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From: Shraga Elam <elams@d...>
Date: Mon Dec 25, 2000 7:35pm
Subject: The Palestinian Right of Return: a fundamental Zionist dilemma

The Israeli government and public is confronted with the question of Palestinian refugees a question which goes under the fundament of the Zionism. Still, as long Israel will not clearly recognize its responsibility for the Palestinian tragedy, there can not be any just and durable settlement for the conflict.

The commentator of Ha'aretz tries today to do the impossible and admit the Israeli guilt without being too explicit about it, while trying to limit the scope of the political implications:

"There is no dispute that thousands of Palestinian refugees who abandoned their homes during the War of 1948 were wronged by being made refugees [by whom is ostensibly left out - se] and that they are entitled to compensation [by whom is ostensibly left out - se] for the direct damages brought upon them. Such compensation, which is also mentioned in Resolution 194, is a fair arrangement which should be handled within the appropriate international framework, in which all those interested in putting an end to the suffering of the refugees, in addition to Israel and the Arabs, should take part."

For Ha'aretz editorial as for Meretz leader Yossi Sarid letting Palestinian refugees back to their original homes and land is a suicide step for Israel as a Jewish state. Still while refusing the right of return to the Palestinians, IDF intensify its efforts to convert to Judaism of non-Jewish immigrants.

Out of this nationalistic attitude it is not astonishing that the majority of the Israelis try to deny their very active role (see further down the list of massacres) in creating the Palestinian tragedy (Nakba) and preserving it.

This Nakba denial should be placed on the same level of Shoa-denial!

An example of this denial could be found in the enclosed Jerusalem Post article, in which the author tries to use a dubious decision of the Israeli court as a winning argument against the "new historians", who expose the past sins of Zionism.

An Israeli Historian, Theodor Katz, claimed in his M.A. thesis that that an IDF unit had massacred over 200 Arab residents of the village of Tantura in 1948. After he was put under enormous pressure and because

his poor health, Katz decided to dilute his argumentation and reached compromise with the soldiers of the said unit who had sued him. At court, Katz changed his mind and wanted to withdraw his agreement, but was not allowed to do so by the judge. He says that he has many recorded interviews, including with soldiers of the unit, who assert that there was a massacre in Tantura after the villagers surrounded it.

The Nakba-deniers believe obviously that they can use this court decision to prove their charge that all the claims of the "new historians" are unfounded.

This pathetic attempt might have certain chances in a biased Israeli court, but not for a very long time.

It is interesting to see that the Jerusalem Post tries simultaneously also to deny the fact that the Zionist leadership misused the sufferings of the Nazi survivors after World War II. This in order to pressure Western public opinion to support the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Still even Yosef Goell from the Post cannot deny that it was Ben-Gurion's policy of calculated abuse of the Jewish sufferings. "Catastrophe is [political] power", postulated this most important Zionist leader. The Jewish welfare organization "Joint" claimed that there was no quantitative advantage created through the illegal immigration to Palestine after WWII, as the total number of immigrants did not exceed the British quota. There were solely political propagandistic benefits in misusing the Nazi survivors, through the pictures of British soldiers' brutality against them.

The Arafat's regime is for sure very attempted to accept a compromise on the issue of the refugees as already signaled many times (including the Beilin-Abu-Mazen-paper). This is actually not just a logical consequence of accepting the so-called two-state solution. The possibility of getting a financial compensation cannot be unattractive for the corrupted PA. But still it has a problem of making the refugees in the camps swallow it.

Israel itself faces a real financial problem with the forthcoming restitution, because even the cautious estimations of Prof. Yossi Katz from Bar-Ilan University speak of around 5 million dunams belonging to the refugees out of the 20.4 million dunams, the area of Israel before 1967 (Ha'aretz 10.8.2000). Katz, a settler from Efrat (West Bank) accepts basically the right of the Palestinian for this direct compensation, but says that Israel would not be able to pay for it and therefore Clinton speaks about an international fund, which should compensate the Palestinians.

