly persuasive: The transfer of the large Arab minority out of the areas of the Jewish state (as of the minuscule Jewish minority out of the Arab-designated areas) would solve an otherwise basic, insurmountable minority problem that had the potential to subvert any peace settlement. The selfsame logic underlay the analysis, a month later, of London's Middle East intelligence centre, the Cairo-based British Middle East Office:

The panic flight of Arabs from the Jewish occupied areas of Palestine has presented a very serious immediate problem but may possibly point the way to a long term solution of one of the greatest difficulties in the way of a satisfactory implementation of partition, namely the existence in the

Jewish state of an Arab community very nearly equal in numbers to the Jewish one.

Previous examinations of this problem have always led to the rejection of transference of populations as a solution for the reason that the number of Arabs to be transferred from the Jewish state was 40 times as great as the number of Jews to be transferred from the Arab state. [But] this disparity has for the moment been largely reduced by the flight of Arabs from the Jewish state . . .

Now that the initial difficulty of persuading the Arabs of Palestine to leave their homes has been overcome by Jewish terrorism and Arab panic it seems possible that the solution may lie in their transference to Iraq and Syria . . . The project [of resettling the refugees in the Arab states] would have to be launched with utmost care. If it were put forward at the present stage the immediate reaction in all Arab minds would be that we had been working for this all along. But if it becomes obvious that through unwillingness on the part of either the Jewish [sic] or Arabs there is little or no chance of the displaced Arabs of Palestine being reinstated in their own homes, it might be put forward as a solution to the problem as it then appeared.<sup>3</sup>

Similar assumptions pervaded American thinking at the end of the war. The consul-general in Jerusalem, William Burdett Jr., no friend of Zionism, advised Washington in February 1949:

Despite the attendant suffering . . . it is felt security in the long run will be served best if the refugees remain in the Arab states and Arab Palestine instead of returning to Israel. Since the US has supported the establishment of a Jewish State, it should insist on a homogeneous one which [sic] will have the best possible chance of stability. Return of the refugees would create a continuing 'minority problem' and form a constant temptation both for uprisings and intervention by neighbouring Arab states.<sup>4</sup>

Such was the thinking in British (and some American) official circles by the second half of 1948, when the creation of the refugee problem was well under way. The same persuasive logic pertained already before the turn of the century, at the start of the Zionist enterprise. There may have been those, among Zionists and Gentile philo-Zionists, who believed, or at least argued, that Palestine was 'an empty land' eagerly awaiting the arrival of waves of Jewish settlers.<sup>5</sup> But, in truth, on the eve of the Zionist influx the country had a population of about 450,000 Arabs (and 20,000 Jews), almost all of them living in its more fertile, northern half. How was the Zionist movement to turn Palestine into a 'Jewish' state if the overwhelming majority of its inhabitants were Arabs? And if, over the years, by means of massive Jewish immigration, the Jews were at last to attain a majority, how could a truly 'Jewish' and stable polity be established containing a very large, and possibly disaffected, Arab minority, whose birth rate was much higher than the Jews?<sup>6</sup>

The obvious, logical solution lay in Arab emigration or 'transfer'. Such a transfer could be carried out by force, i.e., expulsion, or it could be engineered voluntarily, with the transferees leaving on their own steam and by agreement, or by some amalgam of the two methods. For example, the Arabs might be induced to leave by means of a combination of financial sticks and carrots. This, indeed, was the thrust of the diary entry by Theodor Herzl, Zionism's prophet and organisational founder, on 12 June 1895:

We must expropriate gently . . . We shall try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our country . . . Both the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and circumspectly.<sup>7</sup>

This was Herzl's only diary entry on the matter, and only rarely did he refer to the subject elsewhere. It does not crop up at all in his two major Zionist works, *Der Judenstaat* ('The Jews' State) and *Altneuland* (Old-New Land). Nor does it appear in the published writings of most of the Zionist leaders of Herzl's day and after. All understood that discretion and circumspection were called for: Talk of transferring the Arabs, even with Palestinian and outside Arab leaders' agreement, would only put them on their guard and antagonise them, and quite probably needlessly antagonise the Arabs' Ottoman correigionists, who ruled the country until 1917-1918.

But, in private, the Zionist leaders were more forthcoming. In 1911 Arthur Ruppin, head of the Zionist Organisation's Palestine Office, proposed 'a limited population transfer' of peasants to Syria; a year later, Leon Motzkin, one of the organisation's founders, declared: 'The fact is that around Palestine there are extensive areas. It will be easy for the Arabs to settle there with the money that they will receive from the Jews.'<sup>8</sup> For years, the Zionist advocate and novelist Israel Zangwill had been trumpeting the transfer solution to the Arab problem:

We cannot allow the Arabs to block so valuable a piece of historic reconstruction . . . And therefore we must gently persuade them to 'trek'. After all, they have all Arabia with its million square miles . . . There is no particular reason for the Arabs to cling to these few kilometres. 'To fold their tents and silently steal away' is their proverbial habit: Let them exemplify it now.<sup>9</sup>

But most advocates of transfer kept their thoughts to themselves or restricted them to private letters and internal Zionist deliberations. Such was the situation in the waning days of Ottoman rule and so it remained during the first two decades of British government. Talking about transfer would needlessly alienate or at least complicate the

lives of Palestine's new governors and perhaps put off potential Jewish supporters of Zionism as well.

To be sure, to some degree the praxis of Zionism, from the first, had been characterised by a succession of microcosmic transfers; the purchase of land and the establishment of almost every settlement (*moshava*, literally colony) had been accompanied by the (legal and usually compensated) displacement or transfer of an original beduin or settled agricultural community. The displaced Arabs more often than not resettled in another part of rural Palestine or moved to the burgeoning towns, though some moved across the Jordan, out of the country. One such displacement was graphically described by Haim Margaliyot Kalvaryski, a Zionist expert on Arab affairs and a key land-purchaser:

The Arab question was revealed to me in all its seriousness immediately after my first purchase of land here, when I had to see to the first eviction [*irishuf*] of the Arab inhabitants off their land to make way for the settlement of our brothers. For long afterwards I did not cease hearing the sad melody of the beduin men and women who gathered by the sheikh's tent that evening, before they left the village of Shamasin that is near Yama, which is [today] Yavniel [in eastern Galilee]. I sat in the tent and wrapped up the negotiation with Sheikh Fadul from Deleika. And the beduin men and women assembled around the fire prepared coffee for me and the rest of the guests. And at the same time they sang sad songs lamenting their bad luck, which was forcing them to leave the cradle of their homeland. These songs touched my heart and I realised how tied the beduin was to his land.<sup>10</sup>

Herzl, Motzkin, Ruppin and Zangwill, of course, had been thinking not of such mini-displacements but of a massive, 'strategic' transfer. But however appealing on the practical plane, the idea was touched, in most Zionists' minds, by a measure of moral dubiety. True, at least down to the 1920s or 1930s, the Arabs of Palestine did not see themselves and were not considered by anyone else a distinct 'people'. They were seen as 'Arabs' or, more specifically, as 'southern Syrian Arabs'. Therefore, their transfer from Nablus or Hebron to Transjordan, Syria and even Iraq – especially if adequately compensated – would not be tantamount to exile from the homeland; 'Arabs' would merely be moving from one Arab area to another.

Moreover, the transfer of ethnic minorities to their core national areas, was regarded during the first half of the 20th century as morally acceptable, perhaps even morally desirable. It also made good political sense. The historical experience in various parts of the globe during the 1920s and 1940s supported this view. The double coerced transfer of Muslim Turks out of Greek majority areas in Thrace and the Aegean Islands and of Christian Greeks out of Turkish Asia Minor during the early 1920s, a by-product of Greek-Turkish hostilities, at a stroke seemed to solve two long-standing, 'insoluble', minority problems, rendering future

Greek-Turkish relations more logical and pacific. 1947–1948 witnessed even larger (and bloodier) transfers, of Muslims and Hindus, between India and Pakistan, as these states emerged from the womb of history.<sup>11</sup> The world looked on, uncondemning and impervious. Indeed, the transfer of German minority groups from western Poland and the Czech borderlands to Germany at the end of the Second World War was positively lauded in most Allied capitals. In both the West and the Communist Bloc it was seen as both politically imperative and just. These minorities had helped to subvert the European order and a cluster of central and eastern European nation-states, at a mind-boggling cost in lives, suffering and property; it was just and fitting that they be uprooted and 'returned' to Germany, both as punishment and in order that they might cause no trouble in the future.

Still, the notion of transfer remained, in Zionist eyes – even as Zionist leaders trotted out these historical precedents – morally problematic. Almost all shared liberal ideals and values; many, indeed, were socialists of one ilk or another; and, after all, the be-all and end-all of their Zionist ideology was a return of a people to its homeland. Uprooting Arab families from their homes and lands, even with compensation, even with orderly re-settlement among their own outside Palestine, went against the grain. The moral dilemma posed was further aggravated during the 1930s and 1940s by the dawning recognition among many of the Zionist leaders, including Ben-Gurion and Zeev Jabotinsky, the leader of the right-wing Revisionist Movement, that Palestine's Arabs had brought forth a new, distinct (albeit still 'Arab') nationalism and national identity; Palestinian transferees might not feel at home in Transjordan or Iraq. For all these reasons, the notion of transfer was something best not mulled over and brought out into the open in public discourse and disputation; best not to think about it at all. Zionism might necessitate displacement of Palestinians, but why trouble one's conscience and linger over it?

Rather, the Zionist public catechism, at the turn of the century, and well into the 1940s, remained that there was room enough in Palestine for both peoples; there need not be a displacement of Arabs to make way for Zionist immigrants or a Jewish state. There was no need for a transfer of the Arabs and on no account must the idea be incorporated in the movement's ideological-political platform.

But the logic of a transfer solution to the 'Arab problem' remained ineluctable; without some sort of massive displacement of Arabs from the area of the Jewish state-to-be, there could be no viable 'Jewish' state. The need for transfer became more acute with the increase in violent Arab opposition to the Zionist enterprise during the 1920s and 1930s. The violence demonstrated that a disaffected, hostile Arab majority or large minority would inevitably struggle against the very existence of the Jewish state to which it was consigned, subverting and destabilising

it from the start. Moreover, the successive waves of anti-Zionist Arab violence (1920, 1921, 1929 and 1936–1939) bludgeoned the British into periodically curbing Jewish immigration. Hence, Arab violence promised to prevent the gradual emergence of a Jewish majority. This was the significance of the British White Paper of May 1939, which the British delivered up at the end of, and in response to, the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939, the biggest outburst of Arab violence during the Mandate. The White Paper assured the Arabs – who at the time numbered about one million to the Jews' 450,000 – of permanent majority status (by limiting Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the following five years) while promising that majority 'independence' within 10 years. Palestine would become an Arab state with a large Jewish minority (whose future status and rights, needless to say, would be determined by the new Arab rulers).

Hence, if during the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century Zionist advocacy of transfer was unhesitant, low-key and occasional, by the early 1930s a full-throated near-consensus in support of the idea began to emerge among the movement's leaders. Each major bout of Arab violence triggered renewed Zionist interest in a transfer solution. So it was with the riots of 1929. In May 1930, the director of the Jewish Agency's Political Department and the chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive in Palestine, Colonel F. H. Kisch, proposed to the president of the Zionist Organisation, Chaim Weizmann, that the Jewish Agency should press the British to promote the emigration of Palestinian Arabs to Iraq, which is

in urgent need of agricultural population. It should not be impossible to come to an arrangement with [King] Faisal [of Iraq] by which he would take the initiative in offering good openings for Arab immigrants . . . There should be suitable propaganda as to the attractions of the country which indeed are great for Arab immigrants – and there should be specially organised and advertised facilities for travel. We, of course, should not appear [to be promoting this], but I see no reason why H.M.G. should not be interested . . . There can be no conceivable hardship for Palestinian Arabs – a nomadic and semi-nomadic people – to move to another Arab country where there are better opportunities for an agricultural life – c.f. English agricultural emigrants to Canada.<sup>12</sup>

A few weeks earlier, Weizmann himself had suggested to British Colonial Secretary Lord Passfield that a solution to Palestine's troubles might lie across the Jordan: Palestine's troublesome Arabs could be transferred over the river.

Lord Passfield observed that he was convinced he would have to consider a solution in that direction; but Iraq might present some difficulties . . . and they [i.e., the Iraqis] were very difficult people. My reply was: 'Of course, it isn't easy, but these countries [i.e., Transjordan and Iraq] have to be

developed . . . ' Lord Passfield thought this a wide outlook and one to be taken into consideration very seriously. (I then said, supposing we were to create a Development Company which would acquire a million dunams of land in Transjordan, this would establish a reserve and relieve Palestine from pressure . . . )<sup>13</sup>

A year later, Kisch raised the subject again, saying that the movement had to adopt a clear policy in the matter. Responding, the veteran Zionist official Yaakov Thon wrote that from the movement's perspective, the ideal solution would be a transfer of Palestine's Arabs across the Jordan. But the movement's spokesmen, he added, could not say this openly.<sup>14</sup> Weizmann said similar things to Drummond Shiels, Passfield's under-secretary: Transferring Arabs out of Palestine would be 'a courageous and statesmanlike attempt to grapple with a problem that had been tackled hitherto half-heartedly . . . Some [of Palestine's Arabs] might flow off into the neighbouring countries, and this quasi-exchange of population could be fostered and encouraged.'<sup>15</sup>

But before 1936, sporadic talk and thinking about transfer was confined to tête-à-têtes behind closed doors and to internal departmental memoranda. The outbreak of the Arab Revolt in April 1936 opened the floodgates; the revolt implied that, from the Arabs' perspective, there could be no compromise, and that they would never agree to live in (or, indeed, next to) a Jewish state. Moreover, they were bent on forcing the British to halt Jewish immigration – and this, precisely at a time, when the Nazis threatened Europe's Jews with an unimaginably appalling future. Never had there been such need for a safe haven in Palestine.

To be sure, the Zionist leaders, in public, continued to repeat the old refrain – that there was enough room in the country for the two peoples and that Zionist immigration did not necessitate Arab displacement. Jabotinsky, the leader of the Revisionist movement, had generally supported transfer.<sup>16</sup> But in 1931 he had said: 'We don't want to evict even one Arab from the left or right banks of the Jordan. We want them to prosper both economically and culturally';<sup>17</sup> and six years later he had testified before the Peel Commission that 'there was no question at all of expelling the Arabs. On the contrary, the idea was that the Land of Israel on both sides of the Jordan [i.e., Palestine and Transjordan] would [ultimately] contain the Arabs . . . and many millions of Jews . . . – though he admitted that the Arabs would become a 'minority'.<sup>18</sup>

But by 1936, the mainstream Zionist leaders were more forthright in their support of transfer. In July, Ben-Gurion, the chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive and de facto leader of the Yishuv, and his deputy, Moshe Shertok (Sharett), the director of the Agency's Political Department, went to the High Commissioner to plead the Zionist case on immigration, which the Mandatory was considering suspending:

Ben-Gurion asked whether the Government would make it possible for Arab cultivators displaced through Jewish land purchases . . . to be settled in Transjordan. If Transjordan was for the time being a country closed to the Jews [i.e., closed to Jewish settlement], surely it could not be closed to Arabs also.

The High Commissioner thought this a good idea . . . He asked whether the Jews would be prepared to spend money on the settlement of such Palestinian Arabs in Transjordan.

Mr. Ben-Gurion replied that this might be considered.

Mr. Shertok remarked that the Jewish colonising agencies were in any case spending money in providing for the tenants or cultivators who had to be shifted as a result of Jewish land purchase either by the payment of compensation or through the provision of alternative land. They would gladly spend that money on the settlement of these people in Transjordan.<sup>19</sup>

Three months later, the Jewish Agency Executive debated the idea. Ben-Gurion observed:

Why can't we acquire land there for Arabs, who wish to settle in Transjordan? If it was permissible to move an Arab from the Galilee to Judea, why is it impossible to move an Arab from the Hebron area to Transjordan, which is much closer? . . . There are vast expanses of land there and we [in Palestine] are over-crowded . . . We now want to create concentrated areas of Jewish settlement [in Palestine], and by transferring the land-selling Arab to Transjordan, we can solve the problem of this concentration . . . Even the High Commissioner agrees to a transfer to Transjordan if we equip the peasants with land and money . . .<sup>20</sup>

Already in May 1936 the British had promised to send a royal commission of inquiry which would determine the causes of the rebellion and propose a solution – if the Arabs ceased fire. By October the rebel bands had been badly ravaged and the Arab population had generally tired of the rebellion. Haj Amin al-Husseini suspended the hostilities and the Peel Commission arrived in Palestine. It toured the country, met outside Arab leaders and took testimony from British, Zionist and Palestinian Arab officials. In early July 1937, it submitted and published its report. The Peel Commission recommended the partition of Palestine between a Jewish state, comprising some 20 per cent of the country, and Transjordan, which would absorb most of the remainder (the residue, of less than 10 per cent, including Jerusalem and Bethlehem, was to remain in British hands). But even this failed to solve the perennial demographic problem: For even in the 20 per cent of the country where the Jews were concentrated and which was earmarked for Jewish sovereignty (the coastal plain and the Galilee) more than two fifths of the population was Arab. So Peel further recommended the transfer of all or most of the Arab population out of these areas.

The existence of these [Arab and Jewish] minorities [in the respective majority areas] clearly constitutes the most serious hindrance to the smooth and successful operation of partition . . . If the settlement is to be clean and final, this question of the minorities must be boldly faced and firmly dealt with.

The commission pointed to the useful Greco-Turkish precedent, in which about 1.3 million Greeks and 400,000 Turks were compulsorily exchanged or transferred in the first half of the 1920s. 'Before the [exchange] operation the Greek and Turkish minorities had been a constant irritant. Now the ulcer had been cleaned out, and Greco-Turkish relations, we understand, are friendlier than they have ever been before.' Formally, the commission spoke not of 'transfer' but of a 'population exchange' involving the removal to the Jewish state-to-be of '1,250' Jews from the Arab-populated areas and of the removal of '225,000' Arabs out of the Jewish state-to-be to the Arab areas. But, in effect, not an equitable exchange but a transfer of Arabs with a very small figleaf transfer of Jews, was what was envisaged. The commission preferred that the Arabs move voluntarily and with compensation – but regarded the matter as so important that should the Arabs refuse, the transfer should be 'compulsory', that is, it should be carried out by force. Otherwise, the partition settlement would not endure.<sup>21</sup>

The recommendations, especially the transfer recommendation, delighted many of the Zionist leaders, including Ben-Gurion. True, the Jews were being given only a small part of their patrimony; but they could use that mini-state as a base or bridgehead for expansion and conquest of the rest of Palestine (and possibly Transjordan as well). Such, at least, was how Ben-Gurion partially explained his acceptance of the offered 'pittance.'<sup>22</sup> But Ben-Gurion had another reason: 'The compulsory transfer of the Arabs from the valleys of the proposed Jewish state could give us something which we never had, even when we stood on our own during the days of the First and Second Temples . . . Ben-Gurion confided to his diary. 'We are being given an opportunity that we never dared to dream of in our wildest imaginings. This is more than a state, government and sovereignty – this is national consolidation in an independent homeland.' Ben-Gurion deemed the transfer recommendation

a central point whose importance outweighs all the other positive [points] and counterbalances all the report's deficiencies and drawbacks . . . We must grab hold of this conclusion [i.e., recommendation] as we grabbed hold of the Balfour Declaration, even more than that – as we grabbed hold of Zionism itself . . . because of all the Commission's conclusions, this is the one that alone offers some recompense for the tearing away of other parts of the country [and their award to the Arabs] . . . What is inconceivable in normal times is possible in revolutionary times . . . Any doubt on our part about the necessity of this transfer, any doubt we cast about the possibility of its implementation, any hesitancy on our

part about its justice, may lose [us] an historic opportunity that may not recur. . . . If we do not succeed in removing the Arabs from our midst, when a royal commission proposes this to England, and transferring them to the Arab area – it will not be achievable easily (and perhaps at all) after the [Jewish] state is established. . . . This thing must be done now – and the first step – perhaps the *crucial* [step] – is *conditioning ourselves for its implementation*.<sup>23</sup>

The Peel report had, for the first time, accorded the idea of transfer an international moral imprimatur. At the same time, its publication triggered a profound and protracted debate in the Zionist leadership: Should the movement renounce its historic claim to the whole of Palestine and accept the principle of partition and the offered 20 per cent of the land? The controversy cut across party lines, with Ben-Gurion's own Mapai Party split down the middle. For the Revisionist right there was no problem; they claimed Transjordan as well as the whole of Palestine; partition was a non-starter. For the left, represented by Brit Shalom and Hashomer Hatza'ir, the Peel proposals were beside the point; they favoured a binational Arab-Jewish state, not partition. But for the moderate left and centre – the core and mainstream of the movement – the dilemma was profound. The culminating and decisive debate took place in the especially summoned Twentieth Zionist Congress in Zurich August 1937 (the Revisionists did not attend). Ben-Gurion mobilised the Peel transfer proposal in support of acceptance of partition:

We must look carefully at the question of whether transfer is possible, necessary, moral and useful. We do not want to dispossess, [but] transfer of populations occurred previously, in the [Jezreel] Valley, in the Sharon [i.e., Coastal Plain] and in other places. You are no doubt aware of the Jewish National Fund's activity in this respect. Now a transfer of a completely different scope will have to be carried out. In many parts of the country new settlement will not be possible without transferring the Arab peasantry. . . . It is important that this plan comes from the Commission and not from us. . . . Transfer is what will make possible a comprehensive settlement programme. Thankfully, the Arab people have vast empty areas. Jewish power, which grows steadily, will also increase our possibilities to carry out the transfer on a large scale. You must remember, that this system embodies an important humane and Zionist idea, to transfer parts of a people [i.e., Palestine's Arabs] to their country [i.e., Transjordan and Iraq] and to settle empty lands. . . .

