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Minorities in the Middle East: Israel as a Case Study

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Relatório 2/2011
Report 2/2011

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Abstract

This article examines the problem of minorities in Israel and the increasing numbers of non Jewish in Israeli society. Its main objective is to expose the population figures, which have played a major role in the events of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It aims and seeks through searching, investigating, reviewing, and analyzing the historical records, as well as related literature and sources, to prove the hypothesis that demographics is to play a major role in any final future peace agreement.

The article exposes the population figures from the time of the British Mandate in Palestine, British immigration policy, United Nations Partition Plan, establishment of the State of Israel, post 1967 war, settlements, East Jerusalem, and the debate of total population future projections.

The Palestinians and their supporters view UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III) as giving a right of return. The argument over the existence of such a right has perpetuated the Israeli Palestinian conflict, and the failure of the peace process is due in large part to the inability of the two parties to achieve a solution with justice for both sides. The majority of Palestinians considers that their homeland was lost in the *al-Nakba* ("the catastrophe") of 1948, and see the Right of Return as crucial to a peace agreement with Israel. The Palestinians consider the vast majority of refugees as victims of Israeli ethnic cleansing during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and cities massacres. On the other side, the majority of Israelis find a literal right of return for Palestinian refugees to be unacceptable, pointing out that allowing such an influx of Palestinians would eventually cause Israel's Jewish population to become a minority, thus undermining Israel's status as a Jewish State.

Keywords: Minorities, Population, Israel, Palestine, International Relations.

The goal of this article is to examine the population statistical data in order to analysis demographical issues in the Middle East, without supporting the connection of either side as to who has the right to claim the land.

This article traces events chronologically from the beginning to end through searching many relevant references and literature, to find out and present evidences that support it arguments. Therefore, many archives, published books, respectable newspaper articles and manuscripts have been consulted, mainly United Nations documents and sources.

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1. British Mandate and British immigration Policy

During World War I, the Zionist cause gained some degree of support from Great Britain. In a 1917 letter from British foreign secretary Lord Balfour to Jewish financier Lord Rothschild, the British government expressed a commitment to creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This letter is commonly known as the Balfour Declaration. The British were speaking out of both sides of their mouth, simultaneously promising Arabs their freedom if they helped to defeat the Ottoman Empire, which at that time controlled most of the Middle East (including the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, as well as significant portions of Saudi Arabia and northern Africa). The British promised the Arabs that they would limit the Jewish settlement in Palestine mere months after the Balfour Declaration expressed support for the “the establishment in Palestine of national home for the Jewish people.” After World War I, Palestine was assigned to the United Kingdom as a mandated territory by the League of Nations. The Palestinian Mandate initially included the lands that are now Israel and Jordan, but all lands east of the Jordan River were later placed into a separate mandate known as Transjordan (now the kingdom of Jordan). The document creating the Palestinian mandate incorporated the terms of the Balfour Declaration, promising the creation of a national Jewish homeland within the mandate territory. The Palestinian Arabs living in Palestine opposed Jewish immigration into the territory, and the British came to believe that the conflicting claims were irreconcilable. In 1937, the British recommended partition of the territory. After the World War II, the world supported the Jewish for a homeland to be established. The British adopted policy of immigration allowing a large number of Jewish immigrants to enter Palestine. This was the seed for the beginning of new conflict in the 20th century that has not been resolved till this day the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.



Map of the British Mandate. Source: Doron, 2005.

2. The Population of Palestine (1918-1946)

Year	Population	Muslims	Christians	Jews	Others
1918	700,000	574,000	70,000	56,000	
		92%		8%	
1922	757,182	590,000	73,014	83,794	9,474
		89%		11%	
1931	1,035,821	759,712	91,398	174,610	10,101
		83%		17%	
1946	1,972,560	1,203,780	145,060	608,230	15,490
		69%		31%	

Based on: Government of Palestine (British Mandate Government), 1941, p. 12.