The present attempt of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) to raise the issue of restitution for the Jews who left the Arab countries, is to be considered as part of the Israeli efforts to distract from their own responsibility and eventually find alternative sources to finance the restitution of the Palestinians. As already proven in its campaign in Europe, the WJC is for sure not concerned about the interests of Arab Jews, who left their homes in the early 50's. In 1995 the WJC launched its campaign against the Swiss banks on the issue of the 'heirless' dormant accounts, today it is clear to most of the directly concerned Judeocide survivors and heirs of those accounts, that they were misused.

An adequate answer to these cynical attempts and Nakba denial would be, among others, a campaign pleading to recognize the Palestinians as indirect Nazi victims. Such an effort will expose the different manipulations made by the Holocaust Industry and Holocaust religion and also point clearly at the responsibility of Israel and the industrialized countries in creating the Palestinian problem and its continuation.

Shraga Elam

<http://www.jpost.com/Editions/2000/12/25/Opinion/Opinion.17891.html>

(December 25) - The far-from-objective, and at times dishonest, revisionist historians go to incredible lengths to undermine Zionist myths. It is essential that these tendentious would-be myth-busters be "busted" as often as the historic truths allow.

Last Thursday, Tel Aviv District Court Judge Drora Pilpel gave her judicial imprimatur to a compromise in which a Haifa University historian, Theodor Katz, admitted that the charges in his M.A. thesis - that an IDF unit had massacred over 200 Arab residents of the village of Tantura in the 1948 War of Independence - were totally unfounded. In exchange, the plaintiffs, surviving officers and soldiers of the Alexandroni unit, dropped their suit against Katz.

The historian claimed in his research that units of the Alexandroni brigade, which had conquered Tantura on the Mount Carmel coast on the night between May 22-23 of 1948, killed 200 Arab prisoners in cold blood after they and the village had surrendered.

The judge found that Katz quoted only testimony of surviving Arab villagers that support his thesis of a massacre. He failed to seek the response of the surviving officers of that unit.

Haifa University, a co-respondent in the suit, awarded him a mark of 97 for the study.

His research was reported at length earlier this year in Ma'ariv, and a few months ago in Ha'aretz.

When I read the reports of this decision last week, I was reminded of a similar dramatic confrontation two years ago in the context of Israel's Jubilee celebrations.

A Channel 1 panel host was discussing a book by "revisionist" historian Idit Zertal. Zertal claimed that Holocaust survivors who had been intercepted by the British aboard the "illegal aliya" ship the Exodus had been coerced by nefarious Hagana operatives into refusing to leave the ship in Marseilles.

The drama of the Exodus and its heroic DPs, and the British insistence on dumping thousands of survivors back in Germany, was a turning point in the propaganda war for American public opinion.

Subsequently, the British were compelled to give up the Mandate and leave Palestine.

The story itself is one of the pillars of the Israeli "narrative" surrounding the struggle for independence.

The revisionist historians on the TV panel were egging each other on in their insistence on shattering this Israeli myth, when there was a commotion in the back of the audience.

Several men came forward and identified themselves as having been on the Exodus. Not only were the claims of the book a lie, they screamed in disgust, but passengers competed ferociously for the honor of remaining aboard

in the face of the British blandishments.

I had two main impressions from that altercation on TV. First, the revisionist historians were guilty of their own distortion of the truth to support their own "myth" of Israel's being born in "original sin." Second, they were incredulous that the men and women who survived the Holocaust and another year in DP camps were willing to endanger their lives for the cause of Jewish independence in Palestine without brutal Zionist coercion.

Why do I bring this up in the midst of today's dramatic times?

Because these revisionist historians weaken our negotiating position with the Palestinians.

The worst aspect of the case of Tantura is that a respected university saw fit to accord a top grade to a spurious piece of research because its conclusions seemed to fit the ideological prejudices of some of its leading academics.

The media which jump with such gusto on such anti-Zionist propaganda must also be faulted.

All of this, of course, is of a piece with the recent flurry over the Ministry of Education's attempt to introduce a new history text in which the Zionist "narrative" is intentionally placed in doubt and is replaced by ungrounded sympathy for the Palestinian cause.

