

The Palestinians – were they driven out, or did they leave of their own accord?

A Research Paper by Dave Lane (also known as “microlight” on the Internet!). March 2003

Introduction.

Anyone who follows Middle Eastern affairs or who listens to what both sides have to say about the Israeli/Palestinian problem, comes up against the old question of why two thirds of the Palestinians who lived in what is now the state of Israel left the country in 1948. To listen to the Palestinians, one hears that they were driven out by either force, threats or in fear of their lives. Many Israelis would have us believe that the Palestinians left of their own accord and were even encouraged to leave by their own leaders. Over the last half century the truth has been mired with exaggeration, cover ups, a denial of known facts and for most Westerners, any attempt to discover the truth, has been a difficult undertaking.

The mist is slowly clearing as more and more official documents have been released covering that period, plus the hard work of the “new revisionist” Middle Eastern historians, and at last some semblance of the real facts of the period can now be studied by even those who are not qualified historians or experts in Middle Eastern studies.

This paper is an attempt by one such non-expert person to try to make sense of the totally conflicting statements which one hears or reads about, when up to 800,000 Palestinians left Israeli controlled land in 1948. Why did they leave? Were they forced out? Did they leave of their own accord? Did the Palestinian and other Arab leaders encourage them to leave? In order to attempt to answer these questions, there are only three types of evidence or information available, which one can use to search for the truth. One is the spoken testimony of those who lived through the events. Another is the books that have been written since that period. The third source are the historical and official records of the period some of which have only come to light in the last 20 years.

This paper is written by an outside observer of both the area and by someone who is interested in the historical background to the current conflicts. It is an attempt to piece together the known facts and to present the information in an easily understood format, which can be read by the ordinary “man in the street”. Many of the current books on the subject make for heavy reading and it is time a more general article was written by someone who is neither a Jew, Palestinian, Arab, Muslim nor even a Christian.

The paper is broken down into a number of sections and will be placed on the Internet in two separate parts. Firstly, a very brief background giving mainly population, land ownership and refugee statistics. Secondly, a larger section on the plans for the mass expulsion of Palestinians, which were, discussed by the Jewish leadership PRIOR to 1948. This section is fairly large, as the writer felt that pure facts about the 1948 population transfers would not show anything like the real picture, nor would they illustrate the intent for this action which clearly existed for at least a decade prior to 1948. A separate article has been written about the period after July 1948.

This article has been written in an attempt to find the truth. For half of my lifetime I have listened to totally conflicting stories and explanations for the “catastrophe” or mass departure of the indigenous population from Palestine. The two differing “explanations” were totally incompatible. Either one explanation was wrong and the other right, or the truth lay somewhere in between. Over the last year I have tried to research every avenue open to a non-scholar, and this article is a result of those researches. These studies have, to me, produced a definite conclusion. Other readers will have to make up their own minds!

Section 1. Background.

Anyone who is reading this paper is almost certainly fairly well acquainted with the historical background leading up to the formation of the state of Israel so no extensive history will be given. There are however a few factual historical statistics which should be given to show the magnitude of the changes that have taken place in Palestine in the last century.

At the beginning of the 20th century following the defeat of the Turks, the population of Palestine initially decreased from around 800,000 until 1914 when it stabilised at around 640,000. This figure comprised of 512,000 Muslims, 66,000 Jews and 61,000 Christians (*Connor Cruise O'Brien "The Siege"*). By 1917 the Palestinian Arabs constituted over 90% of the population after the British had occupied the country. Following the massive immigration from Poland and Russia in 1925, relatively few Jews came to Palestine over the next few years. “Between 1926 and 1931, the Jewish population increased from only 149,000 to 174,606 whilst at the same time the Arab population increased from 675,450 to 759,700” (*Dan Cohn-Sherbok & Dawoud el-Alami "The Palestine Israeli Conflict"*).

The emergence of the Nazi regime in Germany drove thousands of Jews to escape from Europe and to seek refuge in Palestine when most countries shut their doors to them. “From 1933 to 1936, the proportion of Jews in the total population of Palestine, which has shrunk or remained stagnant from 1926 to 1932, grew from 18% to nearly 30%. In the year 1935 alone, almost 62,000 Jews arrived in Palestine, a number greater than the entire Jewish population of the country as recently as 1919”.

The most authoritative work on Palestine population statistics is “The population of Palestine” by Justin McCarthy who says that in 1946 the “Arab population in Palestine was 1,339,773 and the Jewish population 602,586. Both figures had grown larger by 1948”.

The statistics on actual land ownership during the period 1946 to 1948 are somewhat confusing with different sources quoting slightly different figures. The actual discrepancy is less than 2% so that one can fairly safely assume that the figures represent a reasonably accurate figure. Khalidi’s statistics show that in 1946 the Jews owned 10.6 percent of all privately owned land in Palestine with the Arabs, collectively or privately, owning or living on almost all the rest. Although these are Khalidi’s figures, taken from UN data they are based on original British Mandate statistics. (*Walid Khalidi "From Heaven to Conquest", p680, map, and p673 the UN figures*).

The Jewish owned lands were fully registered with the authorities but not all the Palestinian land had gone through any formal registration/ownership processes despite the fact that in many cases, generations of people had lived on their land for centuries.