Ben-Gurion seemed to suggest that the transfer would be compulsory and that not the British but Jewish troops would be carrying it out. Other speakers at the Congress, including Weizmann and Ruppin, spoke in a similar vein, though all preferred a voluntary, agreed transfer, and some, such as Ussishkin, doubted that the whole idea was practicable; the British would not carry it out and would prevent the Jews from doing so. Many, including Berl Katznelson, the Mapai co-leader, opposed the gist

of the Peel package, which was partition (while theoretically supporting transfer).<sup>24</sup>

In the end, after bitter debate, the Congress equivocally approved – by a vote of 299 to 160 – the Peel recommendations as a basis for further negotiation. The vote marked an in principle endorsement of the concept of partition. No specific mention was made in the resolution of the transfer proposal – though it was implicitly accepted as part of the package whose territorial provisions the Zionists sought to renegotiate (i.e., they wanted more than the 20 per cent offered).<sup>25</sup>

However, within weeks, the Peel recommendations were dead in the water. The Arabs, unappeased, renewed their revolt, and the British Government, taking fright, secretly voted against partition on 8 December 1937 and then appointed yet another ('technical') committee, ostensibly to look into the praxis of implementing the Peel proposals but in reality to bury them. The Woodhead Committee, set up in March 1938, presented its findings in November. It offered a handful of refashioned partition proposals, all with a much smaller Jewish state than proposed by Peel; the committee favoured the one with a Jewish state stretching from Tel Aviv to Zikhron Yaakov, comprising less than 10 per cent of Palestine's land mass (obviously unacceptable to the Zionists). The committee rejected Peel's compulsory transfer proposal as out of the question, suggested that voluntary transfer was 'impossible to assume', and concluded that a Jewish state with a large Arab minority would be dysfunctional. Hence, partition was unworkable.

But during the months of Woodhead deliberations, the Zionist leadership – unaware of London's secret, in principle, rejection of partition – roundly examined and debated the Peel proposals and the practicalities of their implementation. Transfer got a protracted, thorough airing. A 'Transfer Committee' of experts, chaired by Thon, then head of the Palestine Land Development Company, was established and investigated ways and means of implementing transfer – how many and which Arabs could or should be transferred? Where to? With what compensation? The problems were vast and the political circumstances were volatile (an ongoing Arab Revolt, a British Government whose support for the Peel recommendations was uncertain, a world drifting toward total war, when the problem of Palestine would surely be put on the back burner). The committee broke up in June 1938 without producing a final report.<sup>26</sup>

But simultaneously, the Jewish Agency Executive – the 'government' of the Yishuv – discussed transfer. On 7 June 1938, proposing Zionist policy guidelines, Ben-Gurion declared: 'The Jewish State will discuss with the neighbouring Arab states the matter of voluntarily transferring Arab tenant-farmers, labourers and peasants from the Jewish state to the neighbouring Arab states.' (As was his wont, Ben-Gurion at the same time endorsed complete equality and civil rights for the Arabs

living in the Jewish State; some executive members may have regarded this as for-the-record lip service and posturing for posterity.<sup>27</sup> Five days later Ben-Gurion laid his cards baldly on the table: 'I support compulsory transfer. I don't see in it anything immoral.' Ussishkin followed suit: there was nothing immoral about transferring 60,000 Arab families:

We cannot start the Jewish state with . . . half the population being Arab . . . Such a state cannot survive even half an hour. It [i.e., transfer] is the most moral thing to do . . . I am ready to come and defend . . . it before the Almighty . . .

Werner David Senator, a Hebrew University executive of German extraction and liberal views, called for a 'maximal transfer'. Yehoshua Supersky, of the Zionist Actions Committee, said that the Yishuv must take care that 'a new Czechoslovakia is not created here [and this could be assured] through the gradual emigration of part of the Arabs.' He was referring to the undermining of the Czechoslovak republic by its Sudeten German minority. Ben-Gurion, Ussishkin and Berl Katznelson agreed that the British, rather than the Yishuv, should carry out the transfer. 'But the principle should be that there must be a large agreed transfer', declared Katznelson. Ruppin said: 'I do not believe in the transfer of individuals. I believe in the transfer of entire villages.' Eliezer Kaplan, the Jewish Agency's treasurer, thought that with proper financial inducement and if left impoverished in the nascent Jewish State, the Arabs might agree to a 'voluntary' departure. Elisha Berlin, a leader of the Knesset Yisrael religious party, proposed that 'taxes should be increased so that the Arabs will flee because of the taxes'. There was a virtual pro-transfer consensus among the JAE members; all preferred a 'voluntary' transfer; but most were also agreeable to a compulsory transfer, preferring, of course, that the British rather than the Yishuv carry it out.<sup>28</sup>

In one way or another, Zionist expressions of support for transfer during 1936, 1937 and the first half of 1938 can be linked to the Peel Commission's work and recommendations. Not so Ben-Gurion's tabling of a new transfer scheme in early December 1938. Peel was now dead and buried. But in Germany, the Nazis had just unleashed the mass pogrom of *Kristallnacht*; in Palestine and London, the British, the Arabs and the Zionist leaders were preparing for the St James's Conference, soon to open in the British capital. The Zionist leadership was desperate to find a safe haven for Europe's Jews and to empty Palestine in preparation for their arrival. 'We will offer Iraq ten million Palestine pounds to transfer one hundred thousand Arab families from Palestine to Iraq', Ben-Gurion jotted down in his diary. On 11 December he raised the idea at a meeting of the JAE. The Iraqis, he said, were in urgent need of manpower to fill their empty spaces and to develop the country. But Ben-Gurion was not

optimistic; he anticipated opposition from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He was driven by a premonition of unprecedented disaster:

The Jewish question is no longer that which was [the question] until now . . . Millions of Jews are now faced with physical destruction . . . Zionism [itself] is in danger . . . We now need, during this catastrophe that has befallen the Jewish people, all of Palestine . . . [and] mass immigration . . .<sup>29</sup>

Nothing came of these deliberations and plans. In November, the Woodhead Committee had scuppered any possibility of British endorsement of either partition or transfer; the St. James Conference of February 1939 produced only further deadlock; and in May, in a new 'White Paper', Whitehall disavowed its commitment to Zionism itself, in effect supporting a continued, permanent Arab majority and Arab rule in Palestine within a decade.

But the idea of transfer, the golden *deus-ex-machina* solution to the Arab problem, continued to captivate the Zionist imagination. When deliberating transfer in the late thirties, the Zionist executives tended to think either in terms of a total transfer, which would leave the emergent Jewish state Arab free, or, should that prove impossible, in terms of particular categories of Arabs. Most often peasants and tenant farmers were mentioned, perhaps because their transfer would entail an accretion of land to the Zionist institutions. As well, cultivators were seen as 'highly transferable' because their (compensated) resettlement on land in Transjordan or Iraq would not necessitate vocational retraining or profound cultural acclimatisation. Moving the bulk of the Arab townspeople, on the other hand, would gain the Zionist enterprise little of value (only an 'improvement' in Palestine's demography) and would probably be much more problematic on the other, absorptive end.

In the absence of Anglo-Arab-Zionist agreement about a blanket transfer, proposals periodically surfaced regarding the selective transfer of this or that Arab religious or ethnic group. In March 1939, the leader of Syria's Druse, Sultan al-Atrash, proposed that the Yishuv buy up the dozen odd Druse villages in Palestine and that their 15,000 inhabitants be transferred to Jabal el-Druse in southern Syria. The envisioned voluntary transfer would benefit both the Druse and the Jews — and might serve as a model for further population transfers from Palestine, al-Atrash argued. Weizmann responded enthusiastically, launching a series of consultations with American Zionist leaders and French army officers and officials. He reported that the French — who ruled Syria — were in favour but Shertok, in Tel Aviv, was skeptical about the willingness of Palestine's Druse to move and ultimately quashed the negotiation. There the matter seemingly ended.<sup>30</sup>

But a seed had obviously been planted in Ben-Gurion's mind. In October 1941 he formulated a blueprint for future Zionist policy, in which



he expatiated at length about the possibilities of transfer. He wrote that various categories of Palestinian Arabs were ripe for transfer:

The Druze, several Beduin tribes in the Jordan Valley and the South, the Circassians, and perhaps also the Matawalis [Shi'ites living in northern Galilee] [would] not mind being transferred, under favourable conditions, to some neighbouring country.

Tenant farmers and landless labourers, too, could probably be transferred with relative ease, he argued. A transfer of the bulk of Palestine's Arabs, however, would probably necessitate 'ruthless compulsion'. But recent European history, he wrote, had demonstrated that compulsory transfer of populations was possible, and the ongoing world war seemed to underline the need and practicality of massive transfers to solve difficult minority problems. There would be massive transfers of population as part of the post-war settlement, he reasoned. But the Zionist movement must take care not to openly preach or advocate compulsory transfer of Arabs as this would be impolitic and would antagonise many in the West. At the same time, he wrote, the Zionists should do nothing to hamper those in the West who were advocating transfer as a necessary element in the solution of the Palestine problem.<sup>31</sup>

Ben-Gurion was obliquely referring to the proposal by Harry St. John Philby, an orientalist and adviser to King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, to establish at the end of the war a Middle Eastern 'federation' of states, with Ibn Saud as its ruler. The plan also provided for a Jewish state in Palestine, transferring most of Palestine's Arabs out of the country, and the payment to Saudi Arabia of 20 million pounds sterling. Both Weizmann and Shertok were initially enthusiastic.<sup>32</sup>

Through the war years, Shertok and Weizmann remained steady proponents of transfer, flogging the idea to whoever would listen. One of Weizmann's interlocutors was Ivan Maiskii, the Soviet ambassador in London. The two met in London in late January 1941. Initially they discussed possible orange exports to Russia; Maiskii wasn't particularly interested. They then turned to a possible post-war settlement in Palestine. According to Weizmann, Maiskii said

there would have to be an exchange of populations. Dr Weizmann said that if half a million Arabs could be transferred, two million Jews could be put in their place. That, of course, would be a first instalment; what might happen afterwards was a matter for history. Mr Maiskii's comment was that they in Russia had also had to deal with exchanges of population. Dr Weizmann said that the distance they had to deal with in Palestine would be smaller; they would be transferring the Arabs only into Iraq or Transjordan. Mr Maiskii asked whether some difficulties might not arise in transferring a hill-country population to the plains, and Dr Weizmann replied that a beginning might be made with the Arabs from the Jordan

Valley; but anyhow, conditions in Transjordan were not so very different from the Palestine hill-country . . . Dr Weizmann explained that they were unable to deal with [the Arabs] as, for instance, the Russian authorities would deal with a backward element in their population in the USSR. Nor would they desire to do so.<sup>33</sup>

Maiskii's report on the meeting contains a number of differences. Maiskii wrote that it was Weizmann who had raised the subject of transfer. Weizmann, according to Maiskii, had proposed 'to move a million Arabs . . . to Iraq, and to settle four or five million Jews from Poland and other countries on the land where these Arabs were'. The Soviet ambassador had expressed surprise regarding Weizmann's expectation of settling four or five million Jews on lands inhabited by only one million Arabs. Weizmann replied, according to Maiskii:

Oh, don't worry . . . The Arab is often called the son of the desert. It would be truer to call him the father of the desert. His laziness and primitivism turn a flourishing garden into a desert. Give me the land occupied by one million Arabs, and I will easily settle five times that number of Jews on it.<sup>34</sup>

A few months later, an almost identical exchange took place between Shertok, visiting Cairo, and Walter Smart, the secretary for Arab affairs at the British Legation in Egypt. They spoke of possible massive Polish Jewish immigration to Palestine.

[Shertok] said . . . that the Land of Israel could accommodate a population of at least five million. But how many Jews? — he asked.

I said: Three million Jews and two million Arabs. The Arabs increase thanks to Jewish immigration [which expands the economy that facilitates the absorption of Arab immigrants], but if we evict the Arabs there will be room for more Jews; and this will [also] benefit the Arabs.

What will you do with them? [asked Smart].

Syria, for example, will that country develop with such a small population, with its empty spaces? If several hundred thousand Arabs from the Land of Israel were transferred there, the Jewish people would provide funds, Syria would get an income. The same applies to Iraq.

During the visit, Shertok said similar things at his meeting with the American minister, Alexander Kirk.<sup>35</sup>

Nothing, of course, came of these meetings. But they give us an insight into the desperation growingly felt by the Zionist leadership as the news of the awful fate of Europe's Jews began to seep out — and into the measures they were willing to contemplate and propound to save their people.

And such thinking was not limited to the political leadership; it also characterised many of the officials who ran the Yishuv's 'state-within-a-state' institutions. Yosef Weitz, director of the JNF's Lands Department

and a key land-purchasing and settlement executive, was characteristic if somewhat more articulate and blunt than most: 'It must be clear that there is no room in the country for both peoples', he confided to his diary on 20 December 1940.

if the Arabs leave it, the country will become wide and spacious for us. . . . The only solution [after World War II ends] is a Land of Israel, at least a western Land of Israel [i.e., Palestine], without Arabs. There is no room here for compromises. . . . There is no way but to transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries, to transfer all of them, save perhaps for [the mainly Christian Arabs of] Bethlehem, Nazareth and old Jerusalem. Not one village must be left, not one [beduin] tribe. The transfer must be directed at Iraq, Syria and even Transjordan. For this goal funds will be found. . . . And only after this transfer will the country be able to absorb millions of our brothers and the Jewish problem [in Europe] will cease to exist. There is no other solution.<sup>36</sup>

But solving the Jewish problem or the question of Palestine were far from priorities for the Allied leaders and generals during the world war; they had more pressing problems. Transferring Arabs to make way for Jews was hardly an urgent or, indeed, attractive proposition. Nonetheless, the news that gradually emerged during the second half of the war from Nazi-occupied Europe about the ongoing Holocaust certainly caused pangs of conscience among Western politicians and officials and underlined the urgency of a solution of the Jewish problem in Europe by way of a safe haven in Palestine. Pro-Zionist tendencies were reinforced. The Executive of Britain's Labour Party in April 1944 adopted a platform endorsing mass Jewish immigration to, a Jewish majority in, and a transfer of Arabs out of, Palestine as part of a Middle East peace settlement. . . . In Palestine surely is a case, on human grounds and to promote a stable settlement, for transfer of population. Let the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in. Let them be compensated handsomely for their land and let their settlement elsewhere be carefully organised and generously financed', stated the resolution, which was published in the Labour Party's volume, *The International Post-War Settlement*.<sup>37</sup> The publication of the resolution prompted a debate on 7 May in the JAE – not so much about the notion of transfer (all were agreed about its merits if not its practicality) as about how the Zionist leadership should react. Shertok, Israel's future first foreign minister and second prime minister, said: 'The transfer can be the arch-stone, the final stage in the political development, but on no account the starting point. By doing this [i.e., by talking prematurely about transfer] we are mobilising enormous forces against the idea and subverting [its implementation] in advance. . . . And he continued (prophetically): 'What will happen once the Jewish state is established – it is very possible that the result will be transfer of Arabs.' Shertok was followed by Ben-Gurion:

When I heard these things [about the Labour Party Executive's resolution] . . . I had some difficult thoughts. . . . [But] I reached the conclusion that it is best that this remain [i.e., that the resolution remain as part of Labour's official platform] . . . . Were we asked what should be our programme, I would find it inconceivable to tell them transfer. . . . because talk on the subject might cause harm in two ways: (a) It could cause us harm in public opinion in the world, because it might give the impression that there is no room [for more Jews] in Palestine without ejecting the Arabs. . . . [and] (b) [such declarations in support of transfer] would force the Arabs onto. . . . their hind legs.' Nonetheless, Ben-Gurion added: 'Transfer of Arabs is easier than any other type of transfer. There are Arab states in the area. . . . and it is clear that if the Arabs [of Palestine] are sent [to the Arab countries] this will improve their situation and not the contrary. . . .'

The rest of the JAE members followed suit. Yitzhak Gruenbaum, who would be Israel's first interior minister, declared:

To my mind there is an Arab consideration in favour of transfer. That is, in the increase of population of Iraq by [additional] Arabs. It is the function of the Jews occasionally to make the Gentiles [Goyim] aware of things they did not until then perceive. . . . If for example it is possible to create artificially in Iraq conditions that will magnetise the Arabs of Palestine to emigrate to Iraq, I do not see in it any iniquity or crime. . . .'

Eliahu Dobkin, director of the Jewish Agency's Immigration Department, said: 'There will be in the country a large [Arab] minority and it must be ejected. There is no room for our internal inhibitions [in this matter] . . . . Eliezer Kaplan, who would become Israel's first finance minister, said: 'Regarding the matter of transfer I have only one request: Let us not start arguing among ourselves. . . . This will cause us the most damage externally.' Dov Joseph, the JA's legal adviser and soon to be Israel's justice minister, chimed in: 'I agree with Mr. Kaplan.' Werner David Senator said: 'I do not regard the question of transfer as a moral or immoral problem. . . . It is not a matter I would refuse to consider. . . .'<sup>38</sup>

Ben-Gurion returned to the transfer theme the following month, when he (unrealistically) proposed bringing one million Jewish immigrants to Palestine 'immediately'. The religious Mizrahi Party's Moshe Haim Shapira said that the matter would compel the Yishuv to consider transferring Arabs. Ben-Gurion replied:

I am opposed that any proposal for transfer should come from our side. [But] I do not reject transfer on moral grounds and I do not reject it on political grounds. If there is a chance for it [I support it]; with regard to the Druze it is possible. It is possible to move all the Druze voluntarily to Jabal Druze [in Syria]. The other [Arabs] – I don't know. But it must not be a Jewish proposal. . . .<sup>39</sup>

If the Second World War and the Holocaust in various ways quickened Zionist interest in transfer, they also, for a moment, resuscitated British support for a settlement based on partition and Jewish statehood in part of Palestine. In 1943 a special British ministerial committee submitted a proposal based on partition and in January 1944 the full cabinet endorsed the idea, with implementation left to the post-war era. In turn, this renewed advocacy of transfer in British and, perhaps paradoxically, Arab official circles.

In January 1943 a senior British Colonial Office official, the Duke of Devonshire, proposed the following trade-off: That Britain establish an Arab state in Libya, just conquered from the Italians, and that the Arab world, in exchange acquiesce in the establishment of a Jewish state 'in Palestine'. It was untrue, he added, that the Zionists had over the years displaced Arabs from Palestine but 'in any case . . . the Arab population in Palestine might be dealt with by an offer of assistance to migrate to Libya for those families who find conditions in Palestine unendurable'.<sup>40</sup>

Hard on the heels of the end of World War II, another prominent Englishman, General John Glubb, the Arabophile commander of Transjordan's army, the Arab Legion, became a prominent advocate of transfer (alongside partition of Palestine between a Jewish State and Transjordan). In July 1946, Glubb penned a memorandum entitled 'A Note on Partition as a Solution to the Palestine Problem'. In it he recommended partition 'because no other scheme offers any possibility of success'. He envisaged a Jewish state encompassing the Coastal Plain, the Jezreel Valley and the lower Jordan Valley. Glubb was uncertain about how to solve the problem of Jaffa, a large Arab town in the middle of the Jewish coastal area. One possibility, he wrote, was the transfer of its population 'somewhere else' over a 10-15 year period. As to the other Arab inhabitants in the Jewish state-to-be's areas, Glubb (rather hesitantly) recommended transfer:

The best course will probably be to allow a time limit during which persons who find themselves in one or other state against their wishes, will be able to opt for citizenship of the other state . . . Some might, of course, opt for citizenship . . . without desiring to move into and reside in it. The great majority, however, would probably wish to move . . . A small proportion of the minorities could move by direct exchange . . . But . . . a large balance of Arabs would be left in the Jewish state. The Jews would want to get rid of them, and would soon find means of making the Arabs wish to move . . . It is not of course intended to move Arab displaced persons by force, but merely so to arrange that when these persons find themselves left behind in the Jewish state, well paid jobs and good prospects should be simultaneously open for them in the Arab state.<sup>41</sup>

Glubb seemed to be speaking of a 'voluntary' transfer reinforced by a number of tempting carrots. But in a follow-up 'Note', written apparently

a few weeks later, Glubb appeared to move towards an acceptance of some measure of compulsory transfer as well.

When the undoubtedly Arab and undoubtedly Jewish areas had been cleared of all members of the other community, work would begin on deciding the actual frontier . . . [In the frontier belt] every effort would be made to arrange exchanges of land and population so as to leave as few people as possible to be compensated for cash.<sup>42</sup>

In January 1947, as the United Nations partition resolution drew closer, Glubb refined his scheme. The Arabs in the Jewish-designated areas 'would have to be bought out and settled elsewhere', he wrote. But he added:

The proposal for partition put forward in previous memoranda did not involve the forcible transfer of any of the population [Those wishing to move to the other state would be compensated.] . . . HMG or British troops will not be concerned with moving anybody — certainly not their forcible eviction from their homes. It is inconceivable that British troops be used to evict [Arabs] from their homes. Such things can be done by Germans or Russians . . . British troops are not capable of being frightful enough . . . [But] to attempt forcibly to transfer large blocks of Arabs by using Jewish troops would lead to civil war, and troops of the Arab states would refuse to do it. The inevitable conclusion therefore seems to be that large blocks of population cannot be moved, and hence that the only frontier which can in practice be implemented is one running approximately along the existing [demographic] front line . . .<sup>43</sup>

In effect, what Glubb was saying was that partition, between a Jewish state and Transjordan, was the only solution; that for partition to work, there would have to be a transfer of the Arabs out of the Jewish state (as of the far smaller number of Jews out of the Arab areas); and that the transfer would have to be voluntary and compensated because a compulsory transfer, by British or Jewish or Arab troops, was inconceivable and/or would merely lead to widespread hostilities.