In my view, the Palestinians are today as much - if not more - self-declared enemies of Israel as they were in 1948. The time for Israeli sympathy for their self-inflicted tragedy will come when peace has been agreed on and is in place for a generation. Insh'allah.

Date: Sat, 23 Dec 2000 18:55:38 +0200 (IST)

From: Susi Mordechay <susim@i...>

Subject: Teddy Katz's Trial/The Tantura Massacre

After two days of hearings in the Tel Aviv District Court (December 14th and 14th), the libel suit initiated by former fighters of the Alexandroni Brigade against historian Teddy Katz has come to a halt. It will be remembered that Katz, in an M.A. thesis written under the auspices of the University of Haifa, presented evidence of a large-scale massacre committed by members of the Brigade in the Arab village of Tantura in May 1948

December 19th, Katz, under tremendous pressure and in deteriorating health (and fearful of a relapse of the stroke he suffered from a year ago when the story of the massacre hit the press), signed a compromise agreement with members of the Brigade in which he denied that a massacre had taken place.

Almost immediately upon signing the agreement Katz regretted his act: which was taken without consultation with his defense lawyers Avigdor Feldman and Hasan Jabarin and Orna Cohen of Adalah. When the court hearings resumed on December 21st, Katz informed the court that the agreement he signed did not represent his true opinions and he requested the court

cancel the agreement. In her ruling of the same day, Judge Drora Pily rejected Katz's request, granted the compromise agreement the status of a judicial ruling, and thus brought the trial to a close.

Katz is currently considering to appeal the ruling.

The Committee for Teddy Katz

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In the following places terrible massacres had been committed

Al-Abbasiyya 4.5.48
Abu Shusha 14.5.48
Ayan al-Zaytun 2.5.48
Balad al-Shaych 24.4.48
Beer Sheva 21.10.48
Burayar 12.5.48
Al-Dawiyimiyya 29.10.48
Dir Yassin 9.4.48
Eilaboon 29.10.48
Haifa (downtown) 21.4.48
Hawassa 25.4.48
Hysiniyya 21.4.48
Ijzim 24.7.48
Isdud 28.10.48
Jish 29.10.48
Al-Kabri 21.5.48
al-Khisas 18.12.47
Khubbayza 12.5.48
Lydda 10/7/48
Majd al-Kurum 29.10.48
Mansurat al-Khat 18.1.48
Nasr al-Din 12.4.48
Qazaza 9.7.48
Qisarya 13.2.48
Sasa 30.10.48
Safsafd 29.10.48
Saliha 30.10.48
Arab AlO'Samiyya 30.10.48
Al-Tantura 21.5.48
Al-tira 10.7.48
al-Wara al-Sawda 18.4.48
Wadi Ara 27.2.48

The criminals had never been brought to court, maybe it is time to do it.

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Ha'aretz 25.12.2000

Resolution 194 may be the key to Palestinian refugee problem

By Aluf Benn

<http://www3.haaretz.co.il/eng/scripts/article.asp?mador=5&date=12/21/04>

The most difficult issue still dividing Israelis and Palestinians in their talks is that of the refugees. All Palestinian spokesmen from Chairman Yasser Arafat down insist that a permanent settlement must be based on UN Resolution 194. In the Palestinian interpretation, this resolution provides international backing for the refugees' "right of return" to Israel.

Israel has never accepted General Assembly Resolution 194, passed in December 1948 during the final stages of the War of Independence.

This is still Israel's official position but many members of the government now believe it is possible to live with the resolution - and adopt it as the basis for agreement. Prime Minister Ehud Barak's recent statements seem to open the possibility that Israel will recognize the controversial document.

Most of Resolution 194 deals with seeking a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Israel, including setting up an international Conciliation Commission to mediate between the parties. The refugees are mentioned only in Article 11, which resolved "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors 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."

This article also instructed the Conciliation Commission "to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation."

Palestinians rest their claim of a "right of return" on this resolution.

Over the years Israel has come up with a number of legal arguments for rejecting it.