The population of Israel. (the 1948 figures are **after** the majority of the Palestinians had left)

Religion	1948 Population		2001 Population	
	Population	%	Population	%
Jewish	646,000	80.1%	5,240,000	81.3%
Muslim	160,000	19.9%	980,000	15.2%
Christian	N/A	N/A	130,000	2.1%
Druze	N/A	N/A	110,000	1.6%
Total	806,000	100%	6.4 million	100%

(Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics)

The population – West Bank and Gaza

Religion	1948 Population		2001 Population	
	Population	%	Population	%
Jewish			182,900	5.5%
Muslim	570,000	100%	3,268,832	94.5%
Total	570,000	100%	3.45 Million	100%

(CIA statistics)

Palestinian Refugees in the Middle East and USA.

Country/Area	1948 Refugees	2001 Refugees
West Bank	380,000	652,855
Gaza	190,000	766,124
Lebanon	100,000	408,008
Syria	75,000	444,921
Jordan	70,000	1,741,796
Iraq	4,000	74,284
Egypt	7,000	40,468
Saudi Arabia	Not known	274,762
Kuwait	Not known	34,370
Other Gulf States	N/A	104,578
USA	Not known	220,361

(figures taken from Palestinian sources in the Jerusalem Post article "Deciphering the refugee code" of 2/8/2002)

Section 2. The germ of an idea was born.

The Jewish aim was always to create their own state, a “homeland” and a place of security for their people scattered around the globe. There were two ways to achieve this state. To increase Jewish immigration and purchase more and more land in the area, or to persuade the indigenous population to relocate elsewhere. Records indicate that initially the former route to a state was the chosen course of action by the Jews, but although this is what their leaders indicated in public pronouncement and in their official publications, some of their private writings tell another story.

As long ago as 1895 Herzl wrote in his private diary (on 12th June) :

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 discreetly and circumspectly.

As the bulk of the Palestinians at that time would have been considered “poor” one might assume that Hetzl had in mind a large scale expulsion of the indigenous population.

In July 1937 the British Government produced the Peel Commission Report which for the first time, brought the idea of partition and of population transfer, into the open arena. One of its proposals was a transfer of some 225,000 Arabs out of an area of the proposed Jewish State – with the apparent endorsement in principle by the British Government. Although Britain later (in October 1938) tried it’s best to drop any idea or suggestion of population transfer or partition through the Woodhead Commission Report, the seed had already been sown and the genie had been let out of the bag. The publication of the 1937 Peel report brought about a more open discussion regarding population transfer, despite the fact that the British Government no longer endorsed these ideas.

David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv leader, wrote in his diaries:

In my comment on the report immediately after the first reading (10.7.37) I ignored a central point whose importance outweighs all the other positive points and counterbalances all the reports deficiencies and drawbacks, and if it does not remain a dead letter, it could give us something that we never had before, even when we were independent, including during the First Commonwealth and also during the Second Commonwealth: The compulsory transfer of the Arabs from the valleys proposed for the Jewish State

I ignored this fundamental point out of a prejudice tat this transfer may not be possible, and that it is not practicable. But the more I look at the commissions conclusions and the more the gigantic importance of this proposal becomes clear- the more I reach the conclusion that the first obstacle to implementing this proposal is – our own failure to come to grips with it and our being prisoners to prejudices and intellectual habits that flourished in our midst in other circumstances.

With the evacuation of the Arab community from the valleys we achieve, for the first time in our history, a real Jewish state – an agricultural body of one or more million people, continuous, heavily populated, at one with its land which is completely its own. We achieve the possibility of a giant national settlement, on a large area that is all in the hands of the stateAs with a magic wand, all the difficulties and defects that preoccupied us until now in our settlement enterprise [will vanish] – the question of Hebrew labour, defence, an organised economy, rational and pre-determined exploitation of the land and water. We are given an opportunity that we never dreamed of and could not dare dream of in our most daring imaginings. This is more than a state, more than self government, more than sovereignty – this is a national consolidation in a homeland free of handcuffs and external restraints creating power and solidarity and rootedness that are more important than any mere political control a continuous block of two and a half million dunams ... the possibility of the new settlement of fifty or one hundred thousand families ... when we have a Jewish state in the country of and [outside] a Jewish people 16 million strong Nothing will be beyond the capabilities of this combination of forces, possibilities, needs and realities.

And we must first of all cast off the weakness of thought and will and prejudice – that [says that] this transfer is impractical.

As before, I am aware of the terrible difficulty posed by a foreign force uprooting some 100,000 [sic] Arabs from the villages they lived in for hundreds of years – will Britain dare carry this out?

Certainly it will not do it – if we do not want it, and if we do not push it to it with our force and with the force of our faith. Even if a maximum amount of pressure is applied – it is possible she may still be deterred It is certainly possible – and [nothing] greater than this has been done for our cause in our time [than Peel proposing transfer].

And we did not propose this – the Royal Commission did And we must grab hold of this conclusion [ie recommendation] as we grabbed hold of the Balfour Declaration, even more than that – as we grabbed hold of Zionism itself we must cleave to this conclusion, with all our strength and will and faith – because of all the Commissions conclusions, this is the one alone that offers some recompense for the tearing away of other parts of the country [ie the commission’s apportioning of most of the land of Israel for Arab sovereignty], and [the proposal] also has great political logic from the Arab perspective, as Transjordan needs settlement and an increase in population and development and money, and the English Government – the richest of governments – is required by her Royal Commission to provide the funds needed for this, and in the implementation of this transfer is a great blessing for the Arab state – and for us it is a question of life, existence, protection of culture, [Jewish population] increase, freedom and independence. What is inconceivable in normal times is possible in revolutionary times; and if at this time the opportunity is missed and what is possible only in such great hours is not carried out – a whole world is lost. 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. The transfer clause in my eyes is more important than all our demands for additional land. This is the largest and most important and most vital additional “area”We must distinguish between the

importance and urgency of our different demands. We must recognise the most important wisdom of any historical work: The wisdom of what comes first and what later.