But it wasn't only Zionist activists and British officials who during the early and mid-1940s swung around to acceptance of partition accompanied by a transfer of Arabs out of the Jewish state-to-be. So did senior Arab politicians — or at least that is what generally reliable British officials recorded them as saying at the time. In December 1944, Nuri Sa'id, Iraq's senior politician and sometime prime minister, told a British interlocutor that if partition was imposed on the Arabs, there would be a 'necessity of removing the Arabs from the Jewish state' (though it could be done by exchange . . .). Sa'id assumed that the settlement would not provoke a violent Arab reaction but supported the idea — a small Jewish state in Palestine and transfer — only if it provided 'finality' to the problem. In a follow-up conversation, the British official heard similar things from Iraq's foreign minister, Arshad al-Urmani: 'Arshad . . . repeated what Nuri

had said . . . over [i.e., regarding] probable [Arab] reactions and also the necessity of removing the Arabs from the Jewish State.<sup>44</sup> Nuri had put his position still more forcefully in a conversation with Alec Kirkbride, the British Resident in Amman:

Provided the partition was effected on an equitable basis, it might perhaps be best to lose part of Palestine in order to confine the Zionist danger within permanent boundaries . . . Nuri Pasha said that the only fair basis could be the cession to the Jews of those areas where they constituted a majority . . . [while] the Arab section of Palestine would be embodied in Transjordan.<sup>45</sup>

In Amman there was an understandable sympathy for a partition of Palestine between the Jews and Transjordan – and it quite naturally led to acceptance of partition's corollary, transfer. At a meeting in Jerusalem in February 1944, between Sir Harold MacMichael, the high commissioner, Lord Moyne, the Minister Resident in the Middle East, Kirkbride, and General Edward Spears, head of the British political mission in Syria and Lebanon, there was general agreement that 'partition offers the only hope of a final settlement for Palestine'. And, according to Moyne, Jordan's prime minister, Tawfiq Abul Huda, and Egypt's prime minister, Mustafa Nahas Pasha, both recognised that 'a final settlement can only be reached by means of partition' (though the Arab leaders, it was said, would not say so publicly).<sup>46</sup>

Abul Huda had informed Kirkbride directly of his position at two meetings, on 3 December 1943 and 16 January 1944. At the second meeting, Abul Huda – according to MacMichael – had said that 'he did not . . . see any alternative to partition . . .'.<sup>47</sup> Two years later, in July 1946, Kirkbride cabled London about meetings he had just had with King Abdullah and Transjordan's new prime minister, Ibrahim Pasha Hashim:

[Abdullah] is for partition and he feels that the other Arab leaders may acquiesce in that solution although they may not approve of it openly . . . [Hashim said] the only just and permanent solution lay in absolute partition with an exchange of populations; to leave Jews in an Arab state or Arabs in a Jewish state would lead inevitably to further trouble between the two peoples. Ibrahim Pasha admitted that he would not be able to express this idea in public for fear of being called a traitor . . . [He] said that the other Arab representatives at the discussions would be divided into people like himself who did not dare to express their true views and extremists who simply demanded the impossible.<sup>48</sup>

A month later, Kirkbride commented:

King Abdullah and Prime Minister of Jordan both consider that partition followed by an exchange of populations [meaning, as all understood, a transfer of Arabs out of the Jewish state-to-be] is only practical solution to the Palestine problem. They do not feel able to express this view publicly . . .<sup>49</sup>

What emerges from the foregoing is that the Zionist leaders, from the inception of the movement, toyed with the idea of transferring 'the Arabs' or a substantial number of Arabs out of Palestine, or any part of Palestine that was to become Jewish, as a way of solving the problem posed by the existence of an Arab majority or, down the road, a large Arab minority that was opposed to the existence of a Jewish state or to living in it. As Arab opposition, including violent resistance, to Zionism grew in the 1920s and 1930s, and as this opposition resulted in periodic British clampdowns on Jewish immigration, a consensus or near-consensus formed among the Zionist leaders around the idea of transfer as the natural, efficient and even moral solution to the demographic dilemma. The Peel Commission's proposals, which included partition and transfer, only reinforced Zionist advocacy of the idea. All understood that there was no way of carving up Palestine which would not leave in the Jewish-designated area a large Arab minority (or an Arab majority) – and that no partition settlement with such a demographic basis could work. The onset of the Second World War and the Holocaust increased Zionist desperation to attain a safe haven in Palestine for Europe's persecuted Jews – and reinforced their readiness to adopt transfer as a way of instantaneously emptying the land so that it could absorb the prospective refugees from Europe.

The bouts of Zionist reflection about and espousal of transfer usually came not out of the blue but in response to external factors or initiatives: In the early 1930s, Zionist meditation on the idea of transfer was a by-product of Arab violence and the frustration of efforts to persuade the British to allow Zionist settlement in Transjordan; in the late 1930s, it was triggered by the Arab revolt and the Peel Commission's recommendation to transfer the Arab population out of the area designated for Jewish statehood; during the early 1940s, thinking about transfer was stimulated by proposals by St. John Philby for a Middle East 'federation' and by the dire need for a (relatively) empty and safe haven for Europe's decimated Jews; and in 1944–1945, the talk was triggered by the British Labour Party Executive's decision to include transfer in its blueprint for a settlement of the Palestine question.

By the mid-1940s, the logic and necessity of transfer was also accepted by many British officials and various Arab leaders, including Jordan's King Abdullah and Prime Minister Ibrahim Pasha Hashim and by Iraq's Nuri Said. Not the Holocaust was uppermost in their minds. They were motivated mainly by the calculation that partition was the only sensible, ultimately viable and relatively just solution to the Palestine conundrum, and that a partition settlement would only be lasting if it was accompanied by a massive transfer of Arab inhabitants out of the Jewish state-to-be; a large and resentful Arab minority in the future Jewish state would be a recipe for most probably instantaneous and certainly future destabilisation and disaster.

The United Nations Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947 did not provide for population transfers and, indeed, left in the areas designated for Jewish statehood close to 400,000 Arabs (alongside some 500,000 Jews). Once battle was joined, it was a recipe for disaster – and for refugeedom for the side that lost. As it turned out, the Jews won and the great majority of the Arabs who had lived in the areas that became Israel fled or were driven out.

What then was the connection between Zionist transfer thinking before 1948 and what actually happened during the first Arab–Israeli war? Arab and pro-Arab commentators and historians have charged that this thinking amounted to pre-planning and that what happened in 1948 was simply a systematic implementation of Zionist ideology and of a Zionist ‘master-plan’ of expulsion.<sup>50</sup> Old-school Zionist commentators and historians have argued that the sporadic talk among Zionist leaders of ‘transfer’ was mere pipe-dreaming and was never undertaken systematically or seriously; hence, there was no deliberation and premeditation behind what happened in 1948, and the creation of the refugee problem owed nothing to pre-planning and everything to the circumstances of the war and the moment, chaos, immediate military needs and dictates, whims of personality, and so on.<sup>51</sup>

My feeling is that the transfer thinking and near-consensus that emerged in the 1930s and early 1940s was not tantamount to pre-planning and did not issue in the production of a policy or master-plan of expulsion; the Yishuv and its military forces did not enter the 1948 War, which was initiated by the Arab side, with a policy or plan for expulsion. But transfer was inevitable and inbuilt into Zionism – because it sought to transform a land which was ‘Arab’ into a ‘Jewish’ state and a Jewish state could not have arisen without a major displacement of Arab population; and because this aim automatically produced resistance among the Arabs which, in turn, persuaded the Yishuv’s leaders that a hostile Arab majority or large minority could not remain in place if a Jewish state was to arise or safely endure. By 1948, transfer was in the air. The transfer thinking that preceded the war contributed to the denouement by conditioning the Jewish population, political parties, military organisations and military and civilian leaderships for what transpired. Thinking about the possibilities of transfer in the 1930s and 1940s had prepared and conditioned hearts and minds for its implementation in the course of 1948 so that, as it occurred, few voiced protest or doubt; it was accepted as inevitable and natural by the bulk of the Jewish population. The facts that Palestine’s Arabs (and the Arab states) had rejected the UN partition resolution and, to nip it in the bud, had launched the hostilities that snowballed into fullscale civil war and that the Arab states had invaded Palestine and attacked Israel in May 1948 only hardened Jewish hearts toward the Palestinian Arabs, who were seen as mortal enemies and, should they be coopted into the Jewish state, a potential Fifth Column.

Thus, the expulsions that periodically dotted the Palestinian Arab exodus raised few eyebrows and thus the Yishuv’s leaders, parties and population in mid-war accepted without significant dissent or protest the militarily and politically sensible decision not to allow an Arab refugee return.

It was at this point and in this context that some Yishuv leaders occasionally looked back and reflected upon the connection between what had already happened (by autumn 1948, some 400,000–500,000 Arabs had been displaced) and the transfer thinking of the 1930s and 1940s. ‘In my opinion . . . there is no need to discuss a return of the refugees [so long as a renewal of hostilities is possible]. . .’, said Yitzhak Gruenbaum, Israel’s minister of interior, in September 1948.

In the past we had a plan, that were we able to transfer the Arab population to [neighbouring] Arab states – we would have been ready to participate in the expense of their resettlement with assistance and financial help. Now, too, I see nothing wrong with this plan . . .<sup>52</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. Bevin to Kirkbride, 24 July 1948, PRO FO 816\139.
2. Bevin to chargé d’affaires, Amman, 28 July 1948, PRO FO 816\139.
3. BMEQ to FO, 3 August 1948, PRO FO 816\139.
4. Burdett (Jerusalem) to Secretary of State, 5 Feb. 1949, PRO FO 371–75420.
5. Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 42.
6. In this context it is worth noting that at the end of the 1948 War, Israel had a population of some 750,000 Jews and 150,000 Arabs. By the year 2002, Israel’s Arab minority still constituted some 20 per cent of the country’s population (just over one million as compared with some five million Jews) – and this despite the fact that the Jews’ natural increase had been supplemented during this 50-year period by the arrival of some two and a half million new immigrants!
7. Herzl, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, I, 88.
8. Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 140.
9. Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 140. Prince Faisal, the de facto Arab ruler in Damascus, complained of this advocacy of ‘the removal of the Arab population of Palestine by massive camel-trek’ (see Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 141).
10. Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, 98–99.
11. See Joseph Schechtman, *Population Transfers in Asia*, 1–50, which surveys the India–Pakistan exchange of population as part of its polemic arguing ‘the [retroactive] case for [an] Arab–Jewish exchange of population’ (pp. 84–141), meaning the transfer or expulsion of the Palestinian Arabs in 1948.
12. Kisch to Weizmann, 20 May 1930, Kisch Papers temporarily in author’s keeping. It is worth noting that even before the 1929 riots, Kisch had been an enthusiastic advocate of transfer. In September 1928 he wrote about his meeting with the British director of the Lands Department in the Iraqi

administration. The official had highlighted Iraq's 'growing need for fellow-heen' to develop its agriculture. 'This is what I have always been hoping and waiting for, having before now expressed the view that with the irrigation of Mesopotamia will be found the solution of the racial problem in Palestine', commented Kisch. 'Propaganda for an Arab emigration to Iraq cannot be made by us - except by the most indirect methods - but for the Iraq Government to do so would be wonderful, and in the interests [sic] of both countries' (Kisch to Weizmann, 21 Sep. 1928, Kisch Papers temporarily in author's keeping).

13. Weizmann (London), 'Awaiting the Shaw Report', 6 Mar. 1930, *Letters of Chaim Weizmann*, Series B, 591-592.
14. Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, 329.
15. Masalha, *Expulsion*, 32.
16. Teveth, 'The Evolution of "transfer" . . .', 16-21.
17. Jabotinsky, 'Round Table with the Arabs', *Ktavim*, 245. I would like to thank Dr Yoram Meital for directing me to this reference.
18. Katz, *Jabo*, 982. Jabotinsky testified on 11 Feb. 1937 in London.
19. 'Note of a Conversation between Mr D. Ben-Gurion and Mr M. Shertok and His Excellency the High Commissioner on July 9th, 1936 at Government Offices', HA, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi Papers, file 27. Ben-Gurion's views had apparently changed: During World War I and in its immediate aftermath, he had opposed transfer (see Simons, *International Proposals*, 16-17: 'it is not proper or possible to deport the country's present inhabitants').
20. Protocol of the Meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, 1 Nov. 1936, CZA S100/20B.
21. Palestine Royal Commission Report, Cmd 5479 (London, July 1937), 389-91.
22. D. Ben-Gurion to Amos Ben-Gurion, 5 Oct. 1937, DBG Correspondence, IDFA. See also Shapira, *Land and Power*, 271.
23. Entry for 12 July 1937, David Ben-Gurion Diary, BGA. Emphasis in original.
24. See texts of speeches by Ben-Gurion, Ussishkin, Ruppin, etc. in CZA S5-1543. Weizmann also delivered a pro-transfer speech and tabled a specific transfer proposal (but the text of his speech is not in the file; it is referred to in others' speeches). Following the Congress, the Zionist Organisation issued a lauded version of the speeches, in which most references to transfer were deleted (see *Twentieth Zionist Congress*). After seeing a copy of the Peel Commission Report, Weizmann met Colonial Secretary William Ormsby-Gore, in secret, on 19 July 1937, and wholeheartedly endorsed the transfer recommendation. 'I said', Weizmann reported, 'that the whole success of the [partition] scheme depended on whether the Government . . . [carried] out this recommendation.' Ormsby-Gore 'agreed that once Gallilee was given to the Jews . . . the position would be very difficult without transfer' (see Weizmann, 'Summary Note of interview with Mr Ormsby Gore, Colonial Office, Monday, July 19th, 1937, at 10:45 a.m.', Weizmann Archive. See also Simons, *International Proposals*, 19-23).
25. Interestingly, Jabotinsky, at least in public, continued to deny the necessity of transfer, if not actually to reject or condemn the idea. 'I never dreamt of demanding of the Arabs, [living] in a Jewish country, to emigrate from it. This could be a very dangerous precedent, which will be very harmful to

the interests of the Jews in the Diaspora . . . This whole matter of uprooting masses [of people] is nothing but foolishness' (Katz, *Jabo*, 1001, quoting Jabotinsky on 7 July 1937).

26. See documents, including protocols of the deliberations of the Transfer Committee, in CZA S25-247; and Katz, 'The Deliberations of the Jewish Agency Committee for Transfer of Population 1937-1938'.
27. Protocol of the Meeting of the JAE, 7 June 1938, CZA S100-24B.
28. Protocol of the Joint Meeting of the JAE and the Political Committee of the Zionist Actions Committee, 12 June 1938, CZA S100-24B.
29. Entry for 10 Dec. 1938, Ben-Gurion Diary, BGA; and protocol of JAE meeting of 11 Dec. 1938, CZA S100/25b. See also Simons, 'Supplement No. 1', 9.
30. See Ehrlich, *Lebanon*, 73 and 75-76. Sultan al-Atrash wasn't the only Arab interested in transferring Arabs from place to place. In Aug. 1941, Elias Sasson, head of the Arab Division of the Jewish Agency Political Department, reported that a certain Muhammad Haj Abdullah, a Muslim notable in southern Lebanon, had approached him with a proposal to sell to the JA the lands of Jabal 'Amal (roughly the area between the Litani River and the Palestine-Lebanon frontier), and transfer its Shi'ite inhabitants to Iraq. Sasson further reported that Lebanon's president, Bishara al-Khoury, thought that Jabal 'Amal's Shi'ites should be ejected and replaced by Maronites who had emigrated to the United States. Another senior Lebanese politician, Emile Edde, in 1946 reportedly proposed to Weizmann that Tyre and Sidon be handed over to Yishuv control and their 100,000 Muslim inhabitants be transferred (see Ehrlich, *Lebanon*, 118).
31. David Ben-Gurion, 'Outlines of Zionist Policy', 15 Oct. 1941, CZA Z4-14632. Here, too, Ben-Gurion took care to balance his obviously pro-transfer thinking by professions of liberal egalitarianism regarding the status of the Arab minority in the future Jewish state.
32. For a good summary of the Philby plan, see Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity*, 80-106.
33. 'Short Minutes of Meeting Held on Thursday, January 30th, 1941, at 77 Great Russell Street, London WC.1', unsigned, Weizmann Archive, 2271.
34. 'Meeting: I.M. Maiskii-Ch. Weizmann (London, 3 February 1941)', in *Documents on Israeli-Soviet Relations, 1947-1953*, 3-5.
35. Sharett, *Political Diary*, V, 234-235. During 1941, Shertok seems to have sounded out almost everyone he talked to about the possibilities of transfer (see, for example, his meeting with Egyptian journalist Mahmoud Azmi, Shertok, *Political Diary*, V, 246-247).
36. Entry for 20 Dec. 1940, Weitz, *My Diary*, II, 181. Weitz had been a leading member of the Jewish Agency 'Transfer Committee' of 1937-1938.
37. The passage is quoted in Simons, *International Proposals*, 185-207, which also discusses the resolution's formulation; and, partially, in Schechtman, *Population Transfers*, 118. The resolution also proposed the expansion of Palestine's area, in order to accommodate the expected Jewish influx, 'by agreement with Egypt, Syria or Transjordan'. See also Gorny, *British Labour Movement*, 178-79.
38. Protocol of the JAE Meeting of 7 May 1944, CZA S100-42B.
39. Protocol of the JAE Meeting of 20 June 1944, CZA S100-43B.

40. Duke of Devonshire to Secretary of State [for the Colonies], 27 Jan. 1943, PRO CO 733\443\10. It is worth noting that during the 1950s, Israel attempted to covertly engineer a (compensated) migration of part of its Arab minority to Libya.
41. Glubb, 'A Note on Partition as a Solution of the Palestine Problem', July 1946, PRO WO 216\207.
42. Glubb, 'A Further Note on Partition as a Solution of the Palestine Question', undated, PRO CO-537 1856.
43. Glubb, 'A Note on the Exact Siting of the Frontier in the Event of the Adoption of Partition', undated but with covering note Glubb to Kirkbride, 16 Jan. 1947, PRO FO 816\86.
44. 'Note on conversation with General Nuri Sa'id, the Iraqi Prime Minister and the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs in Baghdad on 5th and 6th December, 1944', illegible signature, 18 Dec. 1944, PRO FO 921\149. Hamdi Pachachi, the Iraqi prime minister, took a different line, according to the report. He said that partition in Palestine would cause 'serious trouble' in Iraq.
45. Kirkbride to MacMichael, 28 Nov. 1944, PRO FO 921\149.
46. Moyne to Foreign Secretary Eden, 1 Mar. 1944, PRO FO 921\148. One could, of course, dismiss statements like Nuri Sa'id's, as a case of Arab leaders merely telling allied British officials what they believed these Britishers wanted to hear. My feeling is that these leaders genuinely believed that partition was likely if not inevitable and that for the settlement to work, there would have to be a transfer as well.
47. Note by Oliver Stanley, Colonial Secretary, and appended letter MacMichael to Stanley, 16 Jan. 1944, PRO FO 921\148.
48. Kirkbride to T. Wikeley, Eastern Department, FO, 29 July 1946, PRO FO 816\85.
49. Kirkbride to FO, 23 Aug. 1946 (No. 1387), and Kirkbride to FO 23 Aug. 1946 (No. 1364), both in PRO FO 816\85. Kirkbride left unclear where Abdullah and Hashim expected the Palestinian Arabs to be transferred to – Transjordan, Iraq, or elsewhere.
50. See Masalha, *Expulsion*, 175; and Finkelstein, 'Myths . . .', 67 et al.
51. See Shapira, *Land*, 285–286; and Teveth, 'The Evolution of "Transfer" in Zionist Thinking', 47–48 and 54–57.
52. Protocol of Israel Cabinet meeting of 12 Sep. 1948, ISA.

## Deciding against a return of the refugees, April–December 1948

The exodus confronted the Yishuv with a major problem: Whether or not to allow those who had fled or been expelled to return. Already during the spring, refugees in various localities began pressing to return. Local Haganah and civic leaders had to decide, without having national guidelines, whether to allow this – and almost invariably ruled against.<sup>1</sup> In May, the Arab states, led by Jordan, began clamouring for a refugee return. From early summer, the Yishuv's leaders came under intense international pressure – spearheaded first by Count Folke Bernadotte, the Swedish United Nations Mediator for Palestine, and later by the United States – to repatriate the refugees. At the same time, the government was subjected to lobbying by army and local authorities in various parts of the country to bar a refugee return. In mid-June the Cabinet discussed the matter and a consensus emerged to prevent a return, at least so long as the hostilities continued. The consensus turned into a formal Cabinet decision in July. Without doubt, this was one of the most important decisions taken by the new State in its first formative months.

The decision, taken against the backdrop of the pan-Arab invasion and the intensification of the fighting, had crystallised over April–June. Already in early April, as the Haganah switched to the offensive, local commanders and Arab affairs advisers in predominantly Jewish areas decided to bar a return to their areas. For example, Alexandroni's Arab affairs advisers, responsible for a large section of the coastal plain, formally decided 'not to allow the return of the Arabs who evacuated the area'. They were driven mainly by calculations of Jewish security, but also by a desire to protect the Arabs from Jewish deprecations and by considerations of economic advantage (preventing a refugee return to harvest crops would translate into Jewish economic gain).<sup>2</sup>

The mass exodus from Haifa and Jaffa in late April and early May focused minds in the Jewish leadership regarding a possible return.



Golda Myerson (Meir), the acting head of the JA-PD, visited Arab Haifa a few days after its conquest. She reported on 6 May:

It is a dreadful thing to see the dead city. Next to the port I found children, women, the old, waiting for a way to leave. I entered the houses, there were houses where the coffee and pita bread were left on the table, and I could not avoid [thinking] that this, indeed, had been the picture in many Jewish towns [i.e., in Europe, during World War II].