General Assembly resolutions, unlike those of the Security Council, are non-binding and essentially are only suggestions. The resolution does not use the language of "rights" or "right of return" and does not specify the nationality of the refugees. The resolution speaks of refugees who wish "to live at peace with their neighbors," but it was the Arabs that began the war.

The proposed settlement drafted by Justice Minister Yossi Beilin and Arafat's deputy, Abu Mazen, in 1995 flouts this traditional view. The Beilin-Abu Mazen document, which has served as the basis for the current negotiations, proposed international responsibility for solving the refugee problem.

Most of the refugees would be absorbed into the Palestinian state-to-be, a small number would return to Israel under a family reunification program, and the remainder would be absorbed by Western countries. Israel would help to fund the resettlement effort.

Beilin argues that Resolution 194 never mentions the word "Israel." It does not blame Israel for creating the refugee problem, nor does it hold Israel responsible for solving it.

Therefore, Beilin said, any agreement can say an accord like that proposed in the Beilin-Abu Mazen document fulfills the terms of the UN resolution, without requiring Israel to acknowledge a "right of return" or leaving it open to future Palestinian claims.

The resolution does not speak of the refugees' return as the only, or even the principal, solution to their problem, Beilin notes. Rather, it speaks of a combination of return, resettlement, rehabilitation in their present locations and compensation by the "governments responsible."

>From Israel's perspective, the one problem with the resolution is that it leaves the choice of whether or not to return to the refugees themselves, rather than to a representative body such as the PLO (which did not exist in 1948).

Beilin's ideas were discussed at the Camp David summit in July, and Barak did not rule them out. He repeatedly insisted that Israel would not accept "legal or moral responsibility" for the refugee problem, and Resolution 194 does not assign any such responsibility to Israel.

There is also a historical precedent for the plan of letting tens of thousands of refugees return under a family reunification program. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, agreed to absorb 100,000 refugees in Israel at the end of the War of Independence.

Ben-Gurion made this concession at the Lausanne Conference in 1949, on condition that Israel be allowed to settle the returnees wherever it wanted, and specifically, "far from contact with potential enemies."

However, the Arab delegations rejected Ben-Gurion's proposal because they refused to accept Israel's right to limit the number of returnees, and the conference ultimately decided the number was insufficient. As a result, it was never implemented.

Excerpts from UN Resolution 194.

:11 December 1948

The General Assembly, having considered further the situation in Palestine...

2. Establishes a Conciliation Commission consisting of three States Members of the United Nations [to be chosen later]...

6. Instructs the Conciliation Commission to take steps to assist the Governments and authorities concerned to achieve a final settlement of all questions outstanding between them;

7. Resolves that the Holy Places - including Nazareth - religious buildings and sites in Palestine should be protected and free access to them assured, in accordance with existing rights and historical practice; that arrangements to this end should be under effective United Nations supervision; that the United Nations Conciliation Commission, in presenting ... its detailed proposals for a permanent international regime for the territory of Jerusalem, should include recommendations concerning the Holy Places in that territory...

8. Resolves that, in view of its association with three world religions

the Jerusalem area, including the present municipality of Jerusalem plus the surrounding villages and towns, the most eastern of which shall be Abu Dis; the most southern, Bethlehem; the most western, Ein Karim (including also the built-up area of Motsa); and the most northern Shu'fat, should be accorded special and separate treatment from the rest of Palestine and should be placed under effective United Nations control...

Instructs the Commission to present... detailed proposals for a

permanent international regime for the Jerusalem area which will provide for the maximum local autonomy for distinctive groups consistent with the special international status of the Jerusalem area...

9. Resolves that...the freest possible access to Jerusalem by road, rail or air should be accorded to all inhabitants of Palestine...

11. Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors 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;

Instructs the Conciliation Commission to facilitate the repatriation, resettlement and economic and social rehabilitation of the refugees and the payment of compensation, and to maintain close relations with the Director of the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees and, through him, with the appropriate organs and agencies of the United Nations..