There are a number of things that [we] struggle for now [but] which we cannot achieve now. For example the Negev. [On the other hand] the evacuation [of the Arabs from] the [Jezreel] Valley we shall [ie must] achieve now – and, if not, perhaps we will never achieve it. 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 (or perhaps at all) after the [Jewish] state is established, and the rights of the minorities in it will necessarily be assured, and the whole world that is antagonistic towards us will carefully scrutinise our behaviour towards our minorities. This thing must be done now – and the first step – perhaps the crucial [step] – is conditioning ourselves for its implementation. (Ben-Gurion Archive, Sede Boker, Israel)

What Ben-Gurion wrote in private is almost a blueprint for what seems to have happened in practice a decade later - although it was the Israelis who facilitated the transfer and not the British. Once the genie had been let out of the bag, Ben-Gurion re-emphasised his belief in the forced Arab transfer at the Twentieth Zionist Conference only weeks later (and this time hinted at the idea that the Yushuv rather than the British might carry out the transfer) when he said:

“We do not want to expropriate ... [But] transfer of population has already taken place in the [Jezreel] Valley, in the [Sharon] Plain and in other places. You are aware of the work of the Jewish National Fund in this respect [the reference is to the sporadic uprooting of the Arab tenant-farmer communities from lands purchased by the JNF]. Now a transfer of wholly different dimensions will have to be carried out. In various parts of the country new Jewish settlements will not be possible unless there is transfer of the Arab fellahin it is important that this plan came from the commission and not from usThe transfer of population is what makes possible a comprehensive settlement program. Fortunately for us, the Arab people have enormous desolate areas. The growing Jewish power in the country will increase our possibilities to carry out a large transfer. You must remember that this method [ie possibility] also contains an important and humane and Zionist idea. To empty parts of a people ([ie the Arabs] to their own country and to settle empty lands [Transjordan and Iraq] (from the original text of Ben-Gurions speech 7.8.1937 – David Ben Gurion Diary 12th July 1937, the Ben Gurion Archive, Sede Boker, Israel)

The above speech is taken from the original transcripts taken at the Twentieth Zionist Congress in Geneva. When the Congress published the official texts of the address the following year, all references to Arab transfers including the above segment had been removed.

Over the next few years the official records are suspiciously quiet about the issue of transfer - possibly due to the sensitivity of the topic - but from time to time individuals have obliquely mentioned the subject in released Jewish Agency records. Some of these are recorded in “Revisiting the Palestinian exodus of 1948” by Benny Morris with the originals appearing in CZA 28, protocol of meetings of the JAE, dated 7th and 12th June 1938. The comments are given below:

Ben-Gurion “proposed that the Zionist movement’s future “lines of action” included discussing with the neighbouring Arab states “the matter of voluntary transferring Arab tenant-farmers, labourers and fellahin from the Jewish state to neighbouring states”.

Werner David Senator, a Hebrew University executive stated that the Yishuv should aim for “maximal transfer”.

Menahem Ussishkin, head of the JNF, indicated that he saw nothing immoral about transferring 60,000 Arab families – “it is the most moral thing to do”.

Berl Katznelson, one of the Mapai party’s leaders said “A large transfer must be agreed”.

Ben Gurion is recorded as saying “I support compulsory transfer. I don’t see in it anything immoral”

It is clear that in 1938/9, the Jewish leaders were seriously (if not openly) contemplating the mass transfer of Arabs. This was despite the fact that the British had by now made it clear in the October 1938 Woodhead Commission Report that they were totally against this course of action. Only two months after the report was published, Ben Gurion wrote in his diary *“We shall propose to Iraq 10 million Palestine pounds for the transfer of one hundred thousand Arab families from Palestine to Iraq”.*

Throughout the period of the Second World War, the question of mass transfer was still talked about by the Yishuv leadership. On occasions the War was used as an example of how mass transfers had in fact been the *“most practical way to solve the difficult and dangerous problem of national minorities”*. Ben Gurion reasoned, *“the Zionist movement should do nothing to hamper those in the West who were busy advocating transfer as a necessary element in a solution to the Palestine problem”*.

(Benny Morris, “Revisiting the Palestinian exodus of 1948” with original documents in Ben Gurion “Outlines of Zionist Policy 15.10.4” CZA Z4-14632)

Rather than giving a blow by blow account of all further discussions of the Jewish leadership on the subject of expulsions or mass transfers, I will merely give a selection of a few officially recorded speeches, statements or comments and leave it to the reader to interpret these in their own way.

Ben Gurion. “I am opposed that any proposal for transfer should come from our side. 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 Druse it is possible. It is possible to move all the Druse voluntarily to Jabel Druse [in Syria]. The other [Arabs] - I don’t know. But it must not be a Jewish proposal” (CZA S100/43b, protocol of JAE meeting 7th May 1944).

Eliahu Dobkin, Mapai member & Director of the Jewish Agency’s immigration department. “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] (CZA S100/43b, protocol of JAE meeting 7th May 1944).

Eliezer Kaplan, number three leader of Mapai and future finance minister: “Regarding the matter of transfer I have only one request: Let us not start arguing amongst ourselves” (CZA S100/43b, protocol of JAE meeting 7th May 1944).