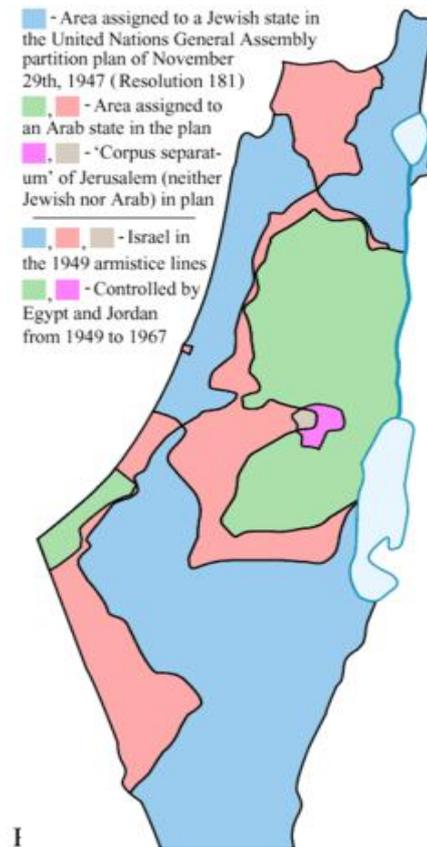
The above table shows the dramatic changes in the population during a period of twenty-eight years. By examining the table within four years between 1918 and 1922 it appears that the Arab population has decreased 3% and that the Jewish population has increased to 3%, which makes it as an equal ratio. From 1922-1931 the Arab population have continued to shrink with 5% and the Jewish population has risen to 5%. 1946 shows significant changes in percentage the Arab population declined by 14%, where as the Jewish population almost doubled.

The year 1946 figures indicate that within the last twenty-eight years, the Jewish population that was a minority in Palestine became the majority and will continue to be so in the years ahead.

3. The United Nations Partition Plan

The British were unable to come up with a solution that would satisfy either Arabs or Jews. In 1947, they handed the problem to the newly founded United Nations, which developed a partition plan dividing Palestine into Jewish

and Arab portions. According to the 1947 UN Partition Plan, Jerusalem was supposed to be internationalized as a *Corpus Separatum* — a political entity under the UN trusteeship and separated by both the proposed Arab and Jewish states. The plan was approved on November 1947 by the UN General Assembly. The mandate of the UK over Trans Jordan expired on May 14, 1948 and British troops pulled out of Palestine.



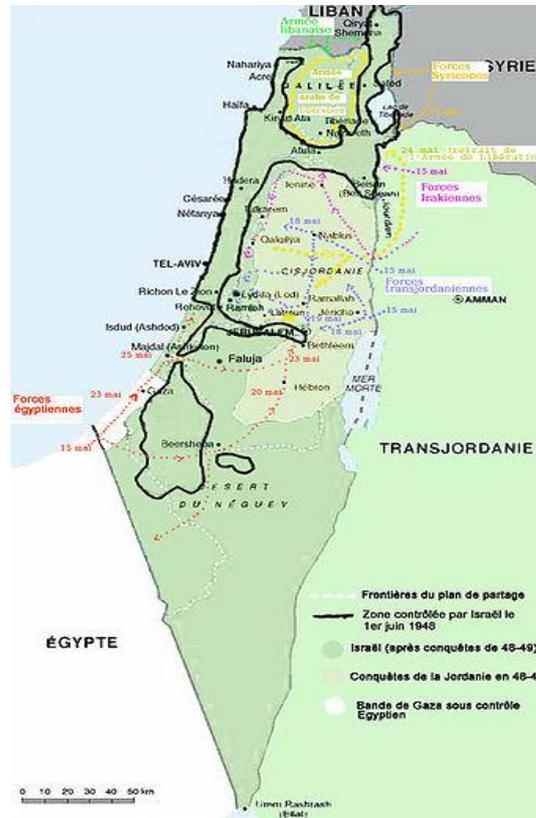
Map of UN Partition Plan of Palestine. Source: AnonMoos, 2005.