Ha'aretz 25.12.2000
Editorial:

Reject the right of return

http://www3.haaretz.co.il/eng/htmls/kat2_4.htm

A week has passed since the Israeli and Palestinian delegations began talks in Washington, and there is still no sign of a peace agreement. The fundamental disputes surrounding Jerusalem, the right of return and the drawing of the borders have not yet been formulated into solutions which both sides can live with, putting a final end to the conflict. Nonetheless, at least according to Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami's declarations, it seems that the two sides have made some progress, moving ahead on the negotiations and perhaps even closer to reaching an agreement in the near future. Israel and the Palestin:

are now at a point where they must decide, not just about percentages of territory and security arrangements, but also about the fundamental nature of their relationship, and especially on the nature of the historical compromise between the two nations.

In this type of decision there is significance to symbols; however, these cannot be more important than peace itself, and certainly cannot exceed in importance the right of each of the states to exist. In this respect, there is a fundamental difference between the question of control over the Temple Mount and the right of return. Whereas control or sovereignty over the Temple Mount is not one of the foundations of the existence of the state of Israel - Israel was four

and existed for two decades without having control over the Temple Mount - this is not the case as far as the right of return is concerned.

The Palestinians rely on United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948, which, among other things, states that those Palestinians wishing to do so can return to their original places of residence and those who choose not to, should be adequately compensated for their loss. The number of Palestinian refugees in the diaspora is a matter of dispute. The Palestinian Authority refers to more than 5 million people, while the UN High Commission on Refugees calculates that the number is closer to 3.5 million refugees. Other sources refer to different figures.

In any case, even in the most conservative estimates, there are no less than 2 million to 3 million Palestinians who, according to the

Palestinian demands, could return at any time to Israel as citizens. Such a decision will enable millions of Palestinian refugees to live within the borders of the state of Israel, with demographic, ethnic and social implications which could cause the collapse of the character of the state of Israel and the reasons for its establishment. In fact, such a development would mean the establishment of a binational state with an Arab majority.

There is no dispute that thousands of Palestinian refugees who abandoned their homes during the War of 1948 were wronged by being made refugees and that they are entitled to compensation for the direct damages brought upon them. Such compensation, which is also mentioned in Resolution 194, is a fair arrangement which should be handled within the appropriate international framework, in which all those interested in putting an end to the suffering of the refugees, in addition to Israel and the Arabs, should take part.

The solution cannot be based on turning back the wheel of history and building anew the national entities in the area. A final status settlement with the Palestinians is meant to set up a national home for the Palestinians, which will absorb, if it so wishes, the Palestinian diaspora. It was not meant to dissolve the Israeli national home.

Ha'aretz 25.12.2000
http://www3.haaretz.co.il/eng/htmls/kat8_2.htm

Returning to the refugee issue

By Danny Rubinstein

In its latest meeting, on Friday, the Palestinian leadership decided that it would not give in on its demand for the fulfillment of the right of return. "The right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes," their statement said, "has been affirmed in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 and is a legal and holy right." Although Palestinian leaders have never forgotten the right of return issue throughout their negotiations with Israel, during certain periods they made scant reference to it. Today, however, hardly a day goes by when this topic is not mentioned by these Palestinian leaders in discussions, in declarations and in resolutions. Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Yasser Arafat himself, who, in the past few years, has made infrequent references to the right of return, has lately begun to give the issue far greater prominence: For example, at the Arab summit conference in Cairo two months ago and last Saturday during a visit with King Abdullah of Jordan.

This new emphasis on the right of return issue is, of course, not a product of coincidence. Recently, whenever it seems that Israel and the Palestinians are getting closer to an agreement on the framework for a final status settlement, Palestinian refugees in Israel, the PLO and other parts of the world become very excited. Spokesmen for the refugees begin to protest their case passionately, hold demonstration issue petitions and announce that they will not let the world forget about them: Thus, for example, when the official expiry date of the Oslo agreement was fast approaching in 1999, or on the last Nakba Day (marking the "catastrophe" for the Palestinians that took place with the establishment of Israel on May 15), when committees of Palestinian refugees organized processions and visits to the remains of destroyed Arab villages in Israel, while the Palestinian media gave the issue a considerable amount of publicity.