Werner David Senator: *“I do not regard the question of transfer as a moral or immoral problem It is not a matter I would refuse to consider”* (CZA S100/43b, protocol of JAE meeting 7th May 1944).

Notes taken from a meeting between Chaim Weitzmann, President of the Zionist Association and the Soviet Ambassador to London Ivan Maisky. According to Benny Morris in “Revisiting the Palestinian Exodus of 1948”, the notes were probably “made by Lewis Namier, one of Weitzmann’s aides”: *“Dr Weitzmann said he had had ...a very interesting talk with M Maisky ...Mr Maisky had said there would have to be an exchange of populations. Dr Weitzmann 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 Maisky’s comments was that they in Russia had also to deal with exchanges of population. Dr Weitzmann 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 Maisky asked whether some difficulties might not arise in transferring a hill-country population to the plains and Dr Weitzmann 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 hill country ...Dr Weitzmann 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”*.

(Weitzmann Papers, 2271, “Short Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday January 30th 1941 at 77 Great Russell Street, London. Present were Dr Weitzmann, Mrs Dugdale, Professor Namier, Mr Locker, Mr Linton”)

Ben Gurion: *“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 better their situation and not the contrary”*. (CZA S100/43b, protocol of JAE meeting, 20th June 1944)

Yitzhak Gruenbaum, Israel’s first minister of the interior: *“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 ...”* (CZA S100/43b, protocol of JAE meeting, 20th June 1944)

Moshe Shertock (Sharrett) director of the Jewish Agency’s political department: *“The transfer can be the archstone, 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...What will happen once a Jewish state is established – it is possible that the result will be transfer of Arabs”*. (CZA S100/43b, protocol of JAE meeting, 7th May 1944).

Ben Gurion: *“When I heard these things [i.e 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 program. 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 ... (b) [such declarations in support of transfer] would force the*

Arabs onto ...their hind legs [i.e. would shock and stir them up] (CZA S100/43b, protocol of JAE meeting, 7th May 1944).

All of the above gives an idea of the Jewish thinking at leadership level on the subject of Arab transfer.

Several conclusions can be drawn from all the documentation presented in the last six pages.

1. The idea of mass population transfer from Palestine was nothing new. It had been first suggested in the nineteenth century.
2. For decades prior to 1948, the question of Arab transfer from Palestine was deemed not only a good idea, but essential for a thriving Jewish state.
3. It was deemed essential that Jews were not seen as the instigators in any mass transfer – or at least not until the Israeli state had been formed.
4. It was felt by the Jewish leadership that this was an extremely sensitive matter which should not be publicly discussed.

The germ of an idea had emerged, the seeds had been sown, the idea had grown and even though I can find no indication **WHATSOEVER** of any Jewish “master plan” to expel the Arabs from Palestine, the growth of an “idea” was soon to materialise in grim reality for the Palestinians.

Section 3. Operation Hiram 1948.

All “official” governmental Israeli references to the exodus of the Palestinians give the impression that there was no force involved and that the bulk of them left their homes after having been encouraged to do so by their “leaders”. Unofficial writings by some Israeli government officials seem to say just the opposite. Although I will try to cover many aspects of the exodus giving a large number of quotes from many different individuals, there is one document above all which I view as being one of the most important and enlightening on the subject. This document contains the words of Yitzhak Rabin, a former Prime Minister of Israel.

Rabin compiled his memoirs in 1978/9. As a brigade commander in 1948 and commander in chief of the armed forces during the 1960’s he perhaps above all, would know what really DID happen to the three-quarters of a million Palestinians who were dispossessed. The memoirs were originally written in Hebrew, were “Ghost written” by journalist Dov Goldstein and the Hebrew/English translator involved was Peretz Kidron.

The texts given to Kidron for translation were not the final edition (even though they had already been passed by the military censors) but had to be also approved by a special ministerial committee before being allowed for publication. In the event, this supplementary censorship requested that various passages and items were to be

removed before publication. These deletions included sections on the Israeli attack against the US Liberty, all references to Israel's nuclear program and the section quoted below about the 1948 Palestinian expulsions.

The deleted section consists of Rabins recollections when he commanded the Harel Brigade which was involved in "Operation Larlar", which involved the Israeli occupation of Lydda (now named Lod). What follows is an extract from the Rabin manuscript which, in the words of Kidron, the translator, is "the rather rough translation I made at the time and never published". (Peretz Kidron "Truth whereby nations live" in "Blaming the Victims" Said & Hitchins 1988)

"While fighting was still in progress, we had to grapple with a troublesome problem: the fate of the populations of Lod and Ramleh, numbering some fifty thousand civilians. Not even Ben-Gurion could offer any solution, and during the discussions at operational headquarters, he remained silent, as was his habit in such situations. Clearly we could not leave Lods hostile and armed populace in our rear, where it could endanger the supply route to Yiftach, which was advancing eastwards.

We walked outside, Ben-Gurion accompanying us. Alon repeated his question: "What is to be done with the population?" Ben-Gurion waved his hand in a gesture which said: Drive them out! Alon and I held a consultation. I agreed that it was essential to drive the inhabitants out. We took them on foot towards the Bet Horon road, assuming that the Legion would be obliged to look after them, thereby shouldering logistic difficulties which would burden its fighting capabilities, making things easier for us.

"Driving out" is a term with a harsh ring. Psychologically, this was one of the most difficult actions we undertook. The population of Lod (Lydda) did not leave willingly. There was no way of avoiding the use of force and warning shots in order to make the inhabitants march the 10-20 miles to the point where they met up with the Legion.

