

ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region



At least 55 Palestinians were shot by Israeli forces on Monday, while protesting along the Gaza Strip border, a grim reminder that the Nakba is not over. AFP

OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Nakba, 70 years on

Arab News Dubai

On May 14, 1948, the creation of the state of Israel was declared, formed out of Palestine, and the next day became known as the day of the “Nakba,” or “catastrophe.”

More than 700,000 Palestinians ended up as refugees, as they fled or were driven off their land, and the first Arab-Israeli War began.

This year, on the eve of the 70th anniversary, the US opened its relocated embassy in Jerusalem, and at least 55 Palestinians were shot by Israeli forces while protesting along the Gaza Strip's border, a grim reminder that the Nakba is not over.

“For Palestinians, the Nakba is also

a continuing affair that only started in 1948, but continued through 1967 and until today, with Jerusalem,” Ghassan Khatib, a former Palestinian government minister, told Arab News.

“Seven decades have passed since Al-Nakba, the biggest crisis in the history of Palestine,” Basem Abdullah Al-Agha, ambassador of Palestine to Saudi Arabia, told Arab News.

“The state of Israel was created on the Palestinian people's home, from which 6 million Palestine refugees continue to suffer from the cruelty of exile and loss of human security, and with ever-expanding Israeli settlements, Palestinians continue to live under occupation.”

The Nakba is not only about the refugees, according to Khatib.

INSIDE

Interview with UNRWA commissioner general.

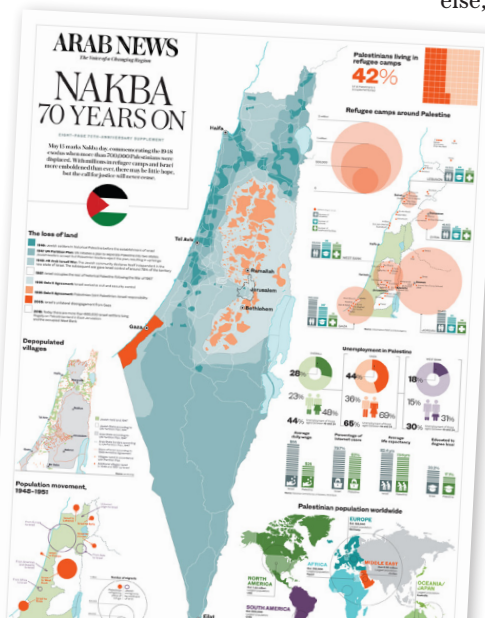
How the young generation sees the Nakba.

‘My Home Is Beit Daras’ by Ramzy Baroud.

Sir John Jenkins on the need for a new deal.

“The Nakba is the turning point for all Palestinians. And commemorating the Nakba is about taking a stand for resistance, and in particular for self-determination and statehood.”

Third-generation Palestinians,



who have made a home somewhere else, struggle with national identity and where to call home. “I’m a Palestinian who grew up in Saudi Arabia,” said 28-year old Dania Hussein, whose family hails from Jerusalem. “I guess I’m one of those who have an identity crisis. I don’t fit into the typical Palestinian culture or the Saudi or the Western, really. I have a mentality of my own that developed after living in all the environments I lived in and met the people that were part of them.”

Whether refugees or not, it is not hard in the Arab world to find someone whose life wasn’t altered forever by the Nakba.

Arab News columnist Ramzy Baroud was born and raised in a Gaza camp. His family village, Beit Daras, was erased from the map.

The father and grandmother of Arab News writer Daoud Kuttab fled Jerusalem’s Musrara neighborhood for the Jordanian city of Zarqa.

You will find their stories in our eight-page supplement today, which marks Nakba day and the toll it has taken over seven decades.

And in the story of Dr. Bishara A. Bahbah, whose family still holds the deed to their orchard in the Lod-Jaffa area, you will find some hope. As he said: “Even if Israel takes our lands, they can never take away our brainpower and our unshakable will and determination to succeed.”

DAY OF VIOLENCE

KSA condemns Israelis for firing on unarmed Palestinians

Arab News Jeddah

Saudi Arabia slammed Israel after troops shot and killed at least 55 Palestinians and wounded hundreds on Monday.

The Foreign Ministry source expressed the Kingdom's strong condemnation and denunciation of the

deadly attack on unarmed protesters by the Israeli forces of occupation.

The source told the Saudi Press Agency that the international community must shoulder its responsibility for the cessation of violence and protection of the brotherly Palestinian people.