Arafat and his followers today feel that they must relate to the plight of the Palestinian refugees. The question on the minds of Palestinian

leaders is whether they can persuade the refugees and the Palestinian public as a whole to accept a peace settlement that will include an Israeli withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 borders and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state whose capital would be East Jerusalem, in exchange for waiving the right of return.

Prior to the start of the peace process (whose initial landmarks were the Madrid peace conference in October 1991 and the signing of the Oslo agreement in September 1993), many Palestinian spokesmen argued that such a settlement was possible. Some of them even said that, in return for the restoration of the Palestinian people to its "national home" - that is, in return for the creation of an independent Palestinian state - the refugees would be prepared to waive their claims to the homes they lost in hundreds of villages, towns and cit:

This was neither a lie nor an attempt to use fraud in order to promote the Palestinian cause. The dream of an independent state was then a lofty ideal. It seemed at the time that this goal would be extremely difficult to attain; thus, it became the most important item on the Palestinians' agenda. For the sake of that goal, the Palestinians were prepared to sacrifice everything.

Since that time, however, a number of things have happened. First of all, the Palestinians quickly concluded that the dream of an independent Palestinian state was far closer than they had previously thought. In the 1996 elections, the Labor Party removed from its platform the clause opposing the creation of a Palestinian state. Second - and this was a more important factor than the first - most Palestinians living in the territories soon came to realize that the independent state-in-the-making was not such a bargain after all. Whether Israel was responsible or not, the Palestinians had arrived at the realization that life under the regime of the embryonic state was not easy: economic problems, unemployment, closures, licensing difficulties, and a Palestinian regime that is arbitrary and discriminatory and in which corruption is not an uncommon phenomenon.

Palestinians thus began asking themselves: "Should we sacrifice the right of return for this kind of state?" Against this background, Palestinian publications have been rejecting, over the past few days, any talk of a resettlement (tha'utin in Arabic) of Palestinians in th

present areas of residence. These publications are rejecting resettlement, not just overseas.

Even the idea of the rehabilitation of Palestinian refugees on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip is now being viewed with suspicion. Hussam Khader, a member of the Palestinian parliament and a resident of the Balata refugee camp in Nablus, said last week that, despite his great reverence for Jerusalem and the Al Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount (Haram Al-Sharif), what he is principally interested in is his former home in Jaffa. At a meeting in Nablus a few months ago, Khader said that, personally, he was prepared never to return to Jaffa and that he was even willing to sign a document to that effect. However, his signature would be binding on no one. One of his grandchildren could always come along one day and claim that Grandpa had been confused at the time of this declaration and that he had had neither the right nor the authority to make such a proclamation, which, in effect, meant an abandonment of the claim to property that had been in the family's possession for hundreds of years.

Arafat and his colleagues in the Palestinian leadership are aware of this mood in the Palestinian public and have recently begun to emphasize that, if they arrive at a peace settlement with Israel, they will have that settlement put to the test of a national referendum (along the Israeli model). In the meantime, they are trying to assuage the tensions in Palestinian society at large by declaring repeatedly that they will not give in on the right of return

IDF to convert 5,000 immigrants a year
to Judaism

TEL AVIV (December 25) - The IDF has plans to convert up to 5,000 immigrant soldiers a year to Judaism, but OC Chaplaincy Corps Brig.-Gen. Yisrael Weiss said yesterday he wants each conversion process to take at least a year.

Weiss told military reporters he prefers the conversion program to be a gradual one, which 16 or 17 year olds would begin before induction and then continue in the IDF.

The idea of converting soldiers arose after it was discovered that many thousands of immigrants, mainly from the former Soviet Union, were not halachicly Jewish. OC Education Corps Brig.-Gen. Eliezer Stern had initially looked into the matter with Minister Michael Melchior, who is responsible for Diaspora affairs in the Prime Minister's Office, but Weiss took over the issue after his appointment in October.

Currently, some 100 to 150 soldiers undergo conversions in the IDF each year. Weiss said he would prefer to see a number of paths that lead to conversions. His idea is to have a pre-army course for 16 and 17 year olds who would learn in a non-military framework.