The situation, she said, 'raised many questions': Should the Jews

make an effort to bring the Arabs back to Haifa, or not [?] Meanwhile, so long as it is not decided differently, we have decided on a number of rules, and these include: We won't go to Acre or Nazareth to bring back the Arabs. But, at the same time, our behaviour should be such that if, because of it, they come back - [then] let them come back. We shouldn't behave badly with the Arabs [who remained] so that others [who fled] won't return.<sup>3</sup>

A few days later, Myerson spoke about the issue within the context of general policy toward Palestine's Arabs. She told the Mapai Central Committee that the Jews could not treat villagers who had fled because they did not want to fight the Yishuv, 'such as [those of] Sheikh Muwannis', in the same way as hostile villagers. But while implying that she thought 'friendly' villagers should be allowed back, Myerson avoided saying so outright. Rather, she posed questions:

What are we to do with the villages . . . abandoned by friends? . . . Are we prepared to preserve these villages in order that their inhabitants might return, or do we want to wipe out every trace that there had been a village on the site?

She then turned to Haifa:

I am not among those extremists - and there are such, and I applaud them, who want to do everything that can be done in order to bring back the Arabs. I say I am not willing to make extraordinary arrangements to bring back Arabs.

The question remained of how the Yishuv should behave toward those who had remained. Ill-treatment might both prompt those who had remained to leave and discourage those who had left from returning - 'and we would [then] be rid of the lot of them'. She concluded by saying that the party and, by implication, the Yishuv, had entered the war without a clear policy regarding Palestine's Arabs. She called for a comprehensive discussion of the 'Arab Question' in the central committee.<sup>4</sup> But the call went unheeded.

Myerson's line was an amplification of the policy sketched by Ben-Gurion during his visit to Haifa on 1 May: The Jews should treat the remaining Arabs 'with civil and human equality' but 'it is not our job to

worry about the return of [those who had fled]'. Clearly, neither he nor Myerson was interested in their return (though Myerson implied that she was willing to make an exception of 'friendly' Arabs). Ben-Gurion had already said as much back in early February, specifically regarding the depopulated Arab neighbourhoods of west-Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

The crystallisation in the national leadership of the policy against a return was heralded on 25 April - as the exodus from Haifa and Jaffa was under way - in a cable from Shertok, in New York, to his officials in Tel Aviv: 'Suggest consider issue warning Arabs now evacuating [that they] cannot be assured of return.'<sup>6</sup>

Pressure for a return began to build up in early May as, for their part, the Arab leaders began to contemplate the political, economic, and military implications of the exodus. At a meeting in Amman on 2 May, Arab officials and notables from Haifa agreed that 'the Arabs should return to Haifa'. There was, apparently, coordination with the British as the following day, the British Army removed several Haganah roadblocks in the town and took up positions in the abandoned Arab neighbourhoods. Immediately afterward, 'Azzam Pasha, 'Abdullah and Qawuqji all issued well-publicised calls to the refugees to return, while the Mandate Government proclaimed, on 6 May: 'In the view of the Government, the Arabs can feel completely safe in Haifa.'<sup>7</sup> The day before, 'Abdullah had called on 'every man of strength and wisdom, every young person of power and faith, who has left the country [i.e., Palestine], let him return to the dear spot. No one should remain outside the country except the rich and the old.' 'Abdullah went on to thank 'those of you . . . who have remained where they are in spite of the tyranny now prevailing', and went out of his way to cite the JA condemnation of the Deir Yassin Massacre.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the month, HIS-AD was reporting that 'in the Arab states the pressure on the refugees to return' was 'building up'.<sup>9</sup>

This joint Arab-British effort, aiming at a general repatriation and not only to Haifa, came to nought. The Haganah was not allowing Arabs to return and, given the continued fighting and confusion on the ground, the call to return may not have generated much enthusiasm among the refugees themselves. In Haifa itself, where initially the local Jewish civilian leadership had not been averse to a return, a major change of heart took place. One participant (expressing the general view) in a meeting of local officials in Haifa's town hall on 6 June, put it this way: 'There are no sentiments in war . . . Better to cause them injustice than that [we suffer] a disaster . . . We have no interest in their returning.'<sup>10</sup>

The talk and diplomatic movement in May surrounding a possible return helped trigger the consolidation in Israel of an effective, if loosely coordinated, lobby against repatriation. The lobby consisted of local authorities, the kibbutz movements, the settlement departments of the National Institutions, Haganah commanders and influential figures such as Yosef Weitz and Ezra Danin.

Weitz regarded the exodus, which he had helped to promote in a number of places, as an implementation, albeit unplanned and largely spontaneous, of the transfer schemes of the late 1930s and early and mid-1940s, which had envisaged the movement of the Arab minority out of the future Jewish State so that it would be homogeneous, politically stable and secure against subversion from within. He and his colleagues realised that, for Israel's sake, the exodus must be expanded by nudging or propelling more Arab communities into flight and the post-exodus status quo consolidated and shored up. A return would endanger the Jewish State. Weitz considered that the matter was sufficiently important to merit the establishment of a special state body to supervise what he defined as the 'retroactive transfer'. During March and April, Weitz energetically sought political backing and help to implement the transfer. From May, Weitz pressed Ben-Gurion and Shertok to set up a 'Transfer Committee', preferably with himself at its head, to oversee 'transfer policy', which in the main was to focus on measures that would assure that there would be no return. More guardedly, the committee was also to advise the political leadership and the Haganah on further population displacements.

The first unofficial Transfer Committee – composed of Weitz, Danin and Sasson, now head of the Middle East Affairs Department of the Foreign Ministry – came into being at the end of May, following Danin's agreement to join and Shertok's 28 May unofficial sanction of the committee's existence and goals.

In mid-May, Danin resigned from the Committee for Arab Property. Danin wrote Weitz that what was needed was 'an institution whose role will be . . . to seek ways to carry out the transfer of the Arab population at this opportunity when it has left its normal place of residence'. Danin thought that Christian organisations could be found, acting under the rubric of helping the refugees, which would assist in their resettlement in the Arab countries. 'Let us not waste the fact that a large Arab population has moved from its home, and achieving such a thing would be very difficult in normal times', he wrote. To prevent a refugee return 'they must be confronted with *faits accomplis*'. Among the *faits accomplis* Danin proposed were the destruction of Arab houses, 'settling Jews in all the area evacuated' and expropriating Arab property.<sup>11</sup>

On 28 May, Weitz went to Shertok and proposed that the Cabinet appoint himself, Sasson and Danin as a Transfer Committee 'to hammer out a plan of action designed [to achieve] the goal of transfer'. Shertok, according to Weitz, congratulated him on his initiative and agreed that the 'momentum [of Arab flight] must be exploited and turned into an accomplished fact'.<sup>12</sup> On 30 May, Weitz met Finance Minister Kaplan, number three in the Mapai hierarchy, and, according to Weitz, received his blessing.<sup>13</sup> That day, the Transfer Committee met for its first working session, and Weitz began preparing a draft proposal for its activities.

But official authorisation by Ben-Gurion and the full Cabinet continued to elude him. Nonetheless, from the beginning of June, with JNF funds and personnel, the committee set about razing villages in various areas. On 5 June, Weitz, armed with a three-page memorandum, signed by himself, Danin and Sasson, entitled 'Retroactive Transfer, A Scheme for the Solution of the Arab Question in the State of Israel', went to see Ben-Gurion.

The memorandum stated that the war had unexpectedly brought about 'the uprooting of masses [of Arabs] from their towns and villages and their flight out of the area of Israel . . . This process may continue as the war continues and our army advances.' The war and the exodus had so deepened Arab enmity 'as perhaps to make impossible the existence of hundreds of thousands of Arabs in the State of Israel and the existence of the state with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants who bear that hatred'. Israel, therefore, 'must be inhabited largely by Jews, so that there will be in it very few non-Jews.' 'The uprooting of the Arabs should be seen as a solution to the Arab question . . . and, in line with this, it must from now on be directed according to a calculated plan geared toward the goal of "retroactive transfer".'

To consolidate and amplify the transfer, the committee proposed:

- (1) Preventing the Arabs from returning to their places.
- (2) [Extending] help to the Arabs to be absorbed in other places.'

Regarding the first guideline, the committee proposed:

- (1) Destruction of villages as much as possible during military operations.
- (2) Prevention of any cultivation of land by them [i.e., the Arabs], including reaping, collection [of crops], picking [olives] and so on . . .
- (3) Settlement of Jews in a number of villages and towns so that no "vacuum" is created.
- (4) Enacting legislation [geared to barring a return].
- (5) [Making] propaganda [aimed at non-return].

The committee proposed that it oversee the destruction of villages and the renovation of certain sites for Jewish settlement, negotiate the purchase of Arab land, prepare legislation for expropriation and negotiate the resettlement of the refugees in Arab countries.<sup>14</sup>

Weitz recorded that Ben-Gurion 'agreed to the whole line' but thought that the Yishuv should first set in train the destruction of the villages, establish Jewish settlements and prevent Arab cultivation, and only later worry about the organised resettlement of the refugees in the Arab countries. Ben-Gurion agreed to the idea of a supervisory committee but was opposed to Weitz's 'temporary committee'. At the same time, he approved the start of organised destruction by the committee of the villages, about which Weitz had informed him.<sup>15</sup>

According to Ben-Gurion's account of the meeting, he had approved the establishment of a committee to oversee 'the cleaning up [nikui]

of the Arab settlements, cultivation of [Arab fields] and their settlement [by Jews], and the creation of labour battalions to carry out this work'. Nowhere did he explicitly refer to the destruction of villages or the prevention of a refugee return.<sup>16</sup>

The following day, 6 June, Weitz wrote Ben-Gurion:

I... take the liberty of setting down your answer to the scheme proposal I submitted to you, that: A) You will call a meeting immediately to discuss [the scheme] and to appoint a committee... B) You agree that the actions marked in clauses 1, 2 [i.e., the destruction of villages and the prevention of Arab cultivation]... begin immediately.

Weitz continued: 'In line with this, I have given an order to begin [these operations] in different parts of the Galilee, the Beit Shean Valley, the Hills of Ephraim and Samaria.'<sup>17</sup> Weitz, of course, was covering himself. He sensed that on this sensitive subject, Ben-Gurion might prefer not to commit anything to paper, and he did not want to leave himself open to charges that he had acted without authorisation. Probably he also wanted to prod Ben-Gurion to set up the committee.

Then, using his JNF branch offices, Weitz set in motion the levelling of a handful of villages (al Mughar, near Gedera, Fajja, near Petah Tikva, Biyar Adas, near Magdiel, Beit Dajan, east of Tel Aviv, Miska, near Ramat Hakovesh, Sumeiriya, near Acre, Buteimat and Sabbarin, southeast of Haifa). His agents toured the countryside to determine which other villages should be destroyed or preserved and renovated for future Jewish settlement. He remained hopeful that official Cabinet-level endorsement of his actions would be forthcoming and that an official letter of appointment would be issued for the Transfer Committee.

But, at least initially, Weitz was unaware that his semi-covert activities had been noted by Mapam and that Mapam, together with Shitrit, had launched a counter-campaign to halt the destruction of the villages and to resist the atmosphere of transfer of which this destruction was a manifestation. This campaign was probably at least in part responsible for Weitz's inability to obtain formal, Cabinet-level authorisation for the Transfer Committee. At the beginning of July, Weitz suspended the destruction operations, effectively terminating the activities of the first, unofficial, self-appointed Transfer Committee.

But by then, the government decision to oppose a refugee return was all but formalised (in this sense, Weitz's efforts had been fruitful). Initially there had been polyphony and dissidence. On 23 May, Shitrit had told his Cabinet colleagues:

A great many of them still have giant assets [in the country]... and they will no doubt return. I do not believe that they have acquiesced in the idea of [permanent] leaving... It will be sufficient to demonstrate [our goodwill for [them]] to begin to return... If they return - and in my opinion they will certainly return - we must find a way [to make sure] that there will

be no discrimination [against the returnees] regarding education, health and religion...<sup>18</sup>

Justice Minister Felix Rosenblueth (Pinhas Rosen) had spoken out against transfer and criticised 'the plunder of [Arab] property' and the destruction of villages as designed to prevent a refugee return.<sup>19</sup> And on 29 May the official state radio station, Kol Yisrael (the Voice of Israel), had proclaimed that Israel would allow a refugee return.<sup>20</sup>

Weitz had notified Foreign Minister Shertok of the broadcast and Shertok had minuted his director general, Walter Eytan:

We must avoid unequivocal statements on this matter. For the moment, only [use] a negative formulation. That is, so long as the war continues, there should be no talk of allowing a return. [But don't let it appear] from our statements that at the war's end, they will be allowed back. Let us keep open every option.<sup>21</sup>

Shertok was reflecting the gist of what had been tentatively decided five days earlier, on 1 June. Shertok, Shitrit, Cabinet Secretary Zeev Sharef, Minority Affairs Ministry Director General Gad Machnes, and Sasson had discussed the issue and, in Ben-Gurion's terse diary phrase, concluded that the Arabs 'were not to be helped to return' and that the IDF commanders 'were to be issued with the appropriate orders'.<sup>22</sup> At the full Cabinet meeting that day, Ben-Gurion and his colleagues tackled the problem obliquely while referring to the question of freedom of movement across the front lines if a truce was concluded. 'We have no real interest in freedom of movement', declared the prime minister; it would enable refugees to return to the empty villages along the Jerusalem - Tel Aviv road. Agriculture Minister Aharon Cising put it more directly:

Freedom of movement along the roads will be reflected in [i.e., will result in] the return of Arabs to the villages... There are more than 100 Arab settlements in our hands; the possibility of the return of Arabs to them during the truce is a great danger.

His fellow Mapam minister, Mordechai Bentov, agreed.<sup>23</sup>

The political leadership was on the way to reaching a firm strategic decision against a refugee return. Meanwhile, the army was instructed to stymie the return on the ground. On 9 June and 11 June, front-line units were instructed to bar villagers from harvesting crops or entering 'the areas in our hands'.<sup>24</sup> Two days later, on 13 June, Oded Brigade HQ ordered its battalions 'to take every possible measure to prevent' a return and thus 'we will prevent tactical and political complications down the road'.<sup>25</sup>

Weitz and his colleagues were not the only anti-return lobbyists in the arena. Others were hard at work during the crucial days before and during the First Truce (11 June-8 July) pressing the Cabinet not to

succumb to international or internal political pressures. From around the country, local leaders demanded that the government bar a return. The more distant from the centre of Jewish population or isolated the settlement, and the more vulnerable, the stronger was the clamour against a return.

In the first days of June, the notables of the Safad Jewish community attempted to appeal directly to the Cabinet. They journeyed to Tel Aviv and got as far as Shlomo Kaddar, the Principal Assistant at the Cabinet Secretariat. He reported that they had demanded that the government bar a return, set up a ring of Jewish settlements around the town and settle Jews in Safad's abandoned houses. 'The Jewish community will not be able to withstand the pressure of the returning Arabs, especially in view [of the fact] that most of the Arab property in Safad has been stolen and plundered since the Arabs left', they said. If the Arabs were allowed to return, the Jewish community would leave, they warned. A similar message was conveyed by Safad's leaders to a visiting delegation of Yishuv officials on 5 July. If Jewish settlers were not brought to Safad, then it were best that 'the Arab houses . . . be destroyed and blown up lest the Arabs have somewhere to return to'.<sup>26</sup> If the Jews did not quickly fill the abandoned villages, they would be 'filled with returning Arabs with hatred in their hearts', Weitz concluded after visiting the Safad area.<sup>27</sup>

A similar note was struck by Ephraim Vizhensky, secretary of the Western Galilee Settlements Block Committee and a member of Kibbutz Evron, in a letter to Cising. Western Galilee 'no longer [has] an Arab population'. There was a need 'to exploit the situation which [has] arisen . . . [and] immediately to establish [new Jewish] settlements' in the area to assure its 'Judaization'.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, a delegation of local Western Galilee leaders arrived in Tel Aviv seeking audience with ministers. They got as far as the Cabinet Secretariat, where they said

that a return to the status quo ante and a return of the Arabs were unthinkable. If the Arabs returned, they [i.e., the Jews] would leave [the area] . . . If they stay put, then it is on condition that the Arabs do not return and that the area be incorporated in the Jewish State.<sup>29</sup>

Similar petitions arrived from other parts of the country. On 2 June, Shmuel Zagorsky, the inspector of Arab property in the Gilbo'a area, urged Avraham Harzfeld to promote the establishment of new settlements in the Beit Shean Valley as a means of preventing a refugee return.

I am fearful that the Arabs of the area will return to these areas and that we will lose the immediate opportunity to set up new settlements. For my part, I have done all in my power to close the way back to the Arabs, but pressure by them to return is already being felt, he warned.<sup>30</sup>

The input of the military lobby may have weighed even more heavily with the Cabinet. IDF intelligence regarded the prospect of a mass refugee return as a major threat to the war effort. As the First Truce approached, local commanders began to press GS\Operations for guidelines. 'Waiting for exact instructions regarding the ceasefire, for fear of a return of Arabs to the villages', 'Oded' of Northern Front radioed on 2 June.<sup>31</sup> 'The problem of the return of the refugees is increasing', Northern Front radioed six days later.<sup>32</sup> On 16 June, the head of the IDF Intelligence Service wrote to Reuven Shiloah, the director of the Foreign Ministry's Political Division:

There is a growing movement by the Palestinian villagers who fled to the neighbouring countries [to] return now, during the days of the [First Truce]. There is a serious danger [that returning villagers] will fortify themselves in their villages behind our front lines, and with the resumption of warfare, will constitute at least a [potential] Fifth Column, if not active hostile concentrations.

If nothing was done, there was a danger that at the end of the truce, the IDF would have 'to set aside considerable forces again to clean up the rear and the lines of communication'.<sup>33</sup> Some officers thought that the piecemeal refugee return was part of a deliberate policy by the Arab states with clear political and economic goals.<sup>34</sup>

Officials from government departments also weighed in. At the start of the First Truce, the Foreign Ministry's Middle East Department noted the Arab leaders' calls for the return to Palestine of 'the 300,000 refugees'. Already, a trickle of refugees had infiltrated back. The department concluded that a major reason for this return was the desire 'to harvest the [summer] crops . . . The Arabs in their places of wandering are suffering from real hunger.' But this harvest-gear return, the department warned, could

in time bring in its wake [re-]settlement in the villages, something which might seriously endanger many of our achievements during the first six months of the war. It is not for nothing that Arab spokesmen are . . . demanding the return . . . [of the refugees], because this would not only ease their burden but weigh us down considerably.<sup>35</sup>

Sheratok, the main Cabinet patron of Weitz's Transfer Committee, in a letter to the chairman of the World Jewish Congress, Nahum Goldmann, explained the primary consideration behind the crystallising policy against a refugee return:

The most spectacular event in the contemporary history of Palestine – more spectacular in a sense than the creation of the Jewish State – is the wholesale evacuation of its Arab population . . . The reversion to the status quo ante is unthinkable. The opportunities which the present position open up for a lasting and radical solution of the most vexing problem of the Jewish State [i.e., the large Arab minority] are so far-reaching as to take

one's breath away. Even if a certain backwash is unavoidable, we must make the most of the momentous chance with which history has presented us so swiftly and so unexpectedly.<sup>36</sup>

Matters came to a head in mid-June. The institution of the truce had stilled the guns along the front lines, posing the physical possibility of a refugee return. A trickle of refugees began making their way back to villages and towns. At the same time, the truce enabled the Arab states to ponder the enormous burden that they had unexpectedly incurred; solving the refugee problem became a major policy goal. Similarly, as the dust of battle temporarily settled, the international community at last took note. Public opinion in the West began to mobilize and refugee relief drives were inaugurated. The newly appointed Mediator, Bernadotte, who in World War II had worked on refugee assistance, having successfully orchestrated the inauguration of the truce made clear his intention to focus on a final settlement, in which a solution to the refugee problem would, it was believed in Tel Aviv, figure prominently.<sup>37</sup> He was due back in Israel on 17 June.

The Cabinet met on 16 June. In a forceful speech, Ben-Gurion set out his views, which were to serve as the basis of the consensus that emerged. 'I do not accept the version [i.e., policy] that [we] should encourage their return', he said, in an obvious response to the resolution of Mapam's Political Committee the day before, to support the return of 'peace-minded' refugees at the end of the war.<sup>38</sup> 'I believe', said Ben-Gurion, 'we should prevent their return . . . We must settle Jaffa, Jaffa will become a Jewish city . . . [Beisan and Abu Kabir must not be resettled with Arabs.] To allow the return of the Arabs to Jaffa would be . . . foolish.' If the Arabs were allowed to return 'and the war is renewed, our chances of ending the war as we wish to end it will be reduced . . . Meanwhile, we must prevent at all costs their return', he said, and, leaving no doubt in the ministers' minds about his views on the ultimate fate of the refugees, he added: 'I will be for them not returning also after the war.' He added that he favoured a 'treaty' between Israel and the Arab states and said that the Turkish-Greek experience proved that it was possible: They were

enemies for more than four hundred years — and after the last war in which the Turks won and expelled the Greeks from Anatolia — they became friends and signed a treaty of peace, and it is also possible between us and the Arabs.<sup>39</sup>

(Ben-Gurion, incidentally, had always had a hard spot for Jaffa. When arriving in Palestine as a new immigrant in 1906, he had landed at Jaffa and been horrified by the filth.<sup>40</sup> In 1936, three months into the Arab Revolt, he jotted down in his diary:

Jaffa's destruction, the town and the port, will happen, and it is good that it will happen . . . This town, which fattened on Jewish immigration and

settlement, deserves to be demolished as [i.e., because] it swings an axe over the heads of its builders and feeders [i.e., the Jews of Tel Aviv]. If Jaffa goes to hell I will not participate in its grief.<sup>41</sup>)

Shertok spoke against a return with equal vehemence. A return to the status quo ante was inconceivable. Jaffa, a 'Fifth Column' and 'pest' in the heart of Israel, must not revert to becoming an 'Arab city'. Israel had managed to 'clear Arabs' a continuous line from Tel Aviv to Romema, in west Jerusalem. Most of the country was now clear of Arabs. There was now

a need [for the government] to explain [to the Israeli public] the enormous importance of this [demographic] change in terms of [possibilities of Jewish] settlement and security, and in terms of the solidity of the state structure and [of] the solution of crucial social and political problems that cast their shadow over the whole future of the state. Had anyone arisen among us and said that one day we should expel all of them — that would have been madness. But if this happened in the course of the turbulence of war, a war that the Arab people declared against us, and because of Arab flight — then that is one of those revolutionary changes after which [the clock of] history cannot be turned back, as it did not turn back after the [sic] Syrian-Greek [i.e., should be Turkish-Greek] war, [or] after the war in Czechoslovakia . . . which caused revolutionary changes, in the social or ethnic composition in those countries . . . The aggressive enemy brought this about and the blood is on his head and he must bear [the consequences] and all the lands and the houses that remained . . . all are spoils of war . . . all this is just compensation for the [Jewish] blood spilled, for the destruction [of Jewish property] . . . This compensation is natural . . .