The inhabitants of Ramleh watched, and learned the lesson: their leaders agreed to be evacuated voluntarily, on condition that the evacuation was carried out by vehicles. Buses took them to Latrun, and from there they were evacuated by the Legion. Great suffering was inflicted on the men taking part in the eviction action. Soldiers of the Yiftach brigade including youth movement graduates, who had been inculcated with values such as international fraternity and humaneness. The eviction action went beyond the concepts they were used to. There were some fellows who refused to take part in the expulsion action. Prolonged propaganda activities were required after the action, to remove the bitterness of these youth movement groups, and explain why we were obliged to undertake such a harsh and cruel action.

Today, in hindsight, I think the action was essential. The removal of those 50,000 Arabs was an important contribution to Israel's security, in one of the most sensitive of regions, linking the coastal plain with Jerusalem. After the War of Independence Some of the inhabitants were permitted to return to their home towns."

It is interesting to note that Kidron, the translator, had in 1974 done some other work, this time writing the memoirs of Ben Dunkelman, ("Duel Loyalty" published in English & Hebrew by

Schocken) a Canadian Jew, who in 1948 had volunteered for the Israeli Army (following a distinguished career as a combat officer with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France in the Second World War). Due to the Israeli shortage of army officers with combat experience, Dunkelman was appointed brigade commander and led the Seventh Brigade into Nazareth which after a brief token resistance, the town surrendered. The surrender was “enshrined in a formal document whereby the town’s dignitaries undertook to cease hostilities, in return for which the Israeli officers headed by Dunkelman solemnly pledged that no harm would befall the civilian population” (*Peretz Kidron “Truth whereby nations live”*).

Kidron wrote the following statement taken from Dunkelman:

“Two days after the second truce came into effect, the Seventh Brigade was ordered to withdraw from Nazareth. Avraham Yaffe, who had commanded the 13th battalion in the assault on the city, now reported to me with orders from Moshe Carmel to take over from me as its military governor. I complied with the order, but only after Avraham had given me his word of honour that he would do nothing to harm or displace the Arab population. My demand may sound strange, but I had good reason to feel concerned on the subject.

Only a few hours previously, Haim Laskov had come to me with astounding orders: Nazareth’s civilian population was to be evacuated! I was shocked and horrified. I told him I would do nothing of the sort – in view of our promises to safeguard the city’s people, such a move would be superfluous and harmful. I reminded him that scarcely a day earlier, he and I, as representatives of the Israeli army, had signed the surrender document, in which we solemnly pledged to do nothing to harm the city or its population. When Haim saw that I refused to obey the order he left.

A scarce twelve hours later, Avraham Yaffe came to tell me that his battalion was relieving my brigade: I felt sure that this order had been given because of my defiance of the evacuation order. But although I was withdrawn from Nazareth, it seems that my disobedience did have some effect. It seems to have given the high command time for second thoughts, which led them to the conclusion that it would, indeed, be wrong to expel the inhabitants of Nazareth. To the best of my knowledge, there was never any more talk of the evacuation plan, and the cities Arab citizens have lived there ever since.”

The day after dictating the above to Kidron, Dunkelman decided that he did not want this extract including in the final book and it was not in the eventual published edition. If his story was accurate, he had been given explicit orders to expel the city’s civilians by his superiors despite having promises being made at the time of the surrender. One has to ask that if explicit orders to evacuate Nazareth were made by the ruling hierarchy, then it is doubtful that this would have been an isolated incident.

Both the Rabin and Dunkelman extracts eventually reached the press in 1979, one being in the New York Times (23rd Oct 1979) and one in the Israeli weekly “Ha’olam Hazeh (June 1980). After an initial flurry of excitement, the matter soon quietened down and appears to have been generally ignored. In his article “Truth whereby nations live” (*Said/Hitchens “Blaming the victims”*), Peretz Kidron comments that “since the New York Times publication, Israel propaganda has largely relinquished the claim that the

Palestinian exodus of 1948 was “self-inspired”. Official circles implicitly concede that the Arab population fled as a result of Israeli action – whether directly, as in the case of Lydda and Ramleh, or indirectly, due to the panic that and similar actions (the Der Yassin massacre) inspired in Arab population centres throughout Palestine”. Whilst the Israeli “official circles” may accept this today, it is apparent that no attempt has been made to communicate this to the ordinary Israeli people!

Let’s look at the Palestinian exodus in a little more detail.

The mass movement of Palestinians from their homes can be broken down into four quite distinct “phases” these being listed in the book “The Birth of the Palestinian refugee problem, 1947-1949” by Benny Morris (*published in 1987, with an updated version due for publication in early 2004*). Each “phase” occurred because of different types of incidents at the time, and the reasons for the exodus in each phase were quite distinct and different. Each phase will be dealt with separately.

The First Phase. The initial exodus, December 1947 to March 1948.

Research from this period shows that in the main, the rural exodus occurred because of “Haganah, IZL or LHI attacks - or at least the fear of such attacks and from a sense of total vulnerability to such an attack”. In the major towns and cities, it was the “spiral of violence” and often the chaotic lack of civilian administration that prompted the flight. In all cases, most of the people who left (especially those who owned businesses) never thought their departure was anything other than temporary – as was also the case in 1936-9.

At the outset it has to be said that during this first phase only a relatively small number of people left due to any Haganah, IZL or LHI “expulsion orders” nor was there any “forceful advice” from either Palestinian, Arab or Israeli sides. With the exception of “tenant farmers”, all of the few expulsions that did occur, were in the main as a result of strategic decisions taken by both sides to evacuate certain villages.