The source also reiterated Saudi Arabia's firm stance in support of the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people in restoring their legitimate rights in accordance with international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Israeli troops opened fire as thousands of Palestinians demonstrated along Gaza's border with the Jewish state, protesting against the official opening on Monday of the new US Embassy in Jerusalem, and calling for Palestinian refugees to be allowed to

return to their homes that are now in Israel.

Kuwait, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, said it was considering calling for an emergency meeting of the body.

Mansour Al-Otaibi, the Kuwaiti ambassador to the UN, said he was consulting with the Arab Group at the UN and with the Palestinian ambassador to the world body.

The transfer of the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was condemned by the 29th Arab League Summit in Saudi Arabia on April 17.

Meanwhile, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said it “strongly rejects and condemns” the White House’s “deplorable action” to move the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

EDITORIAL

Israeli-Palestinian peace remote, but still possible

FAISAL J. ABBAS
EDITOR IN CHIEF



Twitter:
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to Jerusalem adds insult to injury. Riyadh, the Arab League and most countries around the world have condemned this step.

However, it would be unfair to blame the move entirely on the current US administration. Such an assumption ignores the fact that the decision was made in Washington decades ago; all the current administration did was to decide to stop postponing the implementation of it.

Blaming President Donald Trump also makes it seem that previous US presidents were less biased toward the conflict. This is absolutely untrue, as any junior researcher can tell you just by counting the number of pro-Israel vetoes Washington has made at the UN Security Council. (This does not exclude Barack Obama, who despite tensions with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, is regarded as one of the most pro-Israel presidents since Harry Truman).

Continued on Page 4

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ARAB NEWS

The Voice of a Changing Region

NAKBA 70 YEARS ON

EIGHT-PAGE 70TH-ANNIVERSARY SUPPLEMENT

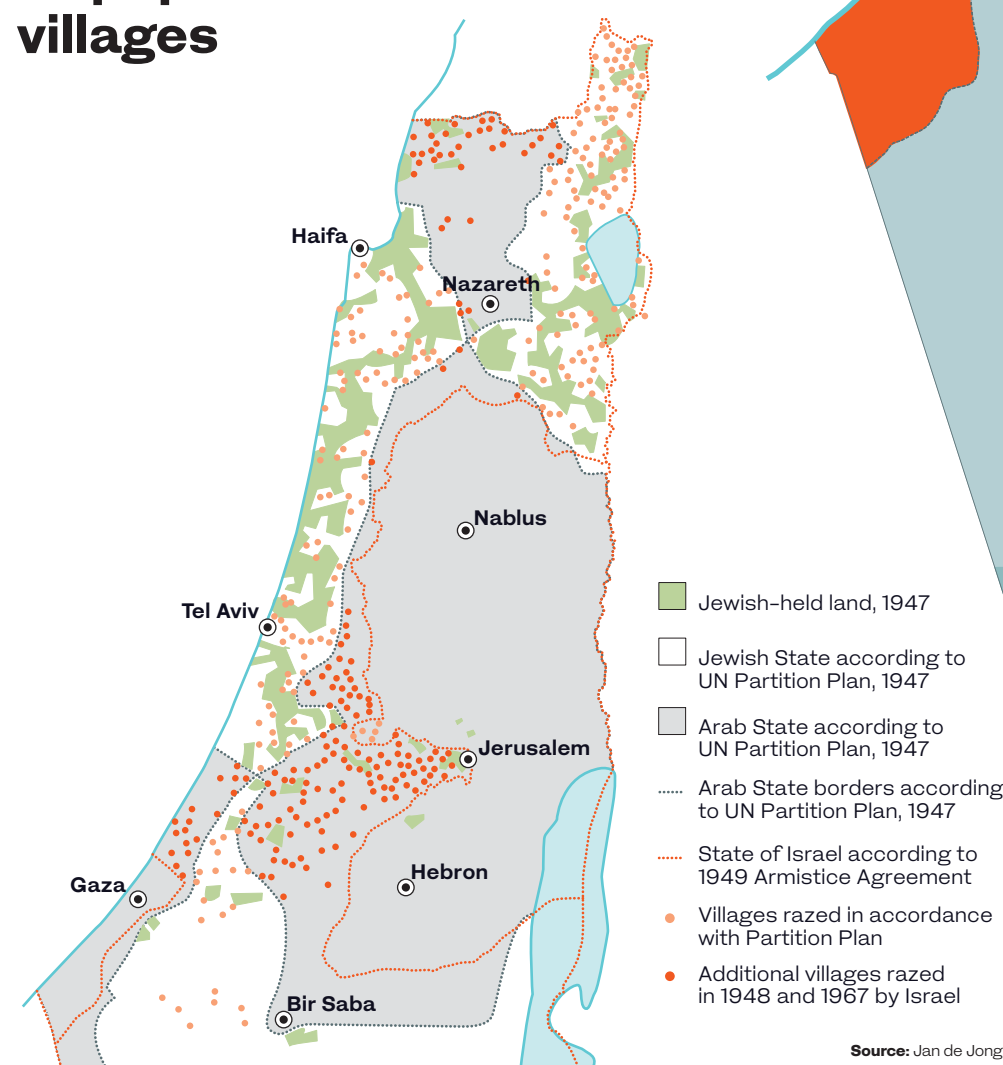
May 15 marks Nakba day, commemorating the 1948 exodus when more than 700,000 Palestinians were displaced. With millions in refugee camps and Israel more emboldened than ever, there may be little hope, but the call for justice will never cease.