Nonetheless, Shertok felt that Israel must be ready to pay compensation for the land 'and this would facilitate the [refugees'] resettlement in other countries'. But 'this is [i.e., must be] our policy: That they are not returning', he said.<sup>42</sup>

Cisling said that 'at this time [i.e., during the war] we must not give the Arabs back even a shoelace. If I have reservations it is only about places where we left [Arabs in place] and we shouldn't have, because this endangers peace.' At the same time, he warned that the refugees would breed hatred toward Israel in their places of exile in the Arab world. 'They will carry in their breasts the desire for revenge and for a return . . . This orientation, of prohibiting a return of the Arabs . . . will be to our detriment.'<sup>43</sup> He implied, though did not say explicitly, that the refugees should be allowed back after the war — but added that the villagers of Qumiya, which overlooked his own home in the Jezreel Valley kibbutz of 'Ein Harod, should not be allowed back.<sup>44</sup>

No formal vote was taken or resolution passed by the ministers. But the line advocated by Ben-Gurion and Shertok — that the refugees should not be allowed back — had now become Israeli policy. Orders

immediately went out down the IDF chains of command to bar the return of refugees.<sup>45</sup> During the following weeks, again and again orders reached the brigades manning the lines to prevent a return, 'also with live fire'.<sup>46</sup> The military's opposition to a return was to remain firm and consistent through the summer. On 14 August, IDF OC Operations (and acting chief of staff) Yadin wrote to Shertok:

Because of the spread of diseases among the Arab refugees, I propose that [we] declare a quarantine on all our conquered areas. We will thus be able to more strongly oppose the demand for the return . . . and all infiltration by Arabs [back] into the abandoned villages - in addition to our opposition [to a return] on understandable military and political grounds.<sup>47</sup>

In the diplomatic arena, this policy was given a somewhat less definitive, more flexible countenance. At their meeting on 17 June, Bernadotte asked Shertok whether Israel would allow back 'the 300,000' refugees 'and would their proprietary rights be respected?' Shertok responded that 'they certainly could not return so long as the war was on<sup>48</sup> or, alternatively, that the question could not be discussed while the war was on' and that the government had not yet 'fixed its policy on the ultimate settlement of the matter'. Shertok added that Arab 'proprietary rights would certainly be respected'.<sup>49</sup>

Shertok appeared to leave open the possibility that Israel might allow back the refugees after the war. This clearly eased the task of Israeli officials meeting with United Nations and American representatives. But it seems to have been the product less of diplomatic expediency than of the exigencies of coalition politics and the need to maintain national unity in wartime. The nettle in the garden was Mapam, Mapai's chief coalition partner in the Provisional Government. Mapam opposed transfer and endorsed the right of 'peace-loving' refugees to return after the war. Had Ben-Gurion definitively closed the door to the possibility of a return, a coalition crisis would have ensued, undermining national unity and isolating Mapai in the Cabinet, where Ben-Gurion would have been left, embarrassing, with only non-socialist and religious parties as partners. Moreover, the top echelons of both the military and, to a lesser degree, the civil bureaucracies of the new state were heavily manned by Mapam cadres.

During the summer, Mapam's Political Committee, after weeks of debate, at last formulated the party's Arab policy. The party - as its co-leader Meir Ya'ari said - was agreeable to deferring a refugee return until the termination of hostilities,<sup>50</sup> but it opposed 'the intention [megama] to expel the Arabs from the areas of the emerging Jewish State' and proposed that the Cabinet issue a call to peace-minded Arabs 'to stay in their places'. As to the Arabs already in exile, the party declared: 'The Cabinet . . . should [announce] that with the return of peace they should

return to a life of peace, honour and productivity . . . The property of the returnees . . . will be restored to them.'<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile, as refugees began to cross truce lines to reach their homes and fields, spokesmen for the remaining, much diminished Arab communities within Israel began to press for specific measures of repatriation, with special pleading on behalf of Haifa, Jaffa and Christian refugees. These appeals sparked repeated - and illuminating - debates within the Israeli bureaucracies.

On 26-27 June, the Greek Catholic Archbishop of Haifa, George Hakim, back from a visit to Beirut and meetings with refugees, met with Haifa lawyer Ya'akov Salomon and then with Shitrit, Machnes and Sasson. He pleaded that Israel allow back at least Christians from Haifa. 'We were frank with him', Shitrit reported, 'and we asked him if the return of Christian Arabs to Haifa, without Muslims, would not damage Muslim-Christian unity.' The Archbishop responded that he was not troubled by this and, in any case, would not publicly appear as seeking only a return of Christians. But both on local and national levels, Hakim met only with 'no's'.<sup>52</sup>

Appeals on behalf of Jaffa's refugees also began to reach the authorities, within weeks of their exodus. The petitions, presented by the remaining notables, were anchored in the surrender agreement signed with the Haganah in mid-May. That agreement had stated that those wishing to leave were free to do so:

likewise, any male Arab who left Jaffa and wishes to return to Jaffa may apply for a permit to do so. Permits will be granted after their bona fides has been proven, provided that the [city] commander of the Haganah is convinced that the applicants will not . . . constitute a threat to peace and security.<sup>53</sup>

The notables thus had good grounds for their appeal to allow back refugees, men, women and children.<sup>54</sup> Yitzhak Chizik, the town's military governor, passed on the appeal to Shitrit, with a covering letter: 'You will certainly recall', he wrote, 'that in Clause 8 of the surrender agreement it states that every Arab who left Jaffa and wishes to come back, can do so by submitting a request, on condition, of course, that their presence here [in Jaffa] will not constitute a security risk.'<sup>55</sup>

Chizik's letter triggered a debate in the upper reaches of the government. Shitrit wrote to Ben-Gurion and Shertok that similar appeals were reaching him from Haifa.<sup>56</sup> Replying for Ben-Gurion, Shlomo Kaddar wrote:

I have been asked to tell you that the prime minister is opposed to the return of the Arab inhabitants to their places so long as the war continues and so long as the enemy stands at our gates. Only the full Cabinet, the prime minister believes, can decide on a change of approach.<sup>57</sup>

Shertok, for his part, passed on Shitrit's letter to Yehoshua Palmon for comment. Palmon, perhaps to Shertok's surprise, proposed:

I think that we should adopt a public posture that we do not oppose the return of the Arab inhabitants of Jaffa, and even to announce this in a [radio] broadcast to the Arabs – but, in practice, their return should be contingent on certain conditions and restrictions.

Palmon thought that the returnees should be asked to sign a loyalty oath and fill out detailed questionnaires. This, he argued, 'would leave in our hands complete supervision of their actual return. We shall have the ability to let back mainly [non-Muslims] . . . something that could be of use [to us] in the future.'<sup>58</sup>

But Palmon's letter drew a blunter rejoinder from Ya'akov Shimoni, the acting director of the Foreign Ministry's Middle East Affairs Department. Shimoni was prepared to allow exceptions in special cases of hardship. But in general he supported the 'no return during the war' line.<sup>59</sup> Shertok came down solidly behind Shimoni, adding: 'I fear a loosening of the reins . . . Permission [to return] should be forthcoming only in a limited number of special cases.'<sup>60</sup>

But Israel's main problem was to be not the uncoordinated, individual or communal Arab attempts to return or requests to return but the increasing international pressure, spearheaded by Bernadotte, for Israeli agreement to a mass repatriation. After several rounds of meetings with Israeli and Arab leaders, Bernadotte, on 27 June, demanded that Israel recognise 'the right of the residents of Palestine who, because of conditions created by the conflict there, have left their normal places of abode, to return to their homes without restriction and to regain possession of their property'.<sup>61</sup> The Israelis responded on 5 July, rejecting Bernadotte's other 'suggestions', that Palestine and Jordan be joined in economic 'Union', that immigration to Israel be subject to that Union's – or UN – jurisdiction, that Jerusalem be given over to Arab rule, and that – in Shertok's phrase – a settlement be 'imposed' from the outside on the parties rather than reached through direct negotiations 'between the interested parties'. (Bernadotte had not explicitly made this last 'suggestion'.) Tergiversating, the Israeli reply did not specifically refer to the demand that Israel recognise the 'right of return', but suggested somewhat vaguely that the Mediator should reconsider his 'whole approach to the [Palestine] problem'.<sup>62</sup>

But the refugee problem could not be dismissed by a sleight of hand, and the Israeli Cabinet understood that Bernadotte's 'suggestion' would eventually have to be directly addressed. By the second half of July the United States, too, was pressing for an Israeli answer. In the course of July – when another 100,000 or so Arabs became refugees (see below) – the Cabinet hammered out the official line.

Yet even before the final formulation was agreed upon, Shertok instructed his diplomats as follows:

Our policy: 1) Arab exodus direct result folly aggression organized by Arab states . . . 2) No question allowing Arabs return while state of war continuing, as would mean introduction Fifth Column, provision bases for enemies from outside and dislocation law and order inside. Exceptions only in favour special deserving cases compassionate grounds, subject [to] security screening . . . 4) Question Arab return can be decided only as part peace settlement with Arab States] and in context its terms, when question [of] confiscation property Jews [in] neighbouring countries and their future will also be raised. 5) Arabs remaining [in] Israel [to be] unmo- lested and receive due care from State as regards services.<sup>63</sup>

The Cabinet consensus of mid-June had thus undergone a significant reshaping. The Cabinet had formally resolved against a return during the hostilities, leaving open the possibility of a reconsideration of the matter at war's end. But Shertok was now saying that there would be no return during the war and reconsideration and a solution of the problem only within the framework of talks aimed at a general peace settlement and with a linkage to the confiscation of the property, and the fate, of the Jewish communities in the Arab world. Thus links were forged between (a) a full-fledged peace settlement and Israeli willingness to consider a return, making the refugees a bargaining counter in Israel's quest for recognition and peace in the region, and (b) the fate of the refugees and that of the Jews in the Arab states.<sup>64</sup>

Dr Leo Kohn, Shertok's veteran Political Adviser, may have been alluding to this policy shift when he wrote on 22 July that 'as far as I know, our attitude on this question has hardened in recent months'. Kohn anticipated that Bernadotte would continue to press the refugee issue,<sup>65</sup> and, indeed, Bernadotte raised the matter again when he met Shertok on 26 July. Shertok responded that there could be no return during the hostilities and that the problem could be reconsidered thereafter 'in the context of a general peace settlement'.<sup>66</sup>

It was this meeting that triggered the final Israeli Cabinet discussion, and resolution, on 28 July. Shertok described his meeting with Bernadotte. Bernadotte had spoken of '300,000–350,000' refugees, living in poverty and deprivation. Assistance had to be organised, but 'the most effective assistance would be their return . . . to their places'. Who, argued the Swede, knows better than the Jews the tribulations of displacement? The Germans, he added by way of illustration, had allowed displaced Frenchmen to return to their homes 'without waiting for the end of [the Second World] War'. Bernadotte recalled that Shertok had once told UN Secretary General Trygve Lie that displaced Arabs would be allowed to return home. Shertok responded (so he told his Cabinet

colleagues) that he may once have said this, but it was under different circumstances, when there were only a handful of refugees. But since then, 'circumstances have radically changed'. The matter should not be treated, or resolved, solely on a humanitarian basis — 'it is a matter for political and military calculation'. Moreover, long-term humanitarian considerations may indicate that resettlement in the Arab countries may well be the best solution, as with the Greek-Turkish population exchanges. Shertok told the Mediator that there could be no return during the war — such a return would be a 'warlike measure' against us, 'the introduction of a Fifth Column . . . and of an explosive to blow us up from within'. But Bernadotte, according to Shertok, stuck to his guns and 'showed little flexibility': indeed, he pointed out that a population of long standing had been uprooted and was being replaced by new Jewish immigrants. To his fellow ministers Shertok now proposed the following formula:

We cannot agree to a mass return of Arab refugees so long as the war continues. We are ready to discuss exceptional cases, be it involving extraordinary suffering or special privilege — each case on an individual basis.

Bernadotte, said Shertok, had argued that the 'world would not understand' Israel's position. He, Shertok, disagreed: 'The world, which understood the uprooting of the Sudeten [Germans] from Czechoslovakia, would also understand this.' Moreover, the Arab states were demanding that Israel pay for the upkeep of the refugees in their places of exile. Shertok suggested that Israel demand compensation from the Arab states for the destruction and expenditure inflicted on the Yishuv by the war they had launched. Ben-Gurion seconded the motion. Interior Minister Grunbaum endorsed the Shertok-Ben-Gurion line: No return during the war. Shitrit agreed, but supported the return to their homes of refugees still inside Israeli-held territory — such as refugees from Jaffa living in Lydda. Peretz Bernstein, minister of commerce and industry, agreed with Shitrit. Ultra-orthodox Social Welfare Minister Yitzhak Meir Levin wasn't so sure about flatly rejecting the call for a refugee return: 'Every gentile has a bit of anti-Semitism in him, but we may yet need the Mediator's [good will]. Levin, supporting Immigration and Health Minister Moshe Shapira, called for allowing a partial return, of women and children. But the Ben-Gurion-Shertok line won the day. At the end of the meeting the Cabinet decided, by nine votes to two, that 'so long as the war continues there is no agreement to the return of the refugees'.<sup>67</sup>

The Mediator, unhappy with Shertok's position, that same day submitted a strongly worded 'Note', suggesting that Israel accept the principle that 'from among those who may desire to do so, a limited number . . . and especially those formerly living in Jaffa and Haifa, be permitted to return to their homes'. Bernadotte seemed to have resigned himself to Israel's rejection of a blanket return before war's end and accepted the principle

of differentiation, on security grounds, between army-age males and 'others'.<sup>68</sup> Bernadotte sought to wedge open the door, however slightly. He was unsuccessful. Kohn drafted a proposal for a response:

Present Arab outcry for return of refugees is move in warfare. Purposes are not, or not merely, humanitarian but desire to get rid of incubus, saddle Israel with it, introduce explosive element into Israel, eliminate sources of menacing bitterness from their own midst . . .

And Kohn divined the chink in Bernadotte's argument, the special pleading for the Jaffa and Haifa exiles. 'Is suffering of those from other towns or from villages less acute, or are they less deserving?' he asked.<sup>69</sup> Kohn's view was that the existence of the refugee problem, on balance, benefited Israel. For the Arab states, the refugees were 'the greatest inconvenience'; for Israel 'at the present moment [they are] our most valuable bargaining asset'. But Kohn realized that they were also a strong card for the Arabs 'in the councils of the UN and among world opinion generally'.<sup>70</sup>

On 1 August, Shertok replied to Bernadotte's 'Note'. Israel, he wrote, was 'not unmindful of the plight of the Arabs . . . Our own people has suffered too much from similar tribulations for us to be indifferent to their hardships.' But Israel could not agree to readmission: it would 'prejudice Israel's rights and positions'. Shertok then took up Kohn's line, asking why Bernadotte had seen fit to plead for special treatment for the exiles of Jaffa and Haifa. The Foreign Minister concluded by saying that while Israel might reconsider the issue at war's end, it was not now in a position 'to re-admit the Arabs who fled . . . on any substantial scale'.<sup>71</sup>

From Israel's point of view, Shertok's use of the phrase 'on any substantial scale' was a bad mistake. The Mediator latched on to it four days later, at their next meeting. If Israel was unwilling, at present, to contemplate a 'substantial' return, how about an insubstantial one — and Bernadotte suggested several categories that might be allowed back immediately: 'Refugees [from] territory controlled by Israeli forces' but lying outside the partition borders Jewish State, 'citrus farmer[s] . . . whose villages . . . are intact . . . [those] for whom employment is available . . . [and] special cases on humanitarian grounds'. Shertok riposted that 'only in exceptional cases would we allow people to come back . . . We are against whole categories of people returning while the war is on'.<sup>72</sup>

Over the following weeks, as the pressures on Israel — internal and external Arab, UN and American — mounted, the Cabinet again and again discussed the problem. The discussions were usually prompted by specific UN or American demarches. Each time the Cabinet re-endorsed the thrust of the decision of 28 July.

Kohn pinpointed Israel's main potential problem — the United States, not Bernadotte. Kohn surmised that the growing American concern was



a result of pressure by American ambassadors in Muslim countries, who were arguing that the 'pauperized, embittered' exiles were a seedbed for 'communist revolution' in the host countries, and that it was best that the refugees return to Palestine.<sup>73</sup> Israel's chief fear was that Washington would soon openly back the Mediator's position. American diplomats were already bluntly describing – even to Israelis – Israel's positions as 'rigid and uncompromising'.<sup>74</sup> They had begun to sense that Israel was never going to allow the refugees back. 'There is little if any possibility of Arabs returning to their homes in Israel or Jewish-occupied Palestine', wrote the American Consul General in Jerusalem, John MacDonald. He described the conditions of those camped out near Jericho and Ramallah as 'not yet desperate' but predicted that they would be 'completely destitute' and highly vulnerable to the elements when winter came.<sup>75</sup> Jefferson Patterson, the American chargé d'affaires in Cairo, reported that the International Committee of the Red Cross had supplied information 'indicating that there may be little prospect for the several hundred thousand Arab refugees from Palestine to return to their former homes'.<sup>76</sup>

The resolve of Israel's leaders and public against a return of refugees hardened daily. But the leaders realised that while this resolve would itself be a major factor in shaping the outcome, the ultimate issue would depend also on external factors – especially on the amount and character of international, particularly American, pressure. As Ben-Gurion put it: 'We do not know if this [i.e., the outcome] will depend on us.'<sup>77</sup>

Bernadotte felt Israel was showing 'every sign of having a swelled head.' It seemed to him

an anomaly that the Israeli Government should advance as an argument for the establishment of their state the plight of Jewish refugees and to demand the immediate immigration [to Israel] of [Jewish] displaced persons at the same time that they refused to recognize the existence of the Arab refugees which they had created.

And the abandoned Arab property – the 'loot' – was simply being distributed among the new Jewish immigrants, reported one American diplomat.<sup>78</sup>

John Reedman, the special representative in Palestine of the United Nations Secretary General, gave Israeli officials an idea of how things stood with pro-Israeli international opinion. He said he understood Israel's opposition to a mass return but suggested that 'a trickle' could be allowed back. Alternatively, Israel could at least announce its intention 'to solve the refugee problem after a final peace settlement'.<sup>79</sup> Bernadotte was blunter when he met Shertok two days later, on 10 August. Israel was 'driving too hard a bargain', he said, and its 'stock was dropping' in the international community (business images with an anti-Semitic undertone that were bound to set off alarm bells in Shertok's mind).<sup>80</sup>

Shertok reported that Bernadotte had asked for an Israeli 'gesture'. He had replied, he told the Cabinet, that perhaps it would raise Israel's stock among idealists and the naive, but not among men of action. . . . And the rulers in the world at this time are not idealists but men of action. They would say that the Jews are fools – they hold an important card and are discarding it [to no purpose]. . . Bernadotte laughed and did not respond.

Shertok told his colleagues that he had said that

the Arab minority in our state should be made as small as possible. . . . If there was a large Arab minority . . . as much as we would pamper them, they would charge us with discrimination, and these charges would serve as a pretext for intervention by the Arab states in our affairs.

On the other hand, for these states, three hundred thousand refugees were but 'a drop in the ocean', and easily assimilable. Bernadotte thanked me for the explanation.<sup>81</sup>

Only one dissenting voice emerged from the higher reaches of Israeli officialdom, that of Eliahu Sasson, the peripatetic director of the Foreign Ministry's Middle East Affairs Department. Sasson, a Syrian-born Arabist with a liberal outlook, wrote to Shertok:

I would advise reconsidering the refugee problem. . . . I do not by this advice mean, heaven forbid, the return of all the refugees. No, and again no. My meaning is to the return of a small part of them, 40 to 50 thousand, over a long period. . . [starting] immediately, to silence a lot of people in the next meeting of the UN [General Assembly].<sup>82</sup>

Through late 1948 – early 1949, Sasson was to remain a consistent (and isolated) advocate of this position. He was prompted both by a desire to brighten Israel's image in the West and to facilitate peace (he resided for much of this time in Paris, where he tried to initiate secret talks with Arab leaders).<sup>83</sup>

Just how isolated Sasson was is clear from a policy meeting called by Ben-Gurion on 18 August. The meeting was prompted by problems arising out of the need to cultivate and expropriate Arab lands, pressure by Bernadotte and the impending arrival of the first United States Representative (later Ambassador) to Tel Aviv, James McDonald.

