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THE ETHNIC CLEANSING OF PALESTINE

A CRASH COURSE ON THE TRUTH

The "Nakba" of 1948 and continuous policy of ethnic cleansing



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THE 1948 ETHNIC CLEANSING OF PALESTINE

The usage of the term **ethnic cleansing** in the context of the 1948 “al-Nakba” has become more common with the phenomenal, well-researched work of Ilan Pappé’s *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. The Nakba, Arabic for catastrophe, is commemorated annually by Palestinians, and its commemoration is illegal under Israeli law.

DEFINITION

Before delving into the historicity of Palestine’s ethnic cleansing, we must look to a definition of the term. The U.S. State Department has defined ethnic cleansing as **“the systematic and forced removal of the members of an ethnic group from communities in order to change the ethnic composition of a given region”**. Using this definition, we can clearly see that the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was and is a grave reality.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROBLEM

When the Zionist movement sought the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and gained this approval through the UN Partition Plan of 1947, it had one major problem: The majority of the population in its new Jewish state was not Jewish. Rather, they were Palestinian Muslims and Christians (and also Palestinian Jews). This demographic problem was a threat to the nature of a Jewish state itself, and would be a problem if Israel was to be truly ‘democratic’. How could Israel exist as a Jewish state if its demographic composition was not a Jewish majority? This “problem” is what set the stage for Palestine’s ethnic cleansing and population transfer.

PRESENCE OF A PLAN AND PLAN DALET

One of the most common myths is that the mass amount of Palestinian refugees and those killed during 1948 was simply a consequence of war, and was unintended. However, this was not the case. Instead, it was a meticulous plan and specific military orders were given to this effect: to expel and kill Palestinians and to destroy their homes and their villages. The mass expulsion of Palestinians and their ethnic cleansing would allow a Jewish majority to exist in the state of Israel and thus solve the demographic problem. Without this expulsion, Israel would cease to exist as a Jewish state: thus, the ethnic cleansing was necessary. Those who claim that the change in demographics was unintended, also revel in the ‘success’ of a million Palestinians fleeing. In fact, the first President of Israel, Chaim Weitzmann called it a “miracle”.

CLAUSE 3B4 OF PLAN DALET: “Destruction of villages (setting fire to, blowing up, and planting mines in the debris), especially those population centers which are difficult to control continuously. Mounting search and control operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the village and conducting a search inside it. In the event of resistance, the armed force must be destroyed and the population must be expelled outside the borders of the state.”

The first evidence of such a detailed plan of ethnic cleansing is in the British Peel Commission of 1937 which recommended a population transfer (essentially, an ethnic cleansing). In the words of Ben-Gurion, in a letter in 1937, he wrote "The Arabs will have to go, but one needs an opportune moment for making it happen, such as a war."

The second and most damning evidence of a conscious plan to ethnically cleanse Palestine is the existence of "Plan Dalet", a codified strategy by the Haganah (the Jewish military of the time, later turned into the IDF) that was implemented soon after the Partition Plan was adopted. It called for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian villages, and the expulsion of Palestinians to neighbouring countries.

It is important to note that although Plan D was certainly an important manifestation of Zionist strategies and goals to ethnically cleanse Palestine, it is not, and should not be considered, the only evidence of ill-intent. The Irgun, as well as the Lehi military units, were not in any way bound by Plan D (since it was a Haganah military order), yet were responsible for the exodus and massacres of thousands of Palestinians. Moreover, it is clear that "transfer" was already being planned by the Zionist leadership and legitimized to a certain degree by Great Britain since 1937, when the Peel Commission Report, justified ethnically cleansing Palestinians from any future Jewish State.

AL NAKBA: THE CATASTROPHE OF 1948

The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine began before the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. 200 000 Palestinians had been cleansed and more than 50 villages destroyed before the first Arab soldier entered Palestine. With the destruction and massacres of many villages, Palestinians began to flee in fear of their lives. The infamous massacre of Deir Yassin, where 100 Palestinians, mostly women and children, were murdered, was used to terrify the Palestinian population into fleeing. In addition to numerous other massacres, Palestinians fled, intending to return at the end of hostilities. Instead, over 800,000 Palestinians became refugees, never to return, and more than 500 Palestinian villages were completely **obliterated**. In the words of Moshe Dayan, Haganah military commander: "*Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist, not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either.... There is not one single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population.*"

"The children they killed by breaking their heads with sticks. There was not a house



Palestinians fleeing their villages in 1948

without dead. One commander ordered a soldier to put two elderly women in a house and blow up the house with them. The soldier refused. The commander then ordered other men to do it, and it was done. **One soldier had boasted that he had raped a woman and then shot her.**" Israeli paper, 'Al ha-Mishmar on the massacre at Al-Dawaymiya

"EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO LEAVE ANY COUNTRY, INCLUDING HIS OR HER OWN AND RETURN TO IT."

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, ARTICLE 13

REFUGEES AND THEIR RIGHT OF RETURN

Because of the ethnic cleansing and hostilities of 1967, roughly a million Palestinians became refugees. Due to the vast amount of Palestinians now homeless, several refugee camps were set up in order to accommodate them. More than 1.4 million Palestinians still live in 58 refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank. There are over 5 million Palestinian refugees eligible for UNRWA services (i.e. recognized Palestine refugees). Many of these families still have the keys to their homes now destroyed, and have never been allowed to return, despite UN Resolution 194, guaranteeing this right. The main reason for their inability to return is because they are a demographic threat to Israel. If they were allowed to return to their homes, the state of Israel could not characterize itself as Jewish, as the vast majority would be Palestinian. As such, Israel has not permitted them to return to their homes, and they continue to be forgotten in refugee camps across the region. Meanwhile, Jews across the world are encouraged to move to Israel. The situation in the refugee camps is dire, Palestinians are not recognized citizens of the countries they reside in, and basic services are provided by UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency).

FURTHER READING: THE ETHNIC CLEANSING OF PALESTINE BY ILAN PAPPE



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