



The Moral Conundrum Over Palestine

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Many in the Western world find themselves in a moral conundrum regarding Israel and the Palestinians. Living in an age that worships "victimhood" the politically correct West is in a difficult quandary. On the one hand, guilt over the Holocaust was the major force behind the creation of the Jewish State in 1948, at least according to common perceptions. On the other hand, Western guilt, already burdened by the dislocation and exploitation caused by Colonialism, has manifested itself in sympathy for the Palestinians, and the still unsettled Palestinian refugees in Gaza, Lebanon, and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Except that Israel, unlike Britain and France, is not, and never was a colonial power. The Palestinian refugee problem can be traced to the decisions made by the Arab leadership

in Palestine in 1947-1948, and the encouragement they received from the surrounding Arab states, whose territorial ambitions as much as their desire to possess the relative wealth built by the Jewish community in Palestine, motivated their policies.

On November 29, 1947 the U.N. voted on partition for Palestine (UN Resolution 181). By a majority of 33 votes to 13, it decided to create a Jewish and Arab state in Palestine. The Jews, eager to absorb hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors suffering in Displaced Persons Camps throughout Germany and Cyprus, welcomed the partition, albeit, as a shrunken Jewish Homeland.

The 1917 Balfour Declaration issued by Great Britain sought to create a

homeland for the Jews in their ancestral home of Palestine. Approximately 77% of the land promised to the Jews in the Balfour Declaration was however sheared off to create the Emirate of Trans-Jordan under British guidance in 1922, and no Jews have been allowed to live there since.

The land allocated to the Jewish State by the U.N. Partition Plan of 1947 was barely contiguous and included the Coastal Plain, Eastern Galilee in the North (not contiguous of the rest of the state), and the central Negev in the South without the city of Beersheba. The historical areas of Judea and Samaria were to be part of the Arab state including the Western Galilee, and Gaza. Jerusalem and Bethlehem were to be administered by an international trusteeship.

An earlier partition plan had been proposed on July 7, 1937. Britain's Peel Commission had issued its Report in London, recognizing that the conflict in Palestine between the Arabs and Jews was insoluble and recommended the partition of Palestine into two independent sovereign states. There was no mention in it of Palestinians or the "Palestinian People." The Commission was ostensibly established in response to Arab riots that had broken out in 1936, which were instigated by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Hussaini - an ally of Adolph Hitler. The Arab rejection of the Peel Commission was a prelude to their rejection of the U.N. partition.

The Arab (the word Palestinian at that time only referred to Jews - Arabs were simply called Arabs, whose main objective was to be part of an Arab nation stretching from North Africa to the Persian Gulf) attitude was "all or nothing at all" - namely no sovereign Jewish presence anywhere in the Arab Middle East. With each rejection, the size of the Arab "Palestinian" state shrunk. In 1937, the Arabs would have controlled 90% of Mandatory Palestine (77% became Jordan, and 13% would have been added to satisfy Arab demands) allocating only 10% to the Jews. In 1947, the percentages were reversed in favor of the Jews. As a result of the Arab's war to annihilate the newborn Jewish State in 1948, Jordan and Egypt took the territory allocated to become an Arab-Palestinian state, and the Palestinians became refugees.

In liberal America and especially in Europe, facts do not speak to the heart, although they might if logic and reason mattered. Thus, the fact that the Arab-Palestinians created their own misery by rejecting two-partition plans does not matter to the touchy-feely liberal crowds. As human beings we should have a heart that is sensitive to the suffering of Palestinian refugees. But the questions we must ask are: why in almost 60 years did neither Egypt, Lebanon, nor Syria for instance provide citizenship for those Palestinians in refugee camps, and why weren't they absorbed by their fellow Arabs-Muslims in these countries who speak the same language, worship in the same mosques, and follow the same traditions?

Another question we must ask is why didn't Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (PA); established in 1994, provide housing for fellow Palestinians in refugee camps in Gaza, Nablus, Jenin, etc., especially since Israel was ready to help with funding?

As awful as conditions are for the Palestinian refugees, the fact is nevertheless that they have been more pampered by the international community and the UN than any other refugee population who has suffered no less, and probably a lot more. Kurds, Tibetans, Indians, Pakistanis, Hungarians, Laotians, Vietnamese, Bosnians, and Africans did not have a special agency of the UN created just for them. UNWRA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) was created solely to deal with the Palestinian Arab issue. Many more Indian and Pakistani refugees died or were dislocated in the Indian sub-continent partition of 1947 than Palestinians. There were approximately 600,000-750,000 Palestinian refugees in 1948 compared to 15 million Hindus and Muslims that crossed borderlines, yet no special UN agency was established for them.

Assuming that the past is behind us, why is it not a top priority for the Hamas-led government in Gaza to eradicate the refugee camps and build permanent housing, decent schools, and create employment for fellow Palestinians? The same question should be asked of Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority. Regretfully, these refu-

gees are being used as pawns against Israel, and the PA would rather spend the billions of dollars in international aid on arming its "security forces" rather than on its people in need.

The burdens of education and welfare have been left to the mosques and UNRWA where, in addition to health care and food, Palestinian refugee youth receive a steady dose of hateful incitement against Jews, Israel, Christians, America and infidels. And liberal guilt-ridden West is silent - they pump in millions to assuage their guilt and fail to demand any changes.

The Peel Commission Report summed up the nature of the conflict as it was then in 1937 which is as relevant today, "The Arabs desire to revive the traditions of the Arab Golden age. The Jews desire to show what they can achieve when restored to the land in which the Jewish nation was born."

The Jewish State would have eventually been restored regardless of the Holocaust, albeit somewhat later. 2000 years of persecution and humiliation in exile had created an invincible force. The Arab refugees and their sovereign rights were never denied or rejected. Rather, the Arabs of Palestine themselves determined their future, and they chose to kill the Jews and the Jewish State rather than create their own state. They sought to revive an Arab Muslim Empire in the Middle East. Many still do.

The Western conundrum mired with guilt over the “victimized” Palestinians is misplaced. Instead of guilt the West should demand that Arab and Palestinian dictatorships address the issue of human rights for their people by making welfare

and humanity a priority. They should demand, as Ronald Reagan did in Berlin, to “tear down those camps” and give their people a life free from hatred, war, suffering, and death.