The meeting was attended by the country's senior political leaders (without Mapam) and senior political and Arab affairs officials. The participants included Ben-Gurion, Shertok, Shitrit, Kaplan, David Horowitz, director general of the Finance Ministry, Machnes, Weitz, Danin and Zaiman Lifshitz, the cartographer and adviser on land matters to Ben-Gurion, Palmon, soon-to-be the prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs, Shimoni and Shiloah, the liaison between the Foreign Ministry and the defence establishment, General Elimelech Avner, OC Military Government in the Conquered Territories, and Kaddar. The sense of the meeting

was summed up by Shimoni the following day: 'The view of the participants was unanimous, and the will to do everything possible to prevent the return of the refugees was shared by all.'<sup>84</sup>

According to Weitz, Shertok opened the discussion by posing the problem 'with clarity'. Ben-Gurion, according to Weitz, then confused the issue by straying into the question of the fate of the abandoned Arab lands. David Hacothen, an intelligence officer and Mapai stalwart, proposed that Jews be settled on these lands. Horowitz agreed, but proposed the sale of Arab property to private individuals ('one can sell [it] to Jews in America'), with the proceeds going to the original owners as compensation. 'The solution [should not be] the prevention [of an Arab return] by force but through a commercial transaction', said Horowitz. Kaplan objected to the destruction of the villages, and said that Jewish settlement on Arab lands presented a serious problem of principle if [we] are speaking of more than [temporary] cultivation'.<sup>85</sup> (Shimoni wrote about the Finance Ministry's representatives that while all at the meeting were agreed that it was best that the refugees not be allowed to return, 'Kaplan and [Horowitz] were more conservative and careful regarding [the means] that could be used immediately and principally regarding the fate of Arab property'.<sup>86</sup>)

Weitz then managed to steer the talk back to what he regarded as the cardinal issue: Should the Arabs be allowed to return?

If the policy we want is that they should not be allowed to return, [then] there is no need to cultivate land beyond what is needed for our existence. It is possible that Jews should be settled in some villages and that there are villages that should be destroyed so that they do not attract their refugees to return. What can be bought [from Arabs] should be bought. . . . [But] first we must set policy: Arabs who abandoned [their homes] should not [be allowed to] return.

He also recommended that plans be developed for the resettlement of the refugees in the Arab countries. Hacothen agreed. Israel should 'reap, plough, settle on [Arab] land — until they understand that they will not be allowed to return'.

Ben-Gurion's own thinking was clear. 'We must start out', he said, 'from an assumption, of how to help those who will not return, whatever their number (and we want them to be as numerous as possible), to resettle abroad'.<sup>87</sup> According to Danin's recollection a month later, Ben-Gurion had not allowed 'any alternative' opinion — such as to allow the return of '20,000 or 50,000 or 100,000 refugees; of families of adult males who had stayed here; whether to bring [i.e., allow] back property owners; whether to allow back [refugees] according to communal differences [i.e., Christians], etc.' — to be broached.<sup>88</sup>

Weitz (once again) proposed the appointment of a non-governmental authority to formulate a 'plan for the transfer of the Arabs and

their resettlement'.<sup>89</sup> Although no formal decision was reached, a committee — the second and official Transfer Committee — with far narrower terms of reference than Weitz had originally sought, was at last appointed by Ben-Gurion.<sup>90</sup>

The 18 August gathering at the Prime Minister's Office had been defined as 'consultative'. The participants had been united on the need to bar a return and there was general, if not complete, agreement as to the means to be used to attain this end — destruction of villages, settlement in other sites and on abandoned lands, cultivation of Arab fields, purchase and expropriation of Arab lands, and the use of propaganda to persuade the refugees that they would not be allowed back. The same day, orders went out to all IDF units to prevent 'with all means' the return of refugees.<sup>91</sup>

On 22 August, Shertok explained the government's position to Zionism's elder statesman and president of the Provisional Council of State, Chaim Weizmann:

With regard to the refugees, we are determined to be adamant while the war lasts. Once the return tide starts, it will be impossible to stem it, and it will prove our undoing. As for the future, we are equally determined — without, for the time being, formally closing the door to any eventuality — to explore all possibilities of getting rid, once and for all, of the huge Arab minority which originally threatened us. What can be achieved in this period of storm and stress will be quite unattainable once conditions are stabilised. A group of people from among our senior officers [i.e., the Transfer Committee] has already started working on the study of resettlement possibilities [for the refugees] in other countries. . . . What such permanent resettlement of 'Israeli' Arabs in the neighbouring territories will mean in terms of making land available in Israel for the settlement of our own people requires no emphasis.<sup>92</sup>

Serious American pressure over the plight of the refugees began to be felt only in late August. Israel's representative in Washington, Eliahu Epstein (Elath), reported: 'American public opinion gradually being undermined. . . . All hostile forces unite in publicizing and shedding crocodile tears regarding plight Arab refugees.'<sup>93</sup> America's representative, McDonald, met Ben-Gurion for the first time on 20 August and warned that the United States was contemplating measures on the refugee question that would prove unpalatable to Israel, and that Washington might even be prepared to impose sanctions to enforce its will. Ben-Gurion replied that Israel would not compromise on its 'security and independence'. Returning the refugees, 'so long as an invading army' was on Israeli soil, was hazardous. 'We could not allow back one who hates [us], even if sanctions were imposed on us', he concluded.<sup>94</sup>

Israel's two senior diplomats in the United States were recalled for consultations and in early September briefed the Cabinet. Epstein quoted Robert Lovett, the deputy secretary of state, as saying that the

refugees constituted a 'severe problem', public opinion-wise, though he 'did not make any threats'.<sup>95</sup> Abba Eban, the Israeli observer (soon ambassador) at the United Nations, said that Britain had failed to mobilize the United Nations 'to act' in support of a refugee return.<sup>96</sup>

A specific American initiative was launched in early September, with the submission to Tel Aviv of 'suggestions' to facilitate the peace process. Western Galilee (in Israeli hands since mid-May but originally allotted to the Palestine Arab State) should go to Israel and a 'large portion of desert land' in the Negev (still largely in Egyptian hands but allotted to the Jewish State) should go to the Arabs (implicitly, to Jordan) and the problem of Jerusalem should be solved on the basis of 'internationalization' (or anything else acceptable to both the Jews and the Arabs). Moreover, Washington said very hesitantly, it 'would like the Israeli government to consider some constructive measures for the alleviation of Arab refugee distress'.<sup>97</sup>

Ben-Gurion, Shertok and McDonald met on 8 September to discuss the 'suggestions'. Ben-Gurion left it to Shertok to deliver the response on the refugee question. [Shertok] said that we were [willing] to consider the return of individual refugees now, and the return of part of the refugees after the war, on condition that most of the refugees would be settled in Arab countries with our help.' This marked a substantial softening of Israel's official and public position, but McDonald apparently failed to realise this. He asked whether 'the door is shut' to discussing the matter and Ben-Gurion responded: 'In my opinion, the door is not shut - if we discuss the arrangement of a solid, stable peace with the Arabs. As part of such an arrangement, one can discuss anything.'<sup>98</sup> Briefing the Cabinet later that day, Shertok said that it was 'unclear' whether the Americans had presented their *démarche* (the 'suggestions') off their own bat or whether they had been put up to it by 'someone' else.<sup>99</sup>

But in private, with the newly arrived Americans, Ben-Gurion and Shertok were exhibiting or appearing to exhibit flexibility, Israel's official and public stance continued to conform with July's Cabinet decision. On 12 September, the Cabinet approved Shertok's draft instructions to the Israel delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. The instructions, dated 10 September, read:

No return before the end of the war save for individual cases; a final solution to the refugee problem as part of a general settlement when peace comes. In informal conversations, the delegation will explain that it were better that the problem be solved by settling the refugees in the neighbouring countries than by returning them to the State of Israel - for their own good, for the good of the neighbouring countries, for the good of Israel and for the good of [future] Israeli relations with her neighbours.

No mention was made of possible Israeli readiness to allow back a portion of the refugees.<sup>100</sup> In Cabinet, Shertok stressed the widespread

ignorance regarding 'Iraq's dire need for workers, [and its] vast settlement projects that were not implemented because of lack of manpower'. Cisling objected to the 'instructions', calling for an addendum stating that Israel 'will be ready to discuss the return of refugees' following the withdrawal of the Arab armies from Palestine. Bentov supported Cisling, adding that Israel should allow the refugees to return to their places or, alternatively, to the areas vacated by the Arab armies when they leave Palestine. Shapira agreed (and argued that the Arabs would, in any case, never agree to withdraw their armies so a refugee return would never materialise). Ben-Gurion, surprisingly, said that Israeli officials should privately explain to Israel's 'friends' that if direct Israeli-Arab negotiations became possible,

and through this we brought about peace - we would bring [allow?] back the refugees. [But] if the Arabs continue their war against us, even if it is a non-active war [i.e., a cold war], and do not want peace - the return of the refugees is a weapon against us; [as] leaving refugees with them - is our weapon.

The ministers then voted. By seven votes to three, it was decided 'not to discuss the return of the refugees until a peace settlement'.<sup>101</sup>

The first round of the diplomatic battle over the refugees climaxed on 20 September, with the publication of Bernadotte's report on his mediation efforts. The report had been completed on 16 September, the day before the Mediator's assassination at the hands of LHI (Stern Gang) terrorists in Jerusalem. In it, Bernadotte strongly supported the right of the refugees to return to their homes 'at the earliest practical date'. No 'just and complete' settlement was possible, the Mediator wrote, if the right of return was not recognised.

It would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine and, indeed, at least offer the threat of permanent replacement of the Arab refugees,

he wrote. At the same time, however, Bernadotte was fully aware that the radically changed and changing circumstances in Israel (including the immigrant influx) strongly militated against a mass return. 'It must not be supposed', he wrote,

that the establishment of the right of refugees to return . . . provides solution of the problem. The vast majority of the refugees may no longer have homes to return to and their re-establishment in the State of Israel presents an economic and social problem of special complexity.<sup>102</sup>

The Israeli response to the report, which contained guidelines for a general settlement of the conflict, was tailored to suit the highly embarrassing and vulnerable diplomatic position in which Tel Aviv found

itself. The Mediator had been murdered by – albeit dissident – Israelis and his report included proposals, such as handing over the Negev to the Arabs, which were anathema to Tel Aviv. The circumstances required contrition and caution – but without saying anything that could later be construed as concrete concessions. In its response on 23 September, Tel Aviv, on the refugee issue, simply ignored the Mediator's call for recognition of the right of return.<sup>103</sup>

Meanwhile, a new wave of *ad hoc* appeals from exiled communities to be allowed back reached Shitrit. Shitrit generally referred them to Ben-Gurion, the IDF and Shertok for a ruling. By nature and politically a softliner, Shitrit, by the end of August, had more or less come around to Ben-Gurion's and Shertok's view. Allowing any Arabs back might serve as a precedent and might constitute a security problem. As Machnes, his director general, put it: 'Over time, views have changed, and now the Minority Affairs Ministry is doing all in its power to prevent the Arabs who have gone from returning to the country.'<sup>104</sup>

A major debate, in which the various arguments re-surfaced, erupted over the refugees from Huj, near the Gaza Strip. Its inhabitants had been expelled eastwards, to Dimra, on 31 May (see above). Nothing was to demonstrate so convincingly the inflexibility of the crystallising Israeli resolve against a return.

In September, the exiles, noting that the Second Truce (19 July–15 October 1948) was holding and that the area around Huj was quiet, appealed to Israel to allow them back. The appeal, as usual, made the rounds of the bureaucracies – the IDF, the Military Government, the Foreign Ministry Middle East Affairs Department and the Minority Affairs Ministry. Shimoni wrote that the Huj appeal deserved 'special treatment' because the inhabitants had been 'loyal collaborators', 'because they had not fled but had been expelled', and because they had not wandered far afield and were still living near the village. His department, therefore, in view of 'the commonly held opinion that an injustice had been done', would be willing to recommend that the IDF permit the villagers to return to Israeli territory, not necessarily to Huj itself but rather to another 'abandoned village'.

But, Shimoni added: 'The problem of precedents arises. If we allow them [to return], hundreds and thousands of others may perhaps come, each with his own good reasons [to be allowed back]. So he concluded his qualified recommendation by writing that 'if the Defence Ministry could find a way' to prevent the Huj case from becoming a precedent, 'then we withdraw our opposition [to a return] in this particular case'.<sup>105</sup>

Shitrit found Shimoni's reservations irksome. He wrote that he did 'not believe that allowing some . . . to return would [necessarily] serve as a precedent'. After all, there was a firm Cabinet decision that so long as the war continued, 'there could be no talk of a return . . .'. So if the Middle East Affairs Department supported allowing the return of the inhabitants

of Huj, 'there will be no opposition on our part', he wrote. But Shitrit, too, thought that the villagers would have to be resettled 'inside' Israel rather than in their home village, which was near the front lines.<sup>106</sup>

But these (hesitant) recommendations proved unavailing. The defence authorities overruled Shitrit and Shimoni, and the inhabitants of Huj, whether because of arguments of security or precedent, were never allowed back. The flare-up of hostilities between Israel and Egypt a few weeks after this exchange sealed the fate of the villagers.

The post-Bernadotte months were dominated by the reverberations of the report or 'plan' he had left behind, and by the growing awareness, abroad as well as among the Israeli public, of the solidity and inflexibility of Israel's resolve to bar a return.<sup>107</sup> In this respect, Bernadotte's murder worked to Israel's advantage: He had made the solution of the refugee problem, including the principle of the right of return, a personal issue and goal. His successor, Acting Mediator, Ralph Bunche, displayed far less determination in pursuing the matter.

On 27 September, a senior Israeli diplomat, Michael Comay, apprised the Israel Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly meeting in Paris of his meetings on 23–24 September in Haifa with Bunche and two of his aides, Reedman and Paul Mohn. While the United Nations' officials had reiterated Bernadotte's commitment to securing recognition of the right of return, 'they were all of the opinion that for the most part the Arabs did not want to go back and live under Jewish domination'. he reported. The middle-class exiles were definitely unenthusiastic about returning, and some of the villagers who wanted to return would, once back, no doubt 'drift off again when they saw some of the things that were alleged to be going on in Israel, such as destruction of villages and taking over of land'. Comay reported that, according to Reedman, Bernadotte had first thought in terms of a general return 'but had retreated from this position when he came to realise the deep-rooted and permanent complications'. Bernadotte, in the end, had sought only a partial return, for political and humanitarian reasons – agreeing that the main solution must be found through organised resettlement in the Arab countries.<sup>108</sup>

Henceforward, while lip-service was still occasionally paid to the concept of 'the right of return', and while the General Assembly, in December, endorsed the refugees' 'right of return' in Resolution 194 (see below), the international community was to focus more and more on the necessity, desirability and possibility of a partial repatriation coupled with the re-settlement of the bulk of the refugees in Arab lands. Israel, it would later be seen, had successfully rebuffed the pressures for a mass return.

Within Israel, the continued state of war had been decisive in the crystallisation of the decision to bar a return. The hostilities facilitated the task of those like Ben-Gurion, Weitz and Shertok, who, from early on, realised and argued that to be established securely and remain secure, the newfound state had to have as small as possible an Arab minority.

The political argument against having a 40 per cent Arab minority intermeshed with the strategic argument against retaining or bringing back hundreds of thousands of Arabs who would or might constitute a Fifth Column. The fighting provided both the opportunity and the reason for creating or at least maintaining an Arab-free country.

A mass return of refugees would have created grave problems for all the Israeli agencies prospectively involved in their repatriation – the IDF, the police, the civilian bureaucracies and the Jewish settlements – at a time when their energies and resources were being strained to capacity by the war and by the influx of masses of Jewish immigrants.

To this, as the weeks and months passed, were added the 'positive' arguments of the Yishuv's settlement and immigration absorption bodies. To expand (and it had to expand to meet the needs of the burgeoning Jewish population), Jewish agriculture had to have the abandoned lands. Jewish settlements, in general, needed more land. And the immigrants (and the many more potential immigrants) required land and houses. Moreover, some of the immigrants who reached Israel in 1948–1949 and, more so, during the 1950s, hailed from Arab countries (Yemen, Iraq, Morocco) – enabling the Israeli leaders, with some justification and logic, to view what had happened as an (unplanned, uncoordinated) 'exchange of population'. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs had left Palestine, losing almost all their belongings, and hundreds of thousands of Jews had left their native, Muslim countries, generally leaving their property behind. History had created an equation that helped Israel rebuff efforts and pressures for Palestinian refugee repatriation.

The political decision to bar a return had matured over April–June, had become official policy in July, and had been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Cabinet in August and September. It was reaffirmed at various levels of government over the following months as successive communities of exiles asked to be allowed back. During the second half of 1948 and the first half of 1949, developments on the ground worked to harden the status quo and certify the refugeness of Palestine's Arabs.

## ENDNOTES

1. See, for example, entry for 26 Mar. 1948, Weitz, *Diary*, II, 257, describing a meeting between Yosef Weitz and local leaders from the Beit Shean and Jezreel valleys in which a consensus emerged against allowing a return.
2. Unsigned, 'Summary of the Meeting of the Arab Affairs Advisers in Dora Camp 6.4.48', IDFA 2506\49\91; and unsigned, 'Summary of Meeting of the Arab Affairs Advisers, Camp Dora 13.4.1948', IDFA 4663\49\125.
3. Protocol of meeting of JAE, 6 May 1948, CZA 45\2.
4. Protocol of meeting of Mapai Central Committee, 11 May 1948, LPA 48\23 aleph.

5. Entry for 1 May 1948, DBG-YH I, 382; and Ben-Gurion, *As Israel Fights*, 68–69, text of 7 Feb. 1948 speech at meeting of Mapai Council. Indeed, there is evidence that on his visit to Haifa on 1 May, Ben-Gurion went further. Hearing that the Mapai boss in the city, Abba Khoushi, was trying to persuade Arabs to stay, Ben-Gurion is said to have remarked: 'Doesn't he have anything more important to do?' (Nimrod, 'Patterns . . .', 268).
6. Shertok to Zaslani (Shiloah), 25 Apr. 1948, *Political and Diplomatic Documents*, 674.
7. Cohen, 'Our Arab Policy in the Midst of the War', 10 May 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.10 (4).
8. 'A Call from His Majesty King 'Abdullah to the Arab People of Palestine on Behalf of the Arab League', as carried in *Al Nasr*, an Amman daily, 5 May 1948, NA Record Group 84, US Consulate General, Jerusalem, Classified Records 1948, 800 – Political Affairs.
9. Middle East Department, Israel Foreign Ministry, 'In the Arab Public', 28 May 1948, IDFA 4944\49\504.
10. Protocol of meeting in Haifa, 6 Jun. 1948, ISA MAM 303\41.
11. Danin to Weitz, 18 May 1948, Yosef Weitz Papers, Institute for the Study of Settlement (Rehovot). For a full examination of Weitz's transfer activities and the 'Transfer Committees' see Morris, 'Yosef Weitz . . .',
12. 'M.S.' (Moshe Shertok), '[Talk] with Yosef Weitz', 28 May 1948, ISA FM 2564\20.
13. Entry for 30 May 1948, Weitz, *Diary*, III, 294.
14. Weitz, Sasson, Danin, 'Retroactive Transfer . . .', undated but from early June, ISA FM 2564\19.
15. Entry for 5 June 1948, CZA A246-13, 2411.
16. Entry for 5 June 1948, DBG-YH II, 487.
17. Weitz to Ben-Gurion, 6 June 1948, ISA FM 2564\19.
18. Protocol of Cabinet meeting of 23 May 1948, ISA, Heller, *Birth*, 192.
19. Shertok to Eytan, 6 June 1948, ISA FM 2444\19.
20. Shertok to Eytan, 6 June 1948, ISA FM 2444\19.
21. Entry for 1 June 1948, DBG-YH II, 477.
22. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 1 June 1948, ISA.
23. Levi, IDF OC Jezreel Valley District, to area commanders, 9 June 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.10 (5); and 'Ya'akobi to Ephraim, Gershon, 11 June 1948, IDFA 410\54\104.
24. Oded\Operations to battalions, 13 June 1948, IDFA 6309\49\2.
25. Kaddar to Sharef, 3 June 1948, ISA FM 2345\10; unsigned, 'Report on a Visit to Safad of the Committee for Abandoned Property, 5 July 1948', ISA AM aleph\19\aleph; and Safad Workers Council, 'Memorandum for Consolidating Safad after Its Liberation', undated, IDFA 782\65\1189.
26. Entry for 3 June 1948, Weitz, *Diary*, III, 297.
27. Vizhensky to Cising, 3 June 1948, ISA AM 5\kof.
28. Protocol of Meeting of Mapai Secretariat, statement by Shertok, 13 June 1948, LPA.
29. Zagorsky to Harzfeld, 2 June 1948, LA 235 IV, 2251 bet. See also unsigned, 'The Visit of the Minister of Minority Affairs and Police in Kfar-Gil'adi, 29.7.48', HA 105\260.