They would spend at least a year learning Hebrew, Israeli history and geography, and Jewish heritage in order to draw them closer to the Jewish state, and only after this would they study Judaism, Weiss said, undergoing conversion after they are drafted. The program, he added, would best be run by groups like the Jewish Agency.

The present IDF conversion course is just three months long. But Weiss is pushing to extend this to at least a year, arguing that it is best for the students to experience a whole yearly cycle of holidays and Jewish festivals before they join the Jewish people.

Stern and Melchior, Weiss said, would like to see up to 5,000 soldiers undergoing conversions each year.

So far, there has been no formal decision on the conversion process in the IDF. Weiss acknowledges that there are still problems, such as those who request to undergo the process with various streams of Judaism, such as haredi, Conservative, or Reform conversions.

The Chaplaincy Corps is working on the conversion programs, Weiss said.

World Jewish Congress says Arabs owe \$6 bln for seizing Jewish assets

Reuters 22.12.2000

NEW YORK - The World Jewish Congress (WJC) on Thursday put a figure on what it believes

Jews forced to flee Iraq and Egypt are owed in compensation - almost billion - but an Arab American group responded that the debt owed to Palestinian refugees in Israel was incalculable.

The WJC report on the assets that 800,000 Jews had to leave behind when they were forced to flee Egypt and Iraq in the years after the creation of Israel in 1948 was issued as Palestinians and Israelis met in Washington for a new round of peace talks hosted by President Bill Clinton.

WJC executive director Elan Steinberg said the prospect of settling compensation claims by both Jews and Palestinians should provide an added impetus for the negotiators. "The benefit of such a settlement would allow for the compensation of both Jewish and Arab refugees which gives everyone an incentive to complete this process," he said.

But the Washington-based Arab American Institute said in response that it was impossible to place a dollar figure on the claims that 875,000 Palestinians have against Israel and its citizens for taking their land, homes and farms. The president of the institute, James Zogby, said the inequities inflicted on Jews and Palestinians did not balance out: "Both (claims) are legitimate but one does not nullify another."

He said Jewish claims against Iraq, for example, did not cancel Palestinian claims against Israel and its citizens. Palestinians should not be forced to accept cash in lieu of getting their actual properties back, Zogby said. "More than one half of what became Israel today was Arab-owned land," he said, citing a 1950 UN report.

"Can you calculate the value of the land today, I don't think so. You're talking tens of billions of dollars," he said, adding that Palestinians had also suffered tremendous emotional pain.

Steinberg told Reuters he accepted that all refugees, "be they Arab or Jews, have a moral claim to their property."

"There is already agreement that both refugee problems, that of the Jewish refugees and that of the Arab refugees, have to be addressed, and a mechanism to address it would be an international fund that already has been discussed," he added.

The WJC report included examples of how wealthy Egyptian Jews were stripped of many of their assets. For example, the Sikoral family of Cairo owned a chain of department stores that it sold for a fraction of its worth months after the 1956 Suez Crisis. The Egyptian government now wants to privatize the flagship Cairo store that still bears the Sikoral name.

The New York-based WJC has in recent years helped win restitution for European Jews whose assets were looted by the Nazis.

Ha'aretz 25.12.2000

http://www3.haaretz.co.il/eng/htmls/kat10_4.htm

The truth about the defense budget

By Reuven Pedatzur

One of the most interesting pieces of information at last week's conference on national security held in Herzliya was provided by the director-general of the Defense Ministry. "I want to make it clear," Major General (res.) Amos Yaron said, "that the defense budget for 2001 was not cut. In fact, it actually increased in real terms in its shekel component." Thus the senior official pulled the carpet from under the IDF senior officers who are conducting a well publicized fight against what they say is a "massive cut in the defense budget."

we also take into account that the dollar component of the budget increased, and currently stands at a whopping \$2 billion (up from \$1.8 billion in 1998), it turns out that, at best, the claims of the senior officers should be treated with skepticism.