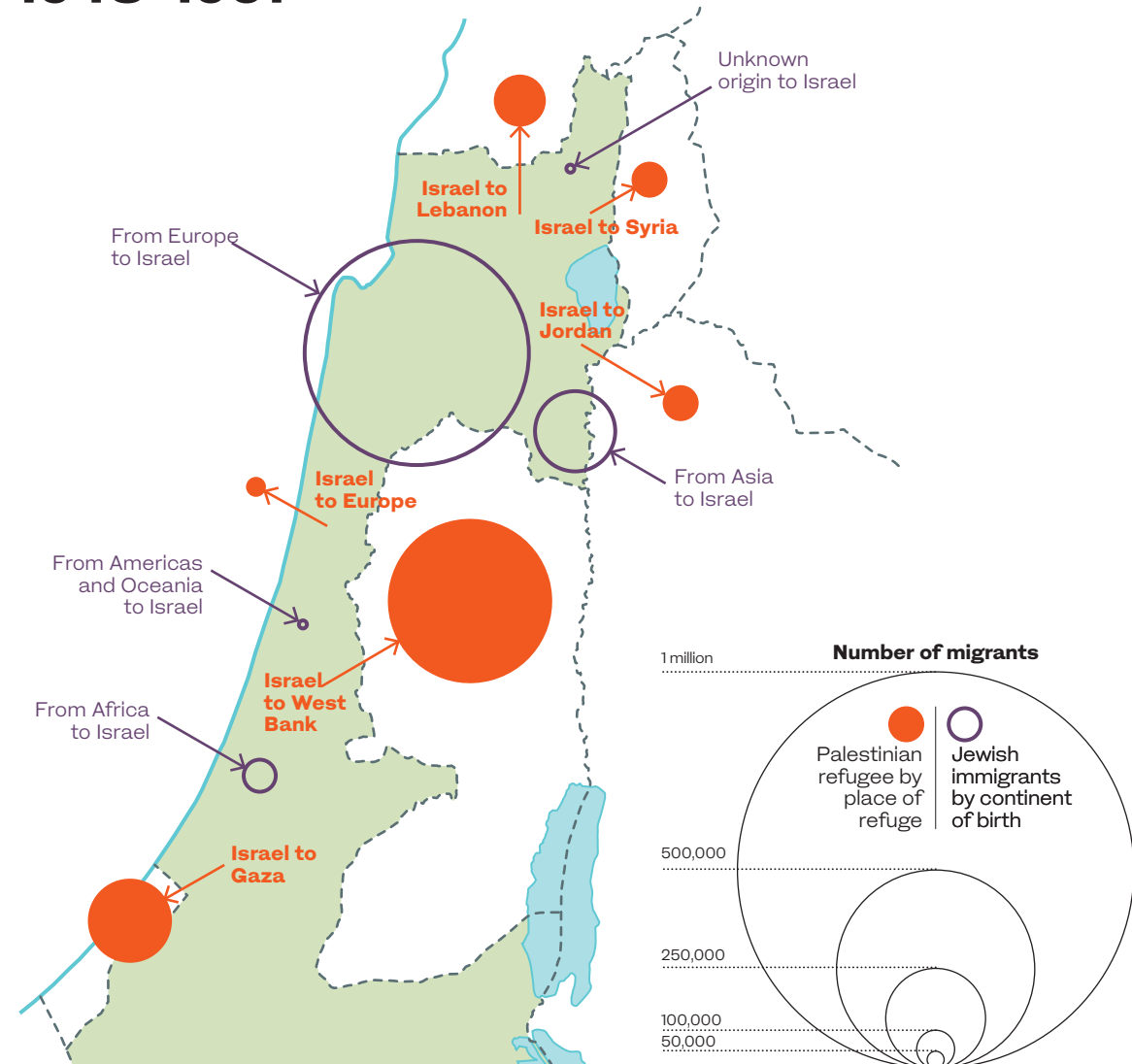
The loss of land

- 1946:** Jewish settlers in historical Palestine before the establishment of Israel
- 1947 UN Partition Plan:** UN initiates a plan to separate Palestine into two states. Jewish leaders accept but Palestinian leaders reject the plan, resulting in uprisings
- 1948-49 Arab Israeli War:** The Jewish community declares itself independent in the new state of Israel. The subsequent war gave Israel control of around 78% of the territory
- 1967:** Israel occupies the rest of historical Palestine following the War of 1967
- 1995 Oslo II Agreement:** Israeli exclusive civil and security control
- 1995 Oslo II Agreement:** Palestinian/joint Palestinian-Israeli responsibility
- 2005:** Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza
- 2018:** Today there are more than 600,000 Israeli settlers living illegally on Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank

Depopulated villages



Population movement, 1948-1951

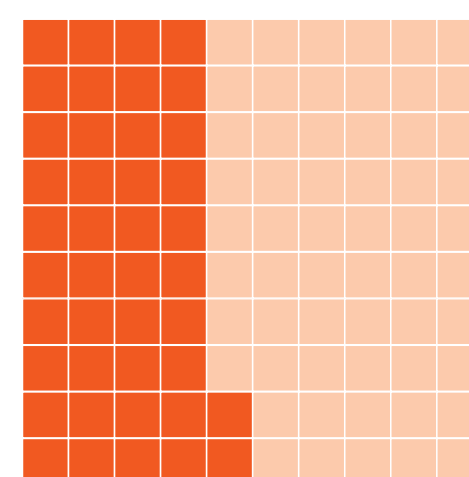


Source: PASSIA, 2002

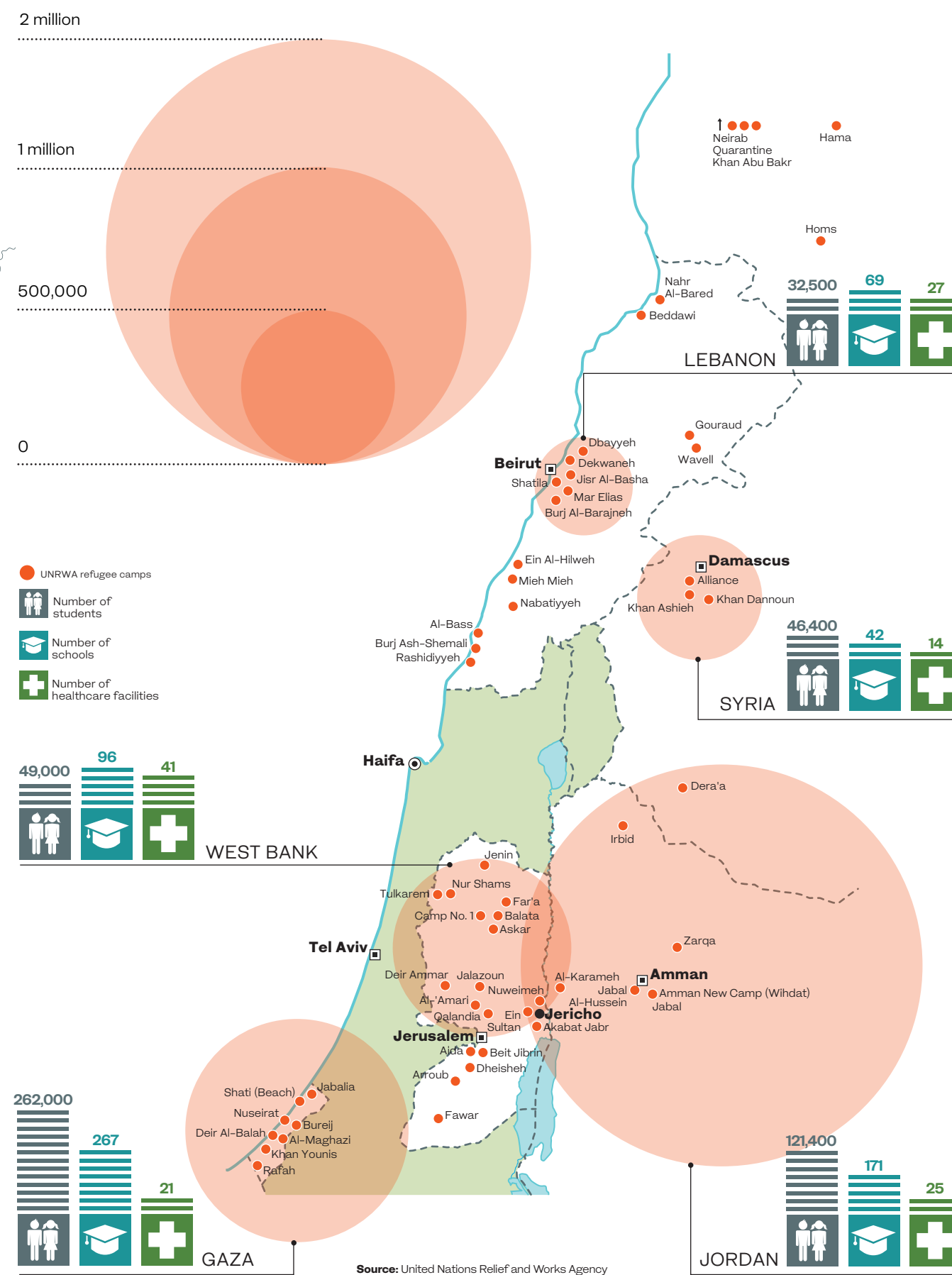