Whilst not classed as “forceful advice”, there is evidence to suggest that some women and children were advised to leave some areas of hostilities by Palestinian leaders. The Arab High Command did, in March, issue a circular advising national committees to move out “women and children and the old from combat or potential combat zones”.

Overall however, most sources agree that the Arab leaders actively encouraged their people to stay and not to move away from their homes. Even Haganah intelligence commented that “The Arab institutions are barring [the flight] of those wishing to settle abroad” (*DBG Archives, “Elkana” (a senior Haganah officer) to “Amitai” (Ben Gurion), 19th February 1948*). A few months earlier, the British Intelligence had noted that the Mufti had ordered those who had left their homes should return immediately “and if they refuse, their homes will be occupied by other (foreign) Arabs sent to reinforce [Arab defences] in the area”. (*PRO W0275-64, Fortnightly Intelligence letter, British Military HQ, Palestine 30th January 1948*.) Even neighbouring Arab states were encouraging the indigenous population to remain in their homes. The Syrian Newspaper Al Ayyam reported that both Damascus and Beirut “had asked the AHC to influence Palestinians along their borders not to flee to Syria & Lebanon but to stay put and fight”. (*CZA S25-*

3999, "Information on the Arab Military Preparations," the Arab Division, Jewish Agency Political Department 9th January 1948.)

The Arab exodus over this period took place mainly in certain clearly defined areas. There was a mass flight by the middle and upper classes from the areas which had been identified as being part of the proposed Israeli State especially from the cities of Haifa, Jaffa and Jerusalem and also from the neighbouring rural communities. This was mainly precipitated by the increasing spiral of violence and lack of any meaningful civilian administration. The exodus spread to the coastal plain area between Tel Aviv and Hadera and also to parts of the Jordan and Jezreel valleys although in this area, the evacuations were piecemeal and not total. As mentioned above, most of these evacuations were caused either by Jewish attacks or fear of attacks and a general feeling of hopelessness. All evacuees intended returning to their homes at the cessation of hostilities.

There are numerous reported incidents of Palestinians leaving their homes following Haganah intimidation and attacks (the Arab orange growers around Jaffa, Rehovot, Nes-Ziona and Tel Aviv, the killing of the garage owner in Lifta, near Jerusalem, the Haganah bombing of the Semiramis Hotel, the attack on Qatamon etc). Many of these incidents had been precipitated by Palestinian actions against the Jewish population. As well as fear of the Jewish armed institutions, some Arabs also left the Jerusalem area due to the internecine Arab strife which was also occurring.

There is nothing "clear cut" about the exodus in this first phase but it is fair to say that there does not appear to have been any definite or "state organised" policy to deliberately drive out the Palestinians. Any policy of "force" tended to be done on a purely local basis by individual commanders. For example, following the death of a Jewish woman in Talbiyeh on the 12th February, a Haganah loudspeaker vehicle drove round the area instructing all Arab residents to leave or else "they and their property would be blown up. The van and its occupants were arrested [by the British but] the Arabs did evacuate" (*PRO W0275-64 "Fortnightly Intelligence Newsletter", British Military HW, Palestine 27th Feb 1948*).

In the rural areas "the emigration was a direct result of, and response to, specific Haganah (and IZL) attacks and retaliatory strikes - and fears of such strikes. A number of communities were attacked or surrounded and expelled by Haganah individual units and others were intimidated into leaving. A number of other isolated sites were abandoned as a direct result of pressure or commands by Arab irregulars". (*"Birth of the Palestinian refugee problem" Benny Morris, 1987*)

I can find only one reference to a pre-planned and organised expulsion of a Palestinian community this being Arab Caesarea where a large number of houses were deliberately destroyed (although most were Jewish owned). There is however reason to infer that the Haganah thought that the British may have tried to take control of the town to use as a base to stem the flow of Jewish refugees into Palestine.

Towards the end of this stage, in March 1948, Yosef Weitz, Director of the Jewish Fund's Lands Development, became impatient for greater Jewish land purchases and the building of settlements. He was also concerned about the lands already purchased which contained tenant farmers who were "reluctant" to move. He had meetings with Jewish farmers who came to him in Haifa to "discuss the problems of our lands in

those places with regard to our possession and their liberation from the hands of tenant farmers. We agreed on certain lines of action in certain conditions” (*CZA A202-217, Avraham Granott Papers, Weitz to Granovsky, 31st March 1948*). He also wrote “is this not the time to be rid of them? Why continue to keep in our midst these thorns at a time when they pose a danger to us. Our people are weighing up [solutions]”. (*Weitz Diary III p223, entry for 11 Jan 1948*)

Weitz attempted to get the Haganah General Staff to agree in principle to evict the tenant farmers. Haganah refused so Weitz went about using his personal contacts within the settlements and within branches of Haganah and a number of evictions were carried out. In Yoqne’am, southeast of Haifa, the local intelligence officer Yehuda Burstein was persuaded to “advise” the local tenant farmers and those in nearby Qira wa Qamun to leave – which they did. Weitz also organised evictions in Haifa Bay, Dalyat ar Ruha and Al Buteimat, southeast of Haifa. (*Weitz Diary III p 256/7, entry for 26th March 1948. Also documented in “Yosef Weitz and the Transfer Committees 1948/9” by Benny Morris p 552-61*)

Weitz attempted to persuade the Jewish leadership to give a national decision on the expulsion of Arabs from the area delineating the Jewish State Partitian Plan. The Jewish Leaders “either rejected” or refused to commit themselves to any national policy of eviction and Weitz was forced to proceed on a private basis to arrange expulsions and evictions.