31. IDF GS\Operations logbook, entry for 2 June 1948, IDFA 922\75\1176.
32. IDF GS\Operations logbook, entry for 8 June 1948, IDFA 922\75\1176.
33. OC, IDF Intelligence Service, to Shiloah, 16 June 1948, ISA FM 2426\9.
34. See, for example, Oded\Operations to battalions, 13 June 1948, IDFA 6309\49\2.
35. Israel Foreign Ministry Middle East Department, 'In the Arab Public', 11 June 1948, ISA FM 2570\6.
36. Shertok (Tel Aviv) to Goldmann (London), 15 June 1948, ISA, *Documents* I, 163. Shertok said similar things the following day in Cabinet (see protocol of Cabinet meeting, 16 June 1948, ISA). He also defined the Arab exodus as 'the most surprising thing' that had happened in the course of the war. Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, said that he had not been surprised by the exodus but that he had been 'bitterly' surprised by the 'ethical failures' of the Yishuv. He was referring to the looting.
37. Shertok to Goldmann, 15 June 1948, ISA, *Documents* I, 162-63.
38. Protocol of the meeting of Mapam Political Committee, 15 June 1948, HHA 66.90 (1); and Secretariat of Mapam Centre, 'Our Policy Towards the Arabs During the War (Decisions of the Political Committee of 15.6.48)', 23 June 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.11 (1).
39. The full version of Ben-Gurion's important speech is inaccessible. In the version open at the ISA, six long, paragraph-size passages (as well as the odd sentence) have been blanked out by internal censors. Over the years, Ben-Gurion himself published two abridged versions, in *As Israel Fights*, 127-31, and in *The Resurgent State of Israel*, I, 165-68. In 1982, Gershon Rivlin and Elhanan Orren, published a third abridged version, in DBG-YH, II, 524-26. The quotations in this paragraph intermix passages from the published versions and the ISA protocol. Only once the ISA opens the full protocol will we know everything that was said, and in its proper order.
40. Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 44-45.
41. Ben-Gurion's diary, 11 July 1936, quoted in Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, 383.
42. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 16 June 1948, ISA.
43. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 16 June 1948, ISA.
44. This passage was censored out in the ISA protocols - but appears in the KMA, 9\9\3.
45. For example, see Nahum [Golani], OC Golani, to 'Shimon', 'Binyamin', and 'Levi', 16 June 1948, IDFA 1096\49\51: 'On no account should Arabs be allowed during the truce to return to areas from which they have been ejected.'
46. For example, see Rabin, Operation Dani HQ, to Harel, Yiftah, Kiryati and 8th brigades, 19 July 1948, KMA-PA 141-419; and Giv'ati to battalions, 24 July 1948, IDFA 922\75\899.
47. Yadin to Shertok, 14 Aug. 1948, ISA FM 2444\19.
48. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 20 June 1948, ISA.
49. Eytan, 'Meetings: M. Shertok-Count Bernadotte and Assistants. Tel Aviv, 17 and 18 June 1948', ISA 2466\2.
50. Ya'ari, 'If You Go to War' (speech delivered on 14 June 1948 at seminar for IDF recruits), 'Kibbutz Artzi Movement Fact-Sheet', No. 274\43, 8 Aug. 1948, HHA.
51. Secretariat of Mapam Centre, 'Our Policy Towards the Arabs During the War (Decisions of the Mapam Political Committee, 15 June 1948)', 23 June 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.11 (1).
52. Salomon, 'Details of a Conversation with Archbishop Georgius Hakim on Saturday, 26 June 1948', and Shitrit to Ben-Gurion, 6 July 1948, both in ISA FM 2563\21; and protocol of Cabinet meeting, 2 July 1948, ISA.
53. 'Instructions to the Arab Population by the Commander of the Haganah, Tel Aviv District, Given on 13th May 1948', and appended 'Agreement', 13 May 1948, signed by Michael Rabinovich (Ben-Gal), OC Haganah Tel Aviv District, and Ahmed Effendi Abu Laban, Salah Effendi al Nazar, Amin Effendi Andraus, and Ahmad Effendi Abdul Rahim, HA 55\31. It was because of this agreement that Danin urged the IDF to stop signing surrender agreements with conquered communities (Danin to Shertok, 28 July 1948, ISA FM 2564\5).
54. Nicola Saba, Jaffa Emergency Committee, to representative of OC Haganah [sic], Tel Aviv District, 26 June 1948, ISA FM 2564\9.
55. Chizik to Shitrit, 27 June 1948, ISA FM 2566\15.
56. Shitrit to Ben-Gurion and Shertok, 30 June 1948, ISA FM 2566\15.
57. Kaddar to Shitrit, 5 July 1948, ISA MAM 307\49.
58. Palmont to Shertok, 6 July 1948, ISA FM 2566\15.
59. Shimoni to Shertok, 'Comments on the Attached Memorandum by Yehoshua Palmont, in Answer to a Letter by Mr Shitrit on the Jaffa [Emergency] Committee Regarding the Return of Jaffa's Arab Residents', 7 July 1948, ISA FM 2566\15.
60. Shimoni to Palmont and Shiloah, 12 July 1948, quoting Shertok's minuted reaction to Palmont's proposals.
61. 'Appendix' to Bernadotte (Rhodes) to Shertok, 27 June 1948, *Documents* I, 230-34. Bernadotte also suggested that the Negev, in whole or in part, be included in 'Arab territory' and Western Galilee in 'Jewish territory'. Bernadotte's letter and 'Appendix', rather un diplomatically, nowhere referred to 'Israel', the 'Government of Israel' or the 'State of Israel' but rather to 'Palestine' and 'your Government'.
62. Shertok to Bernadotte, 5 July 1948, *Documents* I, 262-64. In an interview in *The New York Herald Tribune* of 21 June, Sasson had said that there would be no return of refugees except as part of a peace agreement with the Arab states; restitution for confiscated Arab property would be linked to compensation for Jewish property confiscated in Arab countries; and any return would be selective. Moreover, the Arabs left in Israel were free to leave. This was a new formulation of Israel's position, and Israel's delegation at the United Nations, prodded by the Americans, sought clarification from Tel Aviv (Comay to Shertok, 19 July 1948, *Documents* I, 353 and footnote 2). It was partly to end such unauthorised, 'rogue' responses by its diplomats that the Israeli Cabinet that month sat down to definitively define and formalize its policy on the refugee issue.
63. Shertok to Comay, 22 July 1948, *Documents* I, 374.
64. The linkage between the fate of the refugees and the Jewish communities in the Arab world had first been established at the Cabinet meeting of 2 July 1948. Justice Minister Rosen had said that an 'exchange of population', if

proposed by the United States and Britain - Palestinian Arabs moving to the Arab world and Jews moving out of the Arab countries to Israel - would be 'wonderful' (but if this was not agreed, Israel should not adopt a policy of barring a refugee return). Shitrit, too, had thought that an exchange of population would be 'good for the Arabs' as well as for Israel (protocol of Cabinet meeting of 2 July 1948, ISA. Censors have blanked out a large passage from Shitrit's statement). Such an exchange would 'free us of a large minority and also give us the possibility of bringing [to Israel] Jews from the oriental countries', Shitrit added two days later (protocol of Cabinet meeting, 4 July 1948, ISA).

65. Kohn to Shertok, 22 July 1948, ISA FM 2444\19.
66. 'Meeting: M. Shertok - Count Bernadotte and Assistants, Tel Aviv, 26 July 1948', *Documents* I, 409-14.
67. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 28 July 1948, ISA. What exactly Shapira proposed is unclear as ISA censors have blanked out a passage in his speech.
68. Bernadotte, 'Note from the Mediator to be Submitted to the Consideration of the Provisional Government of Israel on the Subject of Arab Refugees', 28 July 1948, ISA FM 2444\19.
69. Kohn, 'Lines for a Reply to Mediator on Return of Refugees', undated, ISA FM 2444\19.
70. Kohn, 'Note on Walter Eytan's Memorandum', 27 July 1948, *Documents* I, 415-16.
71. Shertok to Bernadotte, 1 Aug. 1948, *Documents* I, 441-44.
72. 'Meeting: M. Shertok and Members of the Staff of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs with Count Bernadotte and His Associates', Tel Aviv, 5 Aug. 1948, *Documents* I, 465-87.
73. Kohn to Shertok, 5 Aug. 1948, ISA FM 2444\19.
74. Ross (New York) to Secretary of State, 30 July 1948, NA 501 BB. Palestine\7-3048.
75. MacDonald to Secretary of State, 27 July 1948, NA RG 84, Consulate General Jerusalem, Classified Records 1948, 800 - Refugees.
76. Patterson to Secretary of State, 29 July 1948, NA RG 84, Haifa Consulate, Classified Records 1948, 800 - Political Affairs.
77. Protocol of meeting of Mapai Central Committee, 24 July 1948, LPA48\23. Ben-Gurion's statement was revealing about his attitude to Palestine's Arabs: 'I doubt whether they deserve respect as we do. Because we did not flee *en masse*. [And] so far no Arab Einstein has arisen and [they] have not created what we have built in this country and [they] have not fought as we are fighting . . . We are dealing here with a collective murderer.'
78. Patterson (Cairo) to Secretary of State, 5 Aug. 1948, NA 501 BB. Palestine\8-548.
79. David Horowitz, 'Meeting: D. Horowitz-J. Reedman, Tel Aviv, 8 August 1948', ISA FM 2425\1.
80. 'Meeting: M. Shertok-Count Bernadotte, Jerusalem, 10 August 1948', *Documents* I, 501-506.
81. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 11 Aug. 1948, ISA.
82. Precis of a letter from Sasson (Paris) to Shertok (Tel Aviv), 13 Aug. 1948, ISA FM 245\13.

83. See Shimoni (Tel Aviv) to Sasson (Paris), 16 Sep. 1948; and Sasson (Paris) to Danin, 29 Nov. 1948, both in ISA FM 3749\1; and entry for 14 Dec. 1948, Weitz, *Diary*, III, 365. For Sasson's activities in Paris, see Cohen-Shany, *Operation Paris*, 73-120.
84. Shimoni (Tel Aviv) to Sasson (Paris), 19 Aug. 1948, ISA FM 2570\11.
85. Shimoni, 'Precis of Things Said at a Meeting in the Office of the Prime Minister about the Problem of the Arab Refugees and their Return, 18 August 1948', ISA FM 2444\19. See also entry for 18 Aug. 1948, DBG-YH II, 652-54; entry for 18 Aug. 1948, Weitz, *Diary*, III, 331; and Shimoni to Sasson, 19 Aug. 1948, ISA FM 2570\11.
86. Shimoni to Sasson, 19 Aug. 1948, ISA FM 2570\11.
87. Shimoni, 'Precis . . .', 18 Aug. 1948, ISA FM 2444\19.
88. Danin (Tel Aviv) to Sasson (Paris), 22 Sep. 1948, ISA FM 2570\11.
89. Entry for 18 Aug. 1948, Weitz, *Diary*, III, 331.
90. See Morris, 'Yosef Weitz . . .'
91. Yadin to brigades, 18 Aug. 1948, IDFA 2687\49\35.
92. Shertok (Tel Aviv) to Weizmann (Montreaux), 20 July\22 August 1948, *Documents* I, 369.
93. Epstein (Washington) to Shertok, 24\26 Aug. 1948, *Documents* I, 549-551.
94. Entry for 20 Aug. 1948, DBG-YH III, 657.
95. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 1 Sep. 1948, ISA. Shitrit asked Eliath: 'Did you not draw a comparison between our [Jewish] refugees and the Arab refugees? . . . Did they [i.e., you] not mention the empty spaces in the Arab countries in connection with the refugee problem?' Eliath: 'I said: Our refugees are victims of Hitler, while the Arab refugees are victims of their own leaders. I told them what happened in Haifa and other places . . . In my opinion, it would not have been wise to speak of the empty spaces in the Arab states.'
96. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 5 Sep. 1948, ISA.
97. 'Statement Delivered by James McDonald at a meeting with M. Shertok, Tel Aviv, 6 September 1948', *Documents* I, 570-71.
98. Entry for 8 Sep. 1948, DBG-YH II, 677.
99. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 8 Sep. 1948, ISA.
100. Foreign Minister to Cabinet members, 'Instructions to the Israeli Delegation to the UN General Assembly', 10 Sep. 1948, appended to protocol of Cabinet meeting, 12 Sep. 1948, ISA. See also Shimoni (Tel Aviv) to Sasson (Paris), 16 Sep. 1948, ISA FM 3749\1.
101. Protocol of Cabinet meeting, 12 Sep. 1948, ISA. Ben-Gurion's stated agreement to allow the return of all the refugees within the framework of a comprehensive peace settlement must be seen as tactical; by September 1948 he thought it extremely unlikely that the Arabs would agree to such a settlement.
102. Bernadotte, 'Progress Report of the UN Mediator on Palestine', 16 Sep. 1948, ISA FM 2527\9.
103. 'Statement by the Spokesman of the Government of Israel', Tel Aviv, 23 Sep. 1948, *Documents* I, 626-27.
104. Protocol of Meeting of Ministerial Committee on Abandoned Property, 27 Aug. 1948, ISA FM 2564\13. See also Shitrit to Ben-Gurion and

- Shertok, 16 Aug. 1948; Shimoni to Foreign Ministry Political Division, 21 Sep. 1948; and Shitrit to Foreign Ministry Middle East Affairs Department, 26 Sep. 1948 -- all in ISA FM 2564\18.
105. Shimoni to Foreign Ministry Political Division, 21 Sep. 1948, ISA FM 2564\18.
106. Shitrit to Foreign Ministry Middle East Affairs Department, 26 Sep. 1948, ISA FM 2564\18.
107. Even Weizmann, a traditional softliner, agreed or had been brought round to agreeing, with Weitz's inflexible opposition to a return (entry for 9 Dec. 1948, Weitz, *Diary*, II, 363).
108. M. Comay, 'Note on Discussions of M.S. Comay with Bunche, Reedman and Mohn -- Haifa, 23rd and 24th September 1948', to Israel Delegation to UN General Assembly, Paris, 27 Sep. 1948, *Documents* I, 640-44.



## Conclusion

150,000 (a minority that today numbers one million – and still constitutes (a restive and potentially explosive) one fifth of the State's population).

At the same time, largely as a result of Arab belligerence and the Yishuv's sense of siege, fragility and isolation, from early April 1948 on, 'transfer' was in the air and the departure of the Arabs was deeply desired on the local and national levels by the majority in the Yishuv, from Ben-Gurion down. And while this general will was never translated into systematic policy, a large number of Arabs were expelled, the frequency of expulsions and the expulsive resolve of the troops increasing following the pan-Arab invasion of mid-May 1948 that threatened the Yishuv with extinction. Yet, still, in July and again in October–November 1948, IDF troops continued to leave Arab communities in place; much depended on local circumstances and on the individual Israeli company, battalion and brigade commanders.

But if a measure of ambivalence and confusion attended Haganah\IDF treatment of Arab communities during and immediately after conquest, there was nothing ambiguous about Israeli policy, from summer 1948, toward those who had been displaced and had become refugees and toward those who were yet to be displaced, in future operations: Generally applied with resolution and, often, with brutality, the policy was to prevent a refugee return at all costs. And if, somehow, refugees succeeded in infiltrating back, they were routinely rounded up and expelled (though tens of thousands of 'infiltrators' ultimately succeeded in resettling and becoming Israeli citizens). In this sense, it may fairly be said that all 700,000 or so who ended up as refugees were compulsorily displaced or 'expelled'.

Yet it is also worth remembering that a large proportion of those who became refugees fled their towns and villages not under direct Israeli threat or duress. Tens of thousands – mostly from well-to-do and elite families – left the towns in the war's early months because of the withdrawal of the British administration, the war-filled chaos that followed and the prospect of Jewish rule. And, in the following months, hundreds of thousands fled not under Jewish orders or direct coercion though, to be sure, most sought to move out of harm's way as Zionist troops conquered town after town and district after district. And most probably believed that they would be returning home in a matter of months if not weeks; perhaps after the Arab armies had crushed Israel.

From the first, the AHC and the local National Committees opposed the exodus, especially of army-aged males, and made efforts to block it. But they were inefficient and, sometimes, half-hearted. And, at the same time, they actively promoted the depopulation of villages and towns. Many thousands of Arabs – women, children and old people, from villages around Jerusalem, the Coastal Plain and the Jezreel and Jordan valleys, and from various towns – left, well before battle was joined, as

The first Arab–Israeli war, of 1948, was launched by the Palestinian Arabs, who rejected the UN partition resolution and embarked on hostilities aimed at preventing the birth of Israel. That war and not design, Jewish or Arab, gave birth to the Palestinian refugee problem.

But the displacement of Arabs from Palestine or from the areas of Palestine that would become the Jewish State was inherent in Zionist ideology and, in microcosm, in Zionist praxis from the start of the enterprise. The piecemeal eviction of tenant farmers, albeit in relatively small numbers, during the first five decades of Zionist land purchase and settlement naturally stemmed from, and in a sense hinted at, the underlying thrust of the ideology, which was to turn an Arab-populated land into a State with an overwhelming Jewish majority. And the Zionist leaders' thinking about, and periodic endorsement of, 'transfer' during those decades – voluntary and agreed, if possible, but coerced if not – readied hearts and minds for the denouement of 1948 and its immediate aftermath, in which some 700,000 Arabs were displaced from their homes (though the majority remained in Palestine).

But there was no pre-war Zionist plan to expel 'the Arabs' from Palestine or the areas of the emergent Jewish State; and the Yishuv did not enter the war with a plan or policy of expulsion. Nor was the pre-war 'transfer' thinking ever translated, in the course of the war, into an agreed, systematic policy of expulsion. Hence, in the war's first four months, between the end of November 1947 and the end of March 1948, there were no preparations for mass expulsion and there were almost no cases of expulsion or the leveling of villages; hence, during the following ten months, Haganah and IDF units acted inconsistently, most units driving out Arab communities as a matter of course while others left (Muslim as well as Christian and Druse) villages and townspeople in place; and hence, at war's end, Israel emerged with a substantial Arab minority, of

a result of advice and orders from local Arab commanders and officials, who feared for their safety and were concerned that their presence would hamper their militiamen in battle. Indeed, already months before the war the Arab states and the AHC had endorsed the removal of dependents from active and potential combat zones. And, starting in December 1947, Arab officers ordered the complete evacuation of specific villages in certain areas, lest their inhabitants 'treacherously' acquiesce in Israeli rule or hamper Arab military deployments. There can be no exaggerating the importance of these early, Arab-initiated evacuations in the demoralisation, and eventual exodus, of the remaining rural and urban populations.

The creation of the Palestinian refugee problem was almost inevitable, given the geographical intermixing of the Arab and Jewish populations in what is a minute country (10,000 sq. miles), the history of Arab-Jewish hostility over 1881-1947, the overwhelming opposition on both sides to a binational state, the outbreak and prolongation of the war for Israel's birth and survival, the major structural weaknesses of Palestinian Arab society, the depth of Arab animosity towards the Yishuv and Arab fears of falling under Jewish rule, and the Yishuv's fears of what would happen should the Arabs win or of what would befall a Jewish State born with a very large and hostile Arab minority.

The exodus unfolded in four or four and a half stages, closely linked to the development of the war itself. It began during December 1947-March 1948 - the first stage - with the departure of many of the country's upper and middle class families, especially from Haifa and Jaffa, towns destined to be in, or at the mercy of, the Jewish state-to-be, and from neighbourhoods of Jewish west Jerusalem. Flight proved infrequent. Household followed household, neighbour, neighbour, street, street and neighbourhood, neighbourhood (as, later, village was to follow neighbouring village, in domino clusters). The prosperous and educated feared death or injury in the ever-spreading hostilities, the anarchy that attended the gradual withdrawal of the British administration and security forces, the brigandage and intimidation of the Arab militias and irregulars and, more vaguely but generally, the unknown, probably dark future that awaited them under Jewish or, indeed, Hussein rule. Some of these considerations, as well as a variety of direct and indirect military pressures, also caused during these months the evacuation of most of the Arab rural communities in the predominantly Jewish Coastal Plain.

Most of the upper and middle class families, who moved from Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem, Ramle, Acre and Tiberias to Damascus, Nablus, Amman, Beirut, Gaza and Cairo, probably thought their exile would be temporary. They had the financial wherewithal to tide them over; many had wealthy relatives and accommodation outside the country. The urban masses and the *fellahin*, however, had nowhere to go, certainly not

in comfort. For most of them, flight meant instant destitution; it was not a course readily adopted. But the daily spectacle of abandonment by their 'betters,' with its concomitant progressive closure of businesses, shops, schools, law offices and medical clinics, and abandonment of public service posts, led to a steady attrition of morale, a cumulative sapping of faith and trust in the world around them. Their leaders were going or had gone; the British were packing. They were being left 'alone' to face the Zionist enemy.

Daily, week in, week out, over December 1947, January, February and March 1948, there were clashes along the 'seams' between the two communities in the mixed towns, ambushes in the fields and on the roads, sniping, machine-gun fire, bomb attacks and occasional mortar-firing. Problems of movement and communication, unemployment and food distribution intensified, especially in the towns, as the hostilities drew out. There is probably no accounting for the mass exodus that followed without understanding the prevalence and depth of the general sense of collapse, of 'falling apart' and of a centre that 'cannot hold', that permeated Arab Palestine, especially the towns, by April 1948. In many places, it would take very little to nudge the masses to pack up and flee.

Come the Haganah (and IZL-LHI) offensives and counteroffensives of April-June, the cumulative effect of the fears, deprivations, abandonment and depredations of the previous months, in both towns and villages, overcame the natural, basic reluctance to abandon home and property and flee. As Palestinian military power was swiftly and dramatically crushed and the Haganah demonstrated almost unchallenged superiority in successive battles, Arab morale cracked, giving way to general, blind, panic or a 'psychosis of flight',<sup>1</sup> as one IDF intelligence report put it. This was the second - and crucial - stage of the exodus. There is a clear, chronological, one-to-one correspondence between the Jewish offensives and the flight of the bulk of the population from each town and district attacked.

Often, the fall of villages harmed morale in neighbouring towns (*vide* the fall of Khirbet Nasir ad Din and Arab Tiberias). Similarly, the fall of the towns - Tiberias, Haifa, Jaffa, Beisan, Safad - and the flight of their population generated panic in the surrounding hinterlands: After Haifa, came flight from Balad al Sheikh and Hawassa; after Jaffa, Salama, Kheiriya and Yazur; after Safad, Dhahiriya Tahta, Sammu'i and Meirun. For decades the villagers had looked to the towns for leadership; now, they followed them into exile.