Palestinians living in refugee camps

42%

(of all Palestinians in occupied territories)

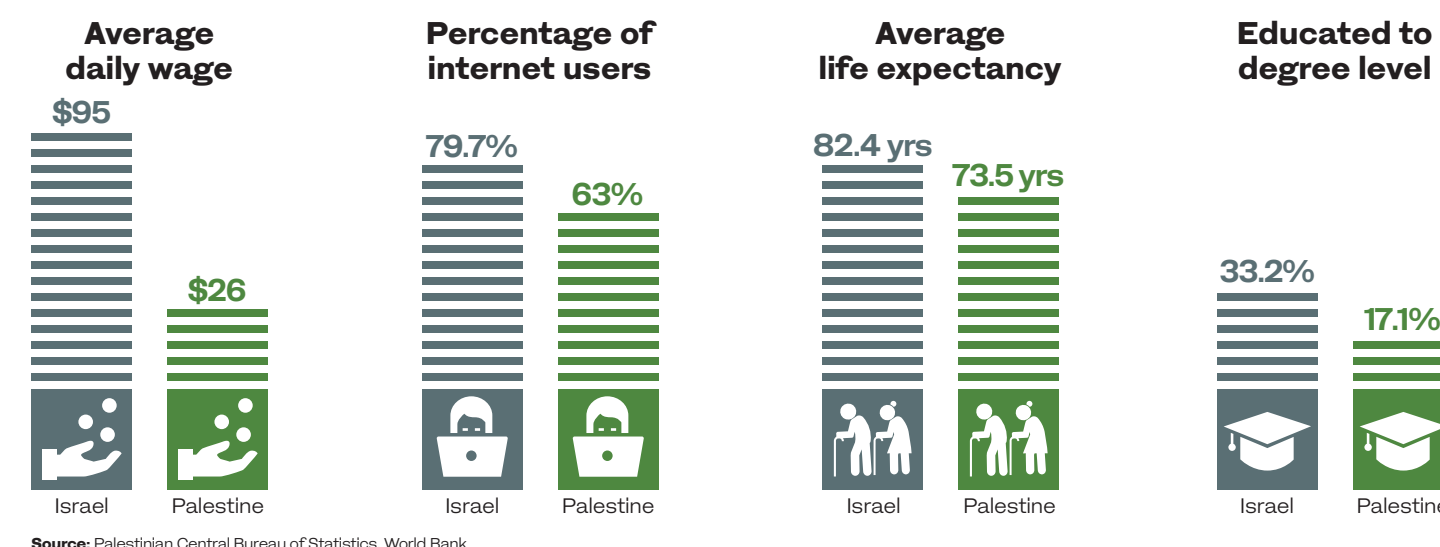
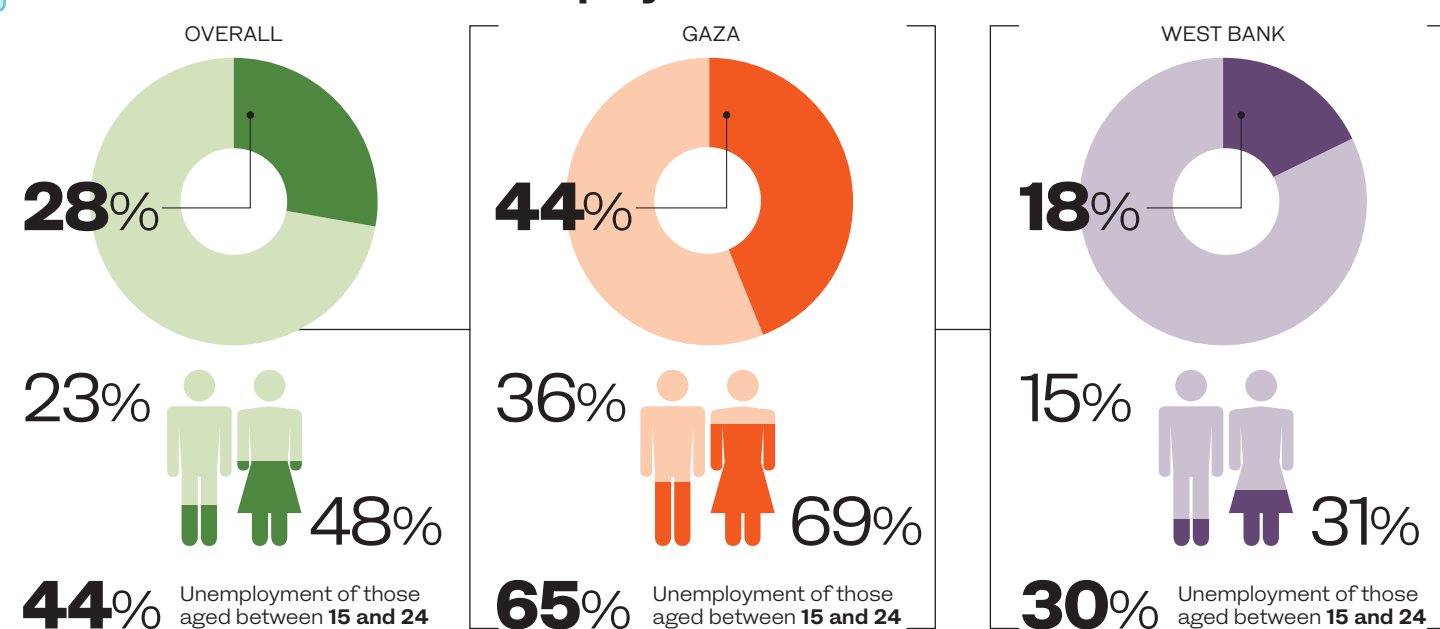


