

14 March 1986

THE MASS EXPULSION LIE

A NEW LAYER has been added to the structure of Arab mythology on the causes of the mass flight of “refugees” in 1948. In an article in the London journal *Middle East Studies* – on which *The Jerusalem Post* published an extensive report (March 2) – Benny Morris asserts that there are two conflicting versions of the flight: the Israeli version that the Arab leaders asked or ordered the “Palestinian masses” to flee; and the Arab contention that “the Jewish community in Palestine mounted a planned, systematic campaign of expulsion already in the first months of the war.

This definition of the confrontation sounds plausible – but is completely false. The conflict of evidence is not between these two versions. The conflict is between the Arabs’ own unvarnished contemporary 1948 version – that their leaders had told them to leave – and the falsehood they concocted later: of an expulsion by the Jews. The Israeli “contention” is little more than a recital of the Arabs’ own accounts in 1948 – supported by the reports of outside observers.

SOON AFTER the first Arab attacks on Jews, many of the wealthier Arabs made a leisurely departure without any urging; and, as *The Times* (London) correspondent reported on May 5, 1948, their “poor example” was followed by “an exodus from Jerusalem, too, though not to the same extent as in Jaffa and Haifa.”

Haifa, as it happened, provided the most publicized example of the main motivation for the flight. Three weeks before the Arab states invaded Palestine the Jewish forces in Haifa, after some brisk fighting, took over the city and proposed a truce. The Jewish authorities made every effort, as the British Police HQ reported, “to persuade the Arab populace to stay and carry on with their normal lives.” These exhortations continued for days – but to no avail. The Arabs departed *en masse* and in quite orderly fashion. “Various factors,” commented the London *Economist*, “influenced their decision. . . . There is but little doubt that the most potent of the factors were the announcements made over the air by the Higher Arab Executive urging the Arabs to quit” (October 2).

The Palestinian Arab leader, Jamal Husseini, described their departure to the UN Security Council (April 23): “The Arabs did not want to submit to a truce. . . . They rather preferred to abandon their homes, their belongings and everything they possessed and leave the town.”

The Haifa Arab leaders themselves told their Jewish counterparts that the whole country would anyhow soon be occupied by the Arab armies and the Arabs of Haifa would come back in their wake.

Summing up the months of the exodus, George Hakim, the leading Christian Arab bishop in Palestine (and no friend of the Jews) told a Beirut newspaper: “The refugees were confident they would return within a week or two. Their leaders had promised them that the Arab armies would crush ‘the Zionist gangs’ very quickly and there was no need for panic or fear of a long exile” (*Sada al Janub*, August 16, 1948).

Most expressive was the recollection by one of the Arabs who had himself fled. He wrote in the Jordan daily *Ad-Difaa*: “The Arab governments told us: Get out so that we can get in. So we got out, but they did not get in” (September 6, 1954).

ANYBODY TRYING to bolster the lie of a mass expulsion must moreover contend with the circumstance that the Arab leaders who, while the flight was in progress, delivered fiery speeches against Zionism (like Azzam Pasha at the Arab League and Jamal Husseini at the UN) did not even hint that the Arabs were being expelled by the Jews. Nor did any of the scores of newspapermen covering the war on both sides “notice” anything of the sort. *The Times*, virulently anti-Zionist, reported from Palestine extensively and, during that period, published 11 editorial articles on the war. Not a mention of expulsions. Why should there be any? After all, everybody knew that the Arabs were simply relocating temporarily.

Indeed, the only jarring note in the Arabs’ story of the flight is the subsequent disagreement between those who blamed the local Arab leaders and those who blamed the Arab League.

The dimensions of the hoax the Arabs later perpetrated is miraculously encapsulated in two separate statements by a Palestinian Arab leader – Emil Ghoury, Secretary of the Palestine Arab Higher Committee. On September 6, 1948, he said to the *Daily Telegraph*:

“The fact that there are these refugees is the direct consequence of the action of the Arab states in opposing partition and the Jewish state. The Arab states agreed upon this policy unanimously and they must share in the solution of the problem.”

Later on, when the expulsion lie had become established national policy, the same Emil Ghoury told the UN Special Political Committee (November 17, 1960): “It has been those [Zionist] acts of terror, accompanied by wholesale depredations, which caused the exodus of the Palestine Arabs.”

BY IGNORING the incontrovertible facts, pretending that the Arabs had never condemned themselves out of their own mouths, and then presenting their fabrication as a respectable contention to be weighed on equal terms with Israel’s truth – it is possible to put on a pair of scholarly spectacles and to proclaim pontifically that “the truth lies somewhere between the two.” This is what Morris has done.

He brings what purports to be supporting evidence. He has, it seems, discovered a document – a report prepared in the IDF Intelligence Branch in June 1948 – that is, when the Arab flight was still at its height. The document, he reveals, had mysteriously reached the private files of the late Aharon Cohen – a noted left-wing Mapam ideologue – where it had lain untouched for 37 years. This document, says Morris, “thoroughly undermines both the official Israeli and Arab explanations of the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem.”

More than once in his article, he uses the somewhat bombastic term “undermines.” However, even from the perspective of his initially false thesis, his selected references to the document would not undermine a chicken-coop.

To demonstrate the “undermining” of the “official Israeli historiography” on the specific subject of Arab responsibility for the bulk of the flight, the only relevant statement he derives from the document is that the exodus was contrary to the political-

strategic desires of both the Arab Higher Committee and the governments of the neighbouring Arab states.

Were this assessment of Arab policy valid and accurate, it would still prove nothing of what might happen in the course of its implementation. In fact, this assessment is nonsensical. The Arab states' political-strategic objectives were no secret. Already during the UN debate in the fall of 1947, their spokesmen announce in lurid terms that they would fight to prevent the birth of a Jewish state. They never thereafter concealed or camouflaged their purpose – sometimes indeed adding genocidal overtones. The day of their invasion – May 15 – was fixed long before. It was perfectly reasonable of them to ask the Palestinian Arab population to “get out of the way” of their armies for the brief period they would need – as they firmly believed – to “drive the Jews into the Mediterranean.” And that is what they did.

THERE WERE, of course, also Arabs who no doubt fled out of sheer panic; and nobody every suggested that every single Arab left for patriotic reasons. What, however, in Morris's report, happens to the Arab charge that the Jews “expelled,” etc.? If the “truth lies somewhere between the two,” the clear implication is that the document he found somehow provides partial justification for the Arab charge.

Just here there is a plum in the pudding. Morris reveals that the document attributed “2 per cent of the exodus to orders of expulsion by the Hagana.”

Two per cent? This sounds rather mouse-like to justify the claim of “undermining Israeli historiography” – which denies there was any mass expulsion. Evidently this incongruity became apparent to Morris himself. Whereupon, after the whole *tararam* of the terribly important secret report, and the sensational discovery, Morris submits its most crucial item to a Higher Authority; and the higher authority pronounces the report is wrong: the percentage, it says, is “closer to 5 per cent.” Who is the higher authority? Benny Morris.

Starting with his false definition, and ending with his contradicting his own source, Morris has proved nothing and “undermined” nothing. He has only provided a little Jewish grist for the Arab propaganda mills.