As can be seen above, on any official basis, Haganah rejected any policy of forced evictions. It did however carry out many cases of excessive retaliation which had basically the same effect! Some Haganah individuals and groups did not seem to heed the “official” Haganah policy.

The Second wave. April to June 1948.

The second wave was numerically the largest with vast numbers of Palestinians leaving their homes over swathes of the country. At the time, the Jews were sorely pressed militarily with the advent of the British leaving in May, neighbouring countries threatening to invade plus increasing resistance from the Palestinians who controlled most of the roads and who had virtually completely cut off Jerusalem.

This was the background which caused the Haganah in March 1948 to produce “Plan D” (Tochnit Dalet), a document circulated to all commanders in the field (and brigade Officers in Charge) which gave clear instructions on methods of protecting the future Israeli State and for minimising the growing superiority of the Palestinians in their grip on communication links. Plan D was intended purely to deal with military matters and to achieve military goals and was not written as a political “blueprint” for the taking over of Palestinian land and villages. It did however provide the Israeli commanders with written guidelines on dealing with certain situations.

Plan D was intended to control the Palestinians who were causing difficulties and it authorised the “pacification” of trouble spots by either the surrender of villages, the depopulation of those villages or the destruction of the villages. In practice this appears to have meant the depopulation and destruction of any village which harboured any forces (or military weapons) opposing the Israelis. Plan D was quite specific. After surrounding a village, should any weapons or irregular fighters be

found, if there were no resistance then the population were to be disarmed and “garrisoned”. In the event of resistance the village or town was to be destroyed and the people expelled from the State. Some (unnamed) hostile villages were to be destroyed whether they resisted or not. (*The Plan D guidelines can be found in STD, III, book 3, pp 1955-9 and also in Pa'il, Min Ha'haganah, pp308-13. There are also articles by Yosef Avidar on aspects of Plan D in Safra Veseifa, No 2 (June 1978, pp 37-48).*)

In practice, many of the villages were empty, as local people had long since fled due to military activity and local battles - so many commanders never used the powers they had been granted under Plan D. There is no evidence anywhere that there was any national “masterplan” to drive out the Arabs, nor initially was there any realisation by the Israelis that an imminent mass exodus was about to occur. When the exodus occurred it “surprised even the most optimistic and hardline Yishuv executives, including the leading advocate of the transfer policy” (“*The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem*”, Benny Morris).

The first use of Plan D came early in April and started with Ben Gurion's decision to secure villages which threatened the transport links especially those from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv to Hadera and the road between Jenin and Haifa. Orders went out to clear hostile or potentially hostile Arabs and to destroy certain villages. During the next few weeks, and for the first time, Israeli forces permanently took over and occupied Arab villages and destroyed others. Al Qastal was occupied in the first week of April with villages such as Qaluniya, Khulda, Ramat Yoanan, Mishmar and Ha'emek following in the next few weeks – all were either occupied or demolished. Larger towns suffered very much the same fate with Arab Tiberias and Arab Haifa being “taken over” near the end of April.

During April, the tide of war changed in favour of the Israelis. The Arab centres were in disarray. In many of the towns and cities, the middle and upper classes had already fled. The civic bodies had ceased to function with many officials leaving their workplaces, the police were leaving in droves and whole Arab communities suffered from low morale and the impending fear of siege, especially by the inhabitants of Haifa and Jaffa. In some areas of the country, Arab towns and villages were directly involved in the fighting and overall a general slide into lawlessness could be added to the general fear of Israeli attacks plus the impending departure of the British. There was also the “atrocious factor” following the rumours of what happened at Nasser ad Din and Deir Yassin which further fueled Arab fears.

It has to be said that whilst Deir Yassin is frequently quoted as “**the**” massacre of the period, people tend to ignore similar massacres perpetrated by the Arabs (Hadassah Hospital, Hebron, Kfar Etzion etc). Both sides committed atrocities.

This was the background to what soon followed. The military pace quickened on both sides. In several areas, the Arabs gave orders for all women, children and the elderly to be evacuated from a number of villages in preparation for military activity (*CZA A246-13, p 2373, entry for 4 May 1948*). So far as I am aware, there is no corroborated evidence to show that either the Mufti or the leaders of nearby Arab states ordered or even encouraged any mass exodus during April. Arab military leaders did however order the compulsory evacuation of more than 20 villages purely on military grounds during April and May (these include villages in Lower Galilee, Mount Gilboa and also around Jerusalem).

During most of April, Palestinians left their homes both in the towns and the villages due to the steady and relentless destruction of Arab society both from within and from without. By the end of the month, virtually the entire Arab High Command had left the country, and this caused yet more depression as the population realised that there was little chance of stemming the Israeli advances. The surrounding Arab states did nothing to help. The exodus produced differing reactions from local Arab civil leaders in different parts of the country. In Jerusalem, the Arab leaders ordered people to remain where they were, yet in Jaffa, most of the members of the National Committee had already fled. The numbers of Arabs leaving grew, climaxing in the fall of Arab Haifa on the 22nd April and the resultant mass exodus of its inhabitants. The Arab population of Arab Tiberias had already left and the exodus from Jaffa was now also underway.