Refugee camps around Palestine



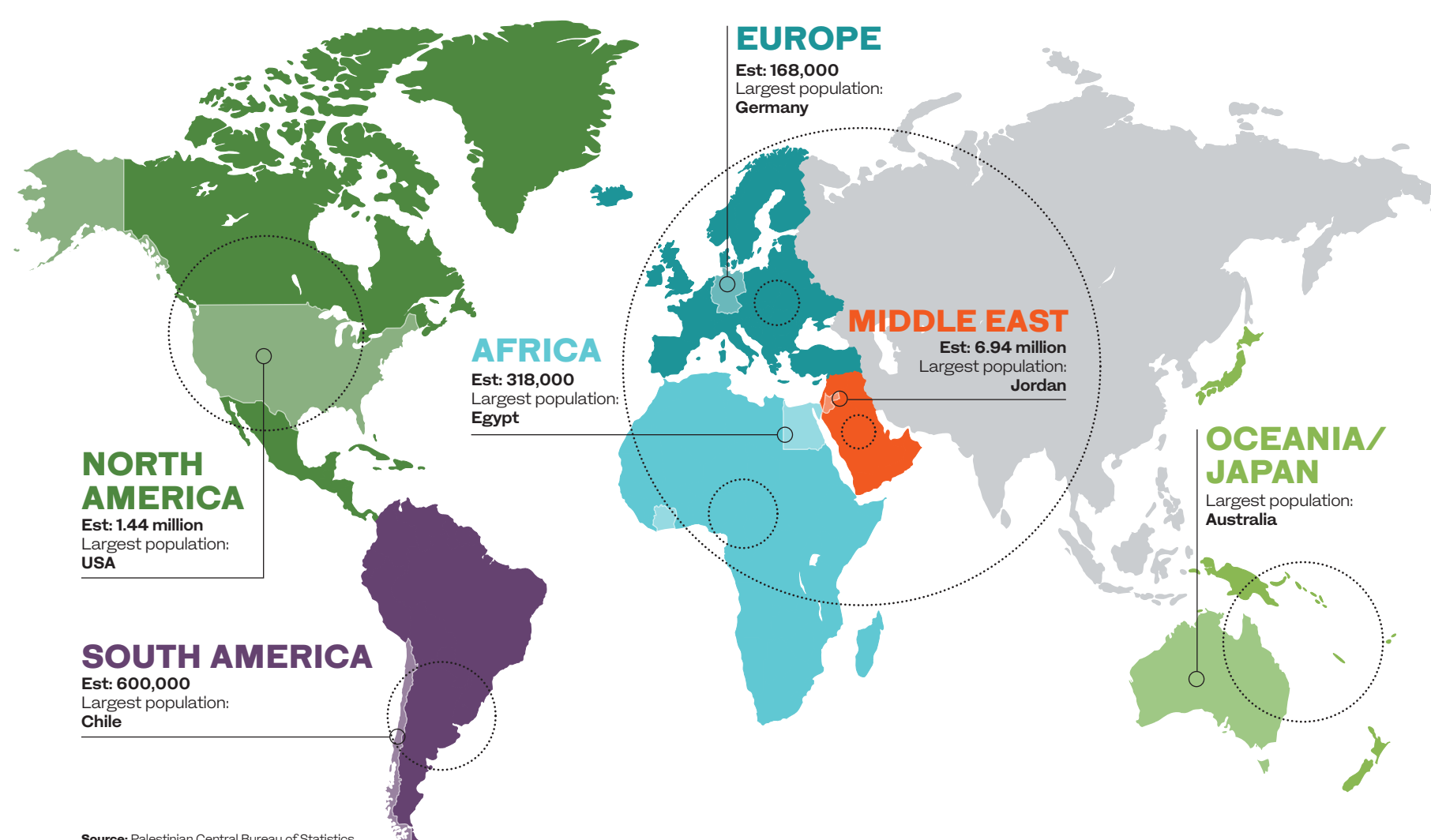
Source: United Nations Relief and Works Agency