Yaron's remarks came in the wake of the lecture delivered by David Boaz, who heads the "resources commission" which was appointed to examine the needs of the defense budget and submitted its recommendations two and a half years ago. Its conclusions constitute part of the explanation for the contradiction between what Yaron said and the repeated cries of anguish emanating from the IDF brass.

"We found that a disparity of NIS 4.5 billion a year exists between the available sources and the planned uses," Boaz said. "Cumulatively the disparity will reach a total of NIS 58 billion within 10 years." That is a dangerous gap, the members of the commission wrote, and added that "without an increase in the budget, in a period of total war, certain systems will be at a far lower level than what is required and accepted, and the defense establishment will find itself breaking its neck at points that could be critical."

If the commission was right and the disparity that was created between the IDF's needs and the actual budget was in fact dangerous to the state's security, a huge gap of more than NIS 11 billion has already been accumulated, according to its calculations, since it submitted its recommendations. On the assumption that the working plans formulated by the IDF are reasonable and seek to respond to the threats that are anticipated, then we citizens should be extremely concerned. After all, it is inconceivable that the level of security provided by the IDF is reasonable if it lacks such large amounts of money to implement its plans. On top of which, the amount of money in question, and the gap it generates in the level of security, is growing year by year at a truly frightening rate.

However, this is very likely not the case. It is difficult to imagine that if the chief of staff and the senior officers of the IDF were convinced that they had a shortfall of NIS 4.5 billion per year, they would be ready to go on bearing the responsibility for the security of the country's citizens. We would all like to believe that if that were the case, they would resign.

The explanation lies in the basic assumptions and the working methods that were adopted by the commission. The database on which they grounded their findings was provided by the IDF and they adopted it totally. In other words, the commission received the description of the threats and their implications from the IDF. The same applies to the assessment of the deployment required by the IDF, which of course includes the types of weapons that need to be maintained or purchased, the method of force-building, and so on and so forth - all those elements that the commission's report calls the army's "planned uses."

So the commission, which had the task of examining and analyzing the country's national security needs and the scope of the defense budget deriving from those needs, made no effort whatsoever to contest the evaluations and the plans it received from the IDF. It follows that one should be surprised to discover that the commission's conclusions were exactly what the army wanted. For the IDF - and it is no different in this regard from any other army - always strives to plan for the most extreme possibilities. Every chief of staff wants to build the largest and most advanced army possible - nothing could be more natural. The commanding officers, naturally, want to provide responses to all possible threats, distant or near, large or small, even

those with an astonishingly low probability of being implemented. Herein lies the key - which was ignored by the commission - to understanding "the disparity between the available sources and the planned uses."

To this day, no one in Israel has tried to examine professionally and objectively what lies beneath the "planned uses" which the army formulates exclusively. Consequently, the army will always claim that there is a shortfall of resources - no matter how big the budget and matter what the objective threats consist of - and it will always be right. Because according to the scenarios the IDF draws up and its deployment plans in the face of the threats it presents, it will always be short of resources. That is why the threats have always intensified and never diminished. And if there are none, it becomes necessary to "invent" them and build them up.

The IDF did not invent this method, of course. After the end of the Cold War, when the military in the United States feared a massive cut in the defense budget, the armed forces turned even North Korea - which has an army weaker than a rear-level American division and an economy smaller than that of Rhode Island - into a dangerous enemy requiring billions of dollars for military deployment.

Thus the director-general of the Defense Ministry was right when he said that the defense budget grew, because the army received more money than it did last year; and the army's top officers are right when they say that "the defense budget was cut," because a gap exists between the army's ability to implement the plans they drew up and the resources they received.

Not until a serious examination is made of IDF's work plans and the appraisals on which they are based, will we be in a position to know whether the army really has an annual shortfall of NIS 4.5 billion, meaning that we are all in ever-mounting danger; or, what is more likely, that the defense budget is large enough and the IDF wants more not because the country is in danger but because that is how all commanders in all armies everywhere operate, and particularly those who are under no external oversight

Replies	Author
1225 Re: The Palestinian Right of Return: a fundamenta	Shraga Elam

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