4. Creation of the State of Israel

On May 1948, David Ben Gourion first Israeli prime minister declared the establishment of the state of Israel, war broke out between the new state of Israel and its Arab neighbours the war lasted for eight months. The new state of Israel has gained more land than it was proposed in the UN partition plan. In 1949 Israel signed armistice agreements with its Arab neighbour's countries. The agreement ended officially the eight-month war and established armistice lines which became known as the green line.

Reaction of the international community to the new state has been mixed, in 1948 Israel applied for a membership in the United Nations but failed to win the necessary vote, in 1949 following the armistice agreement the

application was renewed and Israel was admitted to the United Nations by 37 votes in favour, 12 against and 9 abstentions.



Map of Israel in 1948. Source: Cage, 2006.

5. Palestinian refugees and Israel Law of Return (1950)

The war that ensued was won by Israel, creating a large number of Arab refugees — Up to 726,000 estimated refugees (UNRWA, 2008), Palestinian Arabs who fled or were forced out of their homes during the fighting. This number has grown to include over 4.6 million displaced persons, about 3.7 millions of whom are currently registered as refugees with the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees). Of these, somewhat over a million live in camps run by the UNRWA. Generally, refugees living in the camps live in conditions of poverty and overcrowding.

On 5 July 1950, the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, enacted the Law of Return 5710-1950. Follow-up legislation on immigration matters was contained in the Nationality Law of 1952. These two pieces of legislation combine religion, history and democracy, in a way unique to Israel. Together, the legislation declares the right of Jews to come to Israel, their ancestral homeland, and the will to facilitate their immigration. The law gives the right of

return to those born Jews (having a Jewish mother or maternal grandmother), those with Jewish ancestry (having a Jewish father or grandfather) and converts to Judaism (Orthodox, Reform, or Conservative denominations not secular though Reform and Conservative conversions must take place outside the state, similar to civil marriages) (Knesset, 1950). The Arab citizens of Israel — known as Israeli Arab — are the Palestinians who remained in Palestine during 1948 and who resisted the fighting. Today, Israeli Arab form 20% of Israel total population. According to the Israel Bureau Statistics as of (May 2003 Report), Muslims, including Bedouins, make up 82% of the entire Arab population in Israel, with around 9% Druze see (Nissim, 2003), and 9% Orthodox Christians (International Crisis Group, 2005).

6. The Six Days War (1967)

On June 1967 Israeli defence forces IDF made massive territorial gains capturing the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, East Jerusalem and the Sinai Peninsula up to the Suez Canal. The principle of land-for-peace that has formed the basis of Arab-Israeli negotiations is based on Israel giving up land won in the 1967, war in return for peace deals recognizing Israeli borders and its right to security.

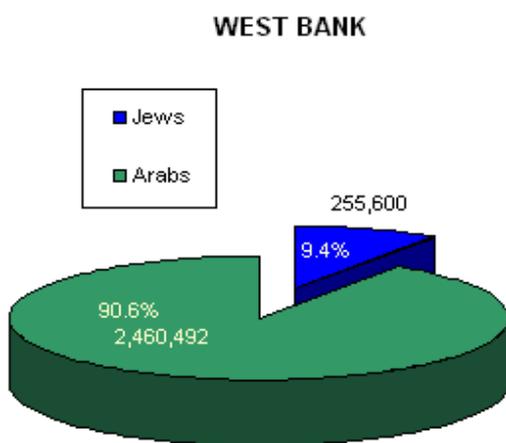


Map of 1967 Israel borders. Adapted from: Ling.Nut, 2010.

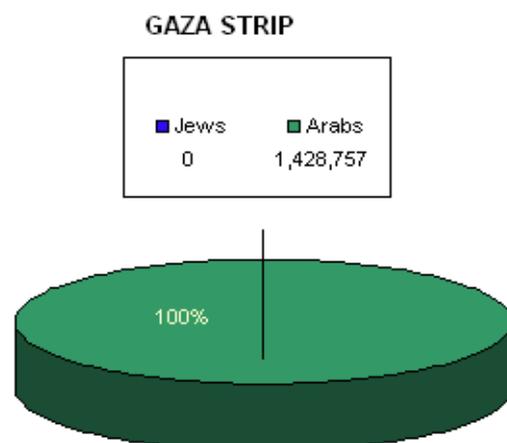
7. The Post 1967 War

As a result of 1967 war around 280,000 to 325,000 Palestinian became refugees (Artz, 1997). Today the population of the Palestinian living in the West Bank amounts to 2,460,492 persons. There are 270,000 Israeli settlers living in the West Bank (see Graph 1), under International law the settlers is illegal (Playfair, 1992) and they are one of the obstacle for any future peace negotiation.