Unemployment in Palestine



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, World Bank

Palestinian population worldwide



Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

Nakba

70 YEARS ON

Dateline of the disaster — from the Balfour Declaration to the ceasefire announcement of 1949

Nov. 2, 1917

Britain's Balfour Declaration from foreign secretary Arthur Balfour, supports "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."



Nov. 29, 1947

UN Resolution 181 plan splits Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem under international control. Arab leaders reject the plan.



April 9, 1948

Nakba begins as more than 100 residents are killed by Zionist paramilitary groups in the Deir Yassin massacre. The remaining villagers driven off their land.



Arab women and children flee with their possessions and begin a three-mile hike through no man's land to the Arab lines in the West Bank city of Tulkarm after being deposited by truck from an Arab village near Haifa in 1948. Getty

OPINION

Personal and collective right that no one must concede

While the claim is inalienable, say Palestinian leaders, implementation is subject to negotiation — and various interpretations

Daoud Kuttab Ramallah

The Palestinian refugee crisis began before May 15, 1948, when Israel declared itself a state on Palestinian land and began barring those who had left their homes from returning.

In many cases the new Jewish immigrants took over the homes and lands of the refugees who had temporarily left because of the violence perpetuated by underground Jewish militias. The Zionist narrative was primarily focused on the false claims that Palestine is a "land without a people for a people without a land." In the process of colonization and settlement by Jewish immigrants, Palestinians were dispossessed and made stateless. The Palestinian refugee problem was taken up in Resolution 194, passed by the UN General Assembly in December 1948. It was also addressed in the Arab Peace Initiative introduced in 2002. Unlike various attempts by Israel and its apologists who insist the problem is insoluble, the Arab plan approaches the refugees' case as something that can be accomplished by consensus rather than clashes. The text on refugees in the Arab peace plan reads: "Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian

refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194." Anis F. Kassim, a Palestinian lawyer based in Jordan and the editor of the Palestine Yearbook of International Law, told Arab News that the right of return enshrined in various UN resolutions is non-negotiable and does not have an expiry date. The UN set up the Palestinian refugee agency, UNRWA, on Dec. 8, 1948, with a mandate to provide humanitarian, educational and health support to Palestinian refugees. UNRWA now has nearly five million registered refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Attempts to cancel Palestinian demands to return to their homes have at times been reflected in attempts to disband this humanitarian UN agency. US President Donald Trump suspended financial support to UNRWA in January 2018, warning that the US may withhold future aid payments to the agency over what he called the Palestinians' unwillingness to talk peace with Israel. In trying to deal with the thorny issue of the right of return, Palestinian negotiators over the past decades have shown flexibility. Palestinian leaders have said that



Mother and child arrive in Jordan from the Gaza strip in 1968. UNWRA

INNUMBERS

7.1m

The number of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons as of 2009, including Nakba survivors and their descendants. They are located mostly in the occupied West Bank and neighboring Arab countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, denied their internationally-recognized legal right to return to their homeland by Israel, simply because they are not Jewish.