It was at this point, and not before, that the enormity of the Arab exodus was realised by all parties involved. Attempts were made to stem the flood, neighbouring Arab states tried to encourage people to return to their homes and orders were issued to irregular fighters to stop the flight. In some areas, Arab militia forced the population to stay by blocking transport links (such as in Ramallah where trucks intended for the towns exodus were turned away). Haganah records show that they picked up radio station messages from the ALA to all Arabs ordering them to return to their homes “within three days”. Both Damascus Radio and the Arabic Service of Radio Jerusalem broadcast a statement by the Supreme HQ ordering people to stay and defend their homes and “those who leave will be punished and their homes will be destroyed (*KMA-PA 100/MemVavDalet/3-154, Haganah Intelligence Service Information, 9th May 1948. Also documented in the DBG archives, “daily Monitoring Report No 28”, 6th May 1948).*

The British authorities, the Arab High command, the National Committees, Azzam Pasha all appealed for a stop to the exodus and Arab governments began to close borders but all appeals were too little too late - 200,000 to 300,000 people had fled. The flight from places such as Haifa and Jaffa created a “domino” effect with the urban flight soon leading to surrounding towns being emptied – which in turn led to flight from the nearby villages.

The main exodus from Haifa was due almost entirely (but not totally) to the Arab leaders unilaterally declaring that they were not going to surrender but that they and their community intended to evacuate the whole town - despite a plea by the Jewish mayor that they stay. The mass exodus caught both the Arab High Command and the neighbouring countries by total surprise. Even Ben Gurion commented in his diaries “I couldn’t understand. Why did the inhabitants leave”? At one point, the Israeli High Command suspected that this was some sort of Arab trap, such was their disbelief at the mass exodus. Most historians are in agreement that neither side deliberately caused the exodus “by design” – it “just happened” due to the cumulative effects of fear, rumours, involvement in local battles and skirmishes. One disaster merely precipitated the next.

Although Haganah never issued any specific orders to its troops to do anything to precipitate Arab flight, there is evidence to suggest that in the lower ranks of the Israeli forces there was some degree of satisfaction for what was happening on the ground. Yosef Weitz, who worked at the Carmeli Brigade HQ wrote in his diary “I

think that this [flight-prone] state of mind [among the Arabs] should be exploited, and [we should] press the other inhabitants not to surrender [but to leave]. We must establish our state”.

By the beginning of May 1948 the city of Haifa had only around 3,000 to 4,000 Arab civilians left and the city effectively became Jewish. The same fate was shared by Jaffa.

Although the flight from the cities was not achieved through the Israelis deliberately driving out the inhabitants the same cannot be said for some of the smaller towns and villages. In many places Israeli attacks were deliberately staged leaving exit points to encourage the inhabitants to evacuate, examples being Safad (original population of 12,000 Arabs and 1,500 Jews) and various Arab villages near the Syrian and Lebanese borders. Many village homes were blown up deliberately and large numbers of Arabs were expelled to Lebanon and other surrounding countries. In some cases Jews moved into Arab owned homes within weeks. Other villages were specifically earmarked for Israeli permanent conquest and occupation (Al Qastal to the west of Jerusalem for example). Villages were deliberately blown up to ensure the non return of the original inhabitants (Qaluniya, Biddu, Beit Suriq and Khulda being typical examples).

As the exodus continued, even Plan D was modified, for instead of leaving “ non – resisting villages” intact, orders went out to destroy many of these villages regardless of whether they were resisting Haganah conquest or not. In the words of Benny Morris “The gloves had to be, and were, taken off” and Haganah was ordered to raid and destroy whole areas of Arab villages such as An Nabi Samwil, Beit Ikksa, Shu’fat, Beit Hanina and Beit Mahsir.

There was not total agreement between the Israeli political parties Mapai and Mapam as to how the Arabs should be dealt with. Mapam accused Ben Gurion of deliberately bringing in a policy of expelling the Arabs. Ben Gurion answered the charge directly saying “there was [only] one way and that was to expel the Arab villagers and burn the villages” (*LPA 23 aleph/48 protocol meeting of the Mapai Centre, statement by Ben Gurion 24th July 1948*).

Throughout April and May the populations of large numbers of villages were expelled and homes were systematically destroyed making any return impossible. Plan D formalised many of these actions stating “you will determine alone, in consultation with your Aran affairs advisers and Intelligence Service officers, [which] villages in your zone should be occupied, cleaned up or destroyed” (*Avrahon Eilon (ed), “Hativat Givati Bemilhemet Hakomemiut p 485*).

Conclusion to the 2nd wave.

In answer to the question “Did they leave of their own accord, or were they driven out” there can be no easy or simple answer for the situation was extremely complex. There are different answers in different places and at different times. There are however certain facts which can be listed and which are unlikely to be challenged:

1. Some left purely because they were living in a war zone and were in fear of their lives.

2. The “atrocities” factor played a role in increasing peoples fears.
3. There was no central Israeli order issued to drive all Arabs from their cities, towns and villages.
4. Haganah and IZL actions in Haifa, Jaffa, and Eastern and Western Galilee precipitated the exodus in these areas.
5. Once living conditions became intolerable in the Arab urban centres due to lack of services, lack of municipal government staff, isolation, fear etc people started to leave. The exodus from one centre had a domino-effect which precipitated flight from neighbouring centres.
6. The fact that local leaders were amongst the first to flee did much to further demoralise the population.
7. On a local level, the Israelis deliberately depopulated a large number of villages and in many cases destroyed the homes as well. The inhabitants of the bulk of these villages were refused the right to return.

The Third Wave. July to October 1948 Follows in the next article.