If Jewish attack directly and indirectly triggered most of the exodus up to June 1948, a small but significant proportion was due to direct expulsion orders and to psychological warfare ploys ('whispering propaganda') designed to intimidate people into flight. Several dozen villages were ordered or 'advised' by the Haganah to evacuate during

April–June. The expulsions were usually from areas considered strategically vital and in conformity with Plan D, which called for clear main lines of communications and border areas. But, in general, Haganah and IDF commanders were not forced to confront the moral dilemma posed by expulsion; most Arabs fled before and during battle, before the Israeli troops reached their homes and before the Israeli commanders were forced to confront the dilemma.

Moreover, during April–July, Arab commanders and the AHC ordered the evacuation of several dozen villages as well as the removal of dependents from dozens more. The invading Arab armies also occasionally ordered whole villages to depart, so as not to be in their way.

In April–May, and indeed, again in October–November, the 'atrocious factor' played a major role in flight from certain areas. Villagers and townspeople, prompted by the fear that the Jews, if victorious, would do to them what, in the reverse circumstances, victorious Arab fighters would most probably have done (and, occasionally, did, as in the Etzion Bloc in May) to the Jews, took to their heels.<sup>2</sup> The actual atrocities committed by the Jewish forces (primarily at Deir Yassin) reinforced such fears considerably, especially when magnified loudly and persistently in the Arab media for weeks thereafter. Apart from the 20-odd cases of massacre, Jewish troops often randomly killed individual prisoners of war, farm hands in the fields and the occasional villager who had stayed behind. Such actions could not but amplify flight. There were also several dozen cases of rape, a crime viewed with particular horror in Arab and Muslim societies. The fear of rape apparently figured large in the Arab imagination, and this may in part account for the despatch of women and girls out of active or potential combat zones and, in some measure, for the headlong flight of villages and urban neighbourhoods from April on.

To what extent was the exodus up to June 1948 a product of Yishuv or Arab policy?

To be sure, the Haganah's adoption and implementation during December 1947 – March 1948 of a retaliatory strategy against Arab militia bases – meaning villages and urban neighbourhoods – resulted in civilian flight. But the strategy, to judge from the documentation, was designed to punish, harm and deter militiamen, not to precipitate an exodus.

In early March, the prospect of pan-Arab invasion gave rise to Plan D. It accorded the Haganah brigade and battalion-level commanders *carte blanche* to completely clear vital areas of Arab population. Many villages served as bases for bands of irregulars; most had militias that periodically assisted the irregulars in attacks on settlements and convoys. During April–May, Haganah units, usually under orders from HGS, carried out elements of Plan D, each unit interpreting and implementing the plan as it saw fit in light of local circumstances. The Haganah

offensives were in large measure responses to Arab attacks. In general, the Jewish commanders preferred to completely clear the vital roads and border areas of Arab communities – Allon in Eastern Galilee, Carmel around Haifa and in Western Galilee, Avidan in the south. Most villagers fled before or during the fighting. Those who stayed put were almost invariably expelled.

During April–June, neither the political nor military leaderships took a decision to expel 'the Arabs'. As far as the available evidence shows, the matter was never discussed in the supreme decision-making bodies. But it was understood by all concerned that, militarily, in the struggle to survive, the fewer Arabs remaining behind and along the front lines, the better and, politically, the fewer Arabs remaining in the Jewish State, the better. At each level of command and execution, Haganah officers, in those April–June days when the fate of the State hung in the balance, simply 'understood' what was required in order to survive. Even most Mapam officers – ideologically committed to coexistence with the Arabs – failed to 'adhere' to the party line: Conditions in the field, tactically and strategically, gave precedence to immediate survival-mindedness over the long-term desirability and ethos of coexistence.

The Arab leadership inside and outside Palestine probably helped precipitate flight in the sense that, while doctrinally opposed to the exodus, it was disunited and ineffectual, and had decided, from the start, on no fixed, uniform policy and gave the masses no consistent guidelines for behaviour, especially during the crucial month of April. The records are incomplete, but they show overwhelming confusion and disparate purpose, 'policy' and implementation changing from week to week and area to area. No guiding hand or central control is evident; no overarching 'policy' was manifest.

During the months before April 1948, especially in March, the flight of the middle and upper classes from the towns provoked condemnations from local NCs and the AHC (while NC members, and their families, were themselves busy fleeing their homes or already living abroad). But little was effectively done to prevent flight. And the surrounding Arab states did little, before late March, to block the entry of the evacuees into their territory. The rich and middle class arrived in Nablus, Amman, Beirut, and Cairo in a trickle and were not needy; it seemed to be merely a repeat of the exodus of 1936–1939. No Arab country effectively closed its borders though, at the end of March, Syria and Lebanon severely curtailed the issue of entry visas. The Husseinis were probably happy that many Opposition-linked families were leaving Palestine. The AHC, almost all its members already dispersed abroad, issued no forceful, blanket, public condemnations of the exodus, though occasionally it implored army-aged males to stand, or return, and fight.<sup>3</sup> At the local level, some NCs (in Haifa and Jerusalem, for example) and local commanders tried to stem the exodus, even setting up people's courts

to try offenders and threatening confiscation of the departees' property. However, enforcement seems to have been weak and haphazard; the measures proved largely unavailing. And bribes could overwhelm any regulation. Militiamen and irregulars often had an interest in encouraging flight – they needed the houses for quarters and there was money to be made out of it (departees paid to have their empty homes 'protected', abandoned houses were looted, and money was extorted from departees).

Regarding April–May and the start of the main stage of the exodus, I have found no evidence to show that the AHC or the Arab leaders outside Palestine issued blanket instructions, by radio or otherwise, to the inhabitants to flee. However, in certain areas, women, children and old people continued to be evacuated and specific villages were instructed to leave, lock, stock and barrel. Moreover, it appears that Hussein supporters in certain areas ordered or encouraged flight out of political calculation, believing that they were doing what the AHC would want them to do. Haifa affords illustration. While it is unlikely that Hussein or AHC members from outside Palestine instructed the Haifa Arab leadership on 22 April to opt for evacuation rather than surrender, local Hussein supporters, led by Sheikh Murad, certainly did. They were probably motivated by fear that staying in Haifa would be interpreted as acquiescence in Jewish rule and 'treachery' and by the calculation that Palestinian misery, born of the exodus, would increase the pressure on the Arab states to intervene. Local and AHC leaders believed that the evacuation was temporary and that a mass return would soon follow. In any event, the AHC encouraged the continuing exodus after it had begun. The case of Haifa in late April – early May is supremely instructive about the ambivalence of the national and local Palestinian leaderships toward the exodus.

The Arab states, apart from appealing to the British to halt the Haganah offensives and charging that the Jews were expelling Palestine's Arabs, seem to have taken weeks to digest and understand what was happening. They did not appeal to the Palestinian masses to leave, but neither, in April, did they publicly enjoin the Palestinians to stay put. Perhaps the politicians in Damascus, Cairo and Amman, like Hussein, understood that they would need to justify their armed intervention – and the exodus, presented as a planned Zionist expulsion, afforded such justification.

But the dimensions and burden of the problem created by the exodus, falling necessarily and initially upon the shoulders of the host countries, quickly persuaded the Arab states – primarily Jordan – that it were best to halt the floodtide. The AHC, too, was apparently shocked by the ease and completeness of the exodus. Hence the spate of appeals to the Palestinians in early May by Jordan, the AHC and the ALA to stay put or, if already in exile, to return home. But, given the ongoing hostilities and

the expectation of a dramatic increase in warfare along the fronts, the appeals had little effect: The refugees, who had just left active combat zones, were hardly minded to return to them, especially on the eve of the invasion. Besides, in most areas the Haganah physically barred a return. Later, after 15 May, the pan-Arab invasion and the widespread fighting made any thought of a return impracticable. At the same time, the invasion substantially increased the readiness of Haganah commanders to clear border areas of Arab communities. (And given the narrow, elongated shape of the new State, every area was in effect a border area.)

Already in April–May, on the local and national levels, the Yishuv's leaders began to contemplate the problem of a return: Should the refugees be allowed back? The approach of the First Truce in early June raised the problem as one of the major political and strategic issues facing the new State. The Arab states, on the local level on each front and in international forums, had begun pressing for Israel to allow back the refugees. And the UN Mediator, Bernadotte, had vigorously taken up the cause.

However, politically and militarily it was clear to most Israelis that a return would be disastrous. Militarily – and the war, all understood, was far from over – it would mean the introduction of a large, potential Fifth Column; politically, it would mean the reintroduction of a large, disruptive, Arab minority. The military commanders argued against a return; so did political common sense. Both were reinforced by strident anti-return lobbying by settlements around the country.

The mainstream national leaders, led by Ben-Gurion, had to confront the issue within two problematic political contexts – the international context of future Israeli–Arab relations, Israeli–United Nations relations and Israeli–United States relations, and the local context of a coalition government, in which the Mapam ministers (and, less insistently, other ministers) advocated future Jewish–Arab coexistence and a return of 'peace-minded' refugees after the war. Hence the Cabinet consensus of June–August 1948 was that there would be no return during the war and that the matter could be reconsidered after the hostilities. This left Israel's diplomats with room for manoeuvre and was sufficiently flexible to allow Mapam to stay in the government, leaving national unity intact.

On the practical level, from spring 1948, a series of developments on the ground increasingly precluded any possibility of a refugee return. These were an admixture of incidental, 'natural' processes and steps specifically designed to assure the impossibility of a return, including the gradual destruction of the abandoned villages, the destruction or cultivation and long-term takeover of Arab fields, the establishment of new settlements on Arab lands and the settlement of Jewish immigrants in abandoned villages and urban neighbourhoods.

The months between the end of the First Truce (8 July) and the signing of the Israeli-Arab armistice agreements in spring-summer 1949 were characterised by short, sharp Israeli offensives interspersed with long periods of ceasefire. In these offensives, the IDF beat the Jordanian and Egyptian armies and the ALA in the Galilee, and conquered large parts of the territory earmarked by the UN for a Palestine Arab state. During and after these battles in July, October-November and December 1948 - January 1949, something like 300,000 more Palestinians became refugees.

Again, there was no Cabinet or IDF General Staff-level decision to expel. Indeed, the July fighting (the 'Ten Days') - the third stage of the exodus - was preceded by an explicit IDF General Staff order to all units and corps to refrain from destruction of villages and expulsions without prior authorisation by the Defence Minister. The order was issued as a result of the cumulative political pressure during the summer by various softline ministers on Ben-Gurion and, perhaps, was never intended to be taken too seriously. In any event, it was largely ignored.

But the overarching operational orders for operations Dekel, Dani, Yoav and Hiram - the main July-November offensives that resulted in Arab displacement - did not include expulsive clauses. However, from July onwards, there was a growing readiness in the IDF units to expel. This was at least partly due to the feeling, encouraged by the mass exodus from Jewish-held areas to date, that an almost completely Jewish State was a realistic possibility. There were also powerful vengeful urges at play - revenge for the Palestinian onslaught on the Yishuv during December 1947 - March 1948, the pan-Arab invasion of May-June, and the massive Jewish losses. In short, the Palestinians were being punished for having forced upon the Yishuv the protracted, bitter war that had resulted in the death of one, and the maiming of two, in every 100 in the Jewish population. The Arabs had rejected partition and unleashed the dogs of war. In consequence, quite understandably, the Yishuv's leadership - left, centre and right - came to believe that leaving in place a large hostile Arab minority (or an Arab majority) inside the State would be suicidal. And driving out the Arabs, it emerged, was easy; generally they fled at the first whiff of grapeshot, their notables and commanders in the lead. Ben-Gurion said that this revealed a collective lack of backbone. In general, the advancing Haganah and IDF units were spared the need to face morally painful decisions to expel communities; to a large degree, Arab flight let the commanders off the moral hook, though, to be sure, many were subsequently, at the very least, troubled by the need to confront, and repel, would-be returnees.

The tendency of IDF units to expel civilians increased just as the pressures on the remaining Arabs by their leaders inside and outside Palestine to stay put grew and just as their motivation to stand fast

increased. During the summer, the Arab governments intermittently tried to bar the entry of new refugees into their territory. The Palestinians were encouraged to stay in Palestine or to return to their homes. At the same time, those Palestinians still in their villages, hearing of the misery that was the lot of their exiled brethren and despairing of salvation and a reconquest of Palestine, generally preferred to stay put, despite the prospect of Israeli rule. After July, Arab resistance to flight was far greater than in the pre-July days. There was to be much less 'spontaneous' flight; villagers tended either to stay put or to leave under duress.

Ben-Gurion clearly wanted as few Arabs as possible in the Jewish State. From early on he hoped that they would flee. He hinted at this in February 1948 and said so explicitly in meetings in August, September and October. But no expulsion policy was ever enunciated and Ben-Gurion always refrained from issuing clear or written expulsion orders; he preferred that his generals 'understand' what he wanted. He probably wished to avoid going down in history as the 'great expeller' and he did not want his government to be blamed for a morally questionable policy. And he sought to preserve national unity in wartime.

But while there was no 'expulsion policy,' the July offensives were characterised by far more expulsions and, indeed, brutality than the first half of the war. Yet events varied from place to place. Ben-Gurion approved the largest expulsion of the war, from Lydda and Ramle, but, at the same time, IDF Northern Front, with Ben-Gurion's authorisation, left mostly-Christian Nazareth's population in place; the 'Christian factor' outgunned security and demographic concerns and was allowed to determine policy. And, in the centre of the country, three Arab villages sitting astride vital axes - Fureidis, Jisr az Zarka and Abu Ghosh - were allowed to stay, for economic and sentimental reasons.

Again, the IDF offensives in October-November - the fourth stage of the exodus - were marked by a measure of ambivalence in all that concerned the troops' treatment of overrun civilian populations. In the south ('Yoav'), where Allon was in command, almost no Arab civilians remained. Allon preferred Arab-clear rear areas and let his subordinates know what he wanted. In the north ('Hiram'), where Carmel was in charge, the picture was varied. Many Arabs declined to budge, contrary to Ben-Gurion's expectations. This was partly due to the fact that before October, the villagers had hardly been touched by the war or its privations. Again, Carmel's hesitant, inexplicit expulsion orders, issued after the battles were over, contributed. So did the varied demographic make-up of the central-upper Galilee pocket. The IDF generally related far more benignly to Christians and Druze than to Muslims. Most Christian and Druze villagers stayed put and were allowed to do so. Many of the Muslim villagers fled; others were expelled. But many other Muslims - in Deir Hanna, Arraba, Sakhrin, Majd al Kurum and other

villages – stayed put, and were allowed to stay. Much depended on specific local factors.

During the following months, with the Cabinet in Tel Aviv gradually persuaded by Arab rhetoric and actions that the conflict would remain a central feature of the Middle East for many years, the IDF was authorised to clear Arab communities from Israel's long, winding and highly penetrable borders to a depth of 5–15 kilometres. The result may be seen as 'stage four and a half' of the exodus. One of the aims was to prevent infiltration of refugees back to their homes. The IDF was also afraid of sabotage and spying. Early November saw a wave of IDF expulsions and transfers inland of villagers along the northern border. Some villagers, ordered out, were 'saved' by last-minute intervention by soft-line Israeli politicians. The following months and years saw other border areas cleared or partially cleared of Arab inhabitants.

In examining the causes of the Arab exodus from Palestine over 1947–1949, accurate quantification is impossible. I have tried to show that the exodus occurred in stages and that causation was multi-layered: A Haifa merchant did not leave only because of the weeks or months of sniping and bombings; or because business was getting bad; or because of intimidation and extortion by irregulars; or because he feared the collapse of law and order when the British left; or because he feared for his prospects and livelihood under Jewish rule. He left because of the accumulation of all these factors. And the mass of Haifaites who fled in his wake, at the end of April – early May 1948, did not flee only as a result of the Arab militia collapse and Haganah conquest of 21–22 April. They fled because of the cumulative effect of the elite's departure, the snipings and bombings and material privations, unemployment and chaos during the previous months; and because of their local leaders' instructions to leave, issued on 22 April; and because of the follow up orders by the AHC to continue departing; and because of IZL and Haganah activities and pressures during the days after the conquest; and because of the prospect of life under Jewish rule.

The situation was somewhat more clear-cut in the countryside. But there, too, multiple causation often applied. Take Qaluniya, near Jerusalem. There were months of hostilities in the area, intermittent shortages of supplies, severance of communications with Arab Jerusalem, lack of leadership or clear instructions about what to do or expect, lack of sustained help from outside, rumours of impending Jewish attack, Jewish attacks on neighbouring villages and reports of Jewish atrocities, and, finally, Jewish attack on Qaluniya itself (after most of the inhabitants had left). Again, evacuation was the end product of a cumulative process.

Even in the case of a Haganah or IDF expulsion order, the actual departure was often the result of a process rather than of that one act. Take Lydda, largely untouched by battle before July 1948. During

the first months of the war, there was unemployment and skyrocketing prices, and the burden of armed irregulars. In April–May, thousands of refugees from Jaffa and its hinterland arrived in the town, camping out in courtyards and on the town's periphery. They brought demoralisation and sickness. Some wealthy families left. There were pinprick Haganah raids. There was uncertainty about Abdullah's commitment to the town's defence. In June, there was a feeling that Lydda's 'turn' was imminent. Then came the attack, with bombings and shelling, Arab Legion pullout, collapse of resistance, sniping, massacre – and expulsion orders. Lydda was evacuated.

What happened in Palestine/Israel over 1947–1949 was so complex and varied, the situation radically changing from date to date and place to place, that a single-cause explanation of the exodus from most sites is untenable. At most, one can say that certain causes were important in certain areas at certain times, with a general shift in the spring of 1948 from precedence of cumulative internal Arab factors – lack of leadership, economic problems, breakdown of law and order – to a primacy of external, compulsive causes: Haganah/IDF attacks and expulsions, fear of Jewish attacks and atrocities, lack of help from the Arab world and the AHC and a feeling of impotence and abandonment, and orders from Arab officials and commanders to leave. In general, throughout the war, the final and decisive precipitant to flight in most places was Haganah, IZL, LHI or IDF attack or the inhabitants' fear of imminent attack.

During the second half of 1948, international concern about the refugee problem mounted. Concern translated into pressure. This pressure, initiated by Bernadotte and the Arab states in the summer of 1948, increased as the months passed, as the number of refugees swelled, as their physical plight became more acute and as the discomfort of their Arab hosts grew. The problem moved to the forefront of every discussion of the Middle East crisis and the Arabs made their agreement to a settlement, nay, even to meaningful negotiations, with Israel contingent on a solution of the problem by repatriation.

From summer 1948, Bernadotte, and from the autumn, the United States, pressed Israel to agree to a substantial measure of repatriation as part of a comprehensive solution to the refugee problem and the conflict. In December, the UN General Assembly endorsed the (peace-minded) refugees' 'right of return'. But, as the abandoned villages fell into decrepitude or were bulldozed or settled, and as more Jewish immigrants poured into the country and were accommodated in abandoned Arab houses, the physical possibility of substantial repatriation grew more remote. Allowing back Arab refugees, Israel argued, would commensurately reduce Israel's ability to absorb Jewish refugees from Europe and the Middle East. Time worked against repatriation. Bernadotte and the United States wanted Israel to make a 'gesture' in the coin of repatriation, to get peace negotiations off the ground.

In the spring of 1949, the thinking about a 'gesture' matured into an American demand that Israel agree to take back 250,000, with the remaining refugees to be resettled in the neighbouring countries. America threatened and cajoled, but never with sufficient force or conviction to persuade Tel Aviv to accede.

In the spring, in a final major effort, the United Nations and United States engineered the Lausanne Peace Conference. Weeks and months of haggling over agenda and secondary problems led nowhere. The Arabs made all progress contingent on Israeli agreement to mass repatriation. Under American pressure, Tel Aviv reluctantly agreed, in July, to take back 65,000-70,000 refugees (the '100,000 Offer') as part of a comprehensive peace settlement. But by summer 1949, public and party political opinion in Israel - in part, due to conditioning by the government - had so hardened against a return that even this minimal offer was greeted by a storm of public protest and howls within Mapai. In any case, the sincerity of the Israeli offer was never tested; the Arabs rejected it out of hand. The United States, too, regarded it as insufficient; as too little, too late.

The insufficiency of the '100,000 Offer', the Arab states' continuing rejectionism, their unwillingness to accept and concede defeat and their inability to publicly agree to absorb and resettle most of the refugees if Israel agreed to repatriate the rest, the Egyptian rejection of the 'Gaza Plan', and America's unwillingness or inability to apply persuasive pressure on Israel and the Arab states to compromise - all meant that the Arab-Israeli impasse would remain and that Palestine's displaced Arabs would remain refugees, to be utilised during the following years by the Arab states as a powerful political and propaganda tool against Israel. The memory or vicarious memory of 1948 and the subsequent decades of humiliation and deprivation in the refugee camps would ultimately turn generations of Palestinians into potential or active terrorists and the 'Palestinian problem' into one of the world's most intractable. And at the core of that problem remain the refugees.

## ENDNOTES

1. HIS-AD, 'The Emigration . . . 1.12.47-1.6.48', 30 June 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.13 (1).
2. Aharon Cohen, no enemy of the Arabs, at the time quoted two observations. An English sergeant told an American newsman on the day of Jaffa's surrender: 'The Arabs were frightened to death when they imagined to themselves that the Jews would do to them half of what they would have done to the Jews were the situation reversed'; and an educated Haifa Arab said, according to Cohen: 'The Arabs always thought that they [themselves] were a primitive, wild and uncivilised people, capable of anything, while the Jews [they thought] were a civilised people, able to restrain their impulses. But in face of the Deir

Yassin atrocity, [the Arabs] began to think that this was not exactly the picture. And because at that time [i.e., April] the Jews were winning the military struggle, the flight began' (Cohen, 'in Face of the Arab Evacuation', undated but late May 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.11 (8), published in *Ahdut Ha'avodah*, June 1948).

3. HIS-AD, 'The Emigration . . . 1.12.47-1.6.48', 30 June 1948, HHA-ACP 10.95.13 (1).