The population of the Palestinian in Gaza Strip is currently 1,604,238 (see Graph 2). There were about 7,000. Israeli settlers living in the Gaza strip until the settlements were evacuated in 2005.



Graph 1



Graph 2

Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 2007 (www.israelipalestinian.procon.org)

8. The Basic Law of Jerusalem

On 30 July 1980, the Israeli Knesset, led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, adopted a law, declaring Jerusalem, in its entirety, the capital of Israel. The UN Security Council, in its Resolution 478 (1980) of 20 August 1980, declared Israel's Basic law null and void (United Nations, 1980). According to International Law, this area is considered as occupied territory and as such it has the same status as the rest of the West Bank.

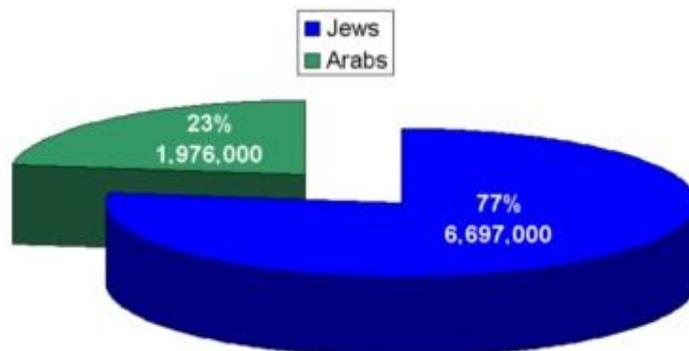
Foreign diplomats and embassies based in Tel-Aviv city which the international community recognize Tel-Aviv as the capital of Israel (Lustick, 1997).

9. The population of East Jerusalem

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 1994) before 1967 war it is estimated that 44,000 Palestinian were living in East Jerusalem and only few hundred Jews. In 1993 155,000 Jews compared to 150,000 Palestinian. The Israeli law on East Jerusalem, expropriation of lands and establishment of Israeli neighbourhoods, changing the demographic map of the city, contravene the principles of international law that govern the relationship of the occupying power to the population of the territory occupied, and its obligations to that population. The residents of East Jerusalem became permanent residents of Israel shortly after the war. Only a few of them accepted Israeli citizenship, and most of them keep close ties with the West Bank. They are allowed to vote for municipal services. In 2006, the population of East Jerusalem was composed of 181,457 Jews, 229,004 Palestinian Muslims and 13,638 Palestinian Christian (ECOSOC, 1994).

10. Total population of Israel today

The total population of Israel 7,510,000 this includes over 200,000 and 250,000 Palestinian in East Jerusalem, about 270,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank and about 20,000 in the Golan Heights this does not include 222,000 foreigners in the country.



Population Projection of Israel for the year of 2025. Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2005.

According to Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), The Arab population in Israel is growing at a faster rate than the Jewish population, and is expected to reach 2 million by the year 2025. According to the CBS report, the Arab population in Israel totalled 1,142,000 million people in 2005, which constitutes 16 percent of the country's population. By 2025, Arabs are estimated to total around 2 million, and make up 23 percent of the Israeli population, Israel's leading newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth has reported. The report also revealed that 39 percent of Israeli Arabs reside in northern Israel, while 21 percent live in the Jerusalem district. The number of Arab children

under the age of 14 currently stands at 475,700, which is almost a quarter of the number of children in the country.

However, and independently of the fact of this projection being true or false, there is certainly a fear in Israel that the Arab population in the future will be rated more than Jewish population. If so, the Israel State — which regards itself as Jewish State — may lose its identity as such.

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