while this right is inalienable, its implementation is subject to negotiation. Palestinian negotiators have said they want Israel to recognize its "legal and historic responsibility" for the refugee crisis. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas went even further in 2012 when he said on Israeli TV that he no longer has any desire to live in the city in which he was born and raised, Safad, but would not mind visiting it. In February 2014 in Ramallah, he also told a group of 300 visiting Israelis that Palestinians are not interested in "flooding Israel with Palestinian refugees." Arab and Muslim countries have

offered Israel a comprehensive peace plan that allows Israel a say in how the right of return is resolved. This flexibility, however, is not universally accepted by Palestinians, and many have continued to oppose any compromise on the issue. Suheil Khoury, a leading left-wing activist based in Amman, told Arab News that the Palestinian right of return is non-negotiable. "This is a personal and a collective right and no one has the right to concede this right except the refugees themselves," Khoury said that PLO factions such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine reject efforts by Fatah and other mainstream PLO factions that he feels take this sacred right lightly. "The right of return is the main plank in the political programs of many Palestinian factions and many have paid the ultimate sacrifice upholding this right." The refugee problem is described by Israeli professor Ilan Pappé as "ethnic cleansing." Unlike the expectations of many Israelis that new generations of Palestinians will forget about Palestine, the right of return continues to take center stage at Nakba Day activities and throughout the year. Generation after generation retain memories of Palestine. Fakhre Daas is a member of the politburo of The Popular Unity Party (Hizb al Wihdeh al Shaabi) in Jordan.

He is also a member of the Return Committee, which organizes rallies and protests throughout Jordan. "Right of return committees exist throughout Jordan and conduct regular events, protests and teach-ins to ensure that new generations of Arabs are aware of this right and its ramifications," he told Arab News. Similar committees exist throughout the world. The right of return has also been one of the main features of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BdS) movement. It calls for "respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194." The movement has published an article by Pappé and Karma Nabulsi fleshing out the issue. "There is hardly a right that is more morally urgent and more legally compelling than the Palestinian right of return," they wrote. "Regardless of who they are, where they came from, or when they became homeless, refugees the world over have an inalienable right to return to their homes. They and their descendants retain that right until the moment of its translation into reality — when they are permitted to return, and can choose whether or not they wish to do so."

Nakba

70 YEARS ON

My family’s home is and always will be Beit Daras

RAMZY BAROUD

When Google Earth was initially released in 2001, I immediately rushed to locate a village that no longer exists on a map and which now delineates a whole different reality.

Although I was born and raised in a Gaza refugee camp, and then moved to and lived in the United States, finding a village that was erased from the map decades earlier was not, at least for me, an irrational act. The village of Beit Daras was the single most important piece of earth that truly mattered to me.

But I could only find it by estimation. Beit Daras was located 32 kilometers northeast of Gaza, on elevated ground, perched between a large hill and a small river that seemed to never run dry.

A once peaceful village, Beit Daras had existed for millennia. Romans, Crusaders, Mamluks and Ottomans ruled over and even tried to subdue Beit Daras; yet they failed. True, each invader left their mark — ancient Roman tunnels, a Crusaders’ castle, a Mamluk mail building, an Ottoman khan (caravanserai) — but they were all eventually driven out. It wasn’t until 1948 that Beit Daras, that tenacious village with a population of merely 3,000, was emptied of its population and later destroyed.

The agony of the inhabitants of Beit Daras and their descendants lingers on even after all these years. The tragic way it was conquered by invading Zionist forces has left behind bloodstains and emotional scars that have never healed.

Three battles were bravely fought by the Badrasawis, as the dwellers of Beit Daras were called, in defense of their village. In the end, the Zionist militias, the Haganah, with the help of British weapons and strategic assistance, routed the humble resistance, which consisted mostly of villagers fighting with old rifles.

The “massacre of Beit Daras” that followed remains a subdued scream that pierces through the hearts of Badrasawis. Those who survived became refugees and are mostly living in the Gaza Strip. Under siege, successive wars and endless strife, their Nakba — the catastrophic ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1947-48 — has never truly ended. One cannot dispel the pain if the wound never truly heals.

Born into a family of refugees in the Nuseirat Refugee Camp in Gaza, I took pride in being a Badrasawi. Our resistance has garnered us the reputation of being “stubborn,” as well as the uncorroborated claim of having large heads. We truly are stubborn, proud and generous, for Beit Daras was erased but the collective identity it has given us remains intact.

As I child, I learned to be proud from my grandfather: A handsome, elegant, strong peasant with unshakable faith. He managed to hide his deep sadness so well after he was expelled from his home in Palestine, along

with his entire family. As he aged, he would sit for hours, between prayers, searching within his soul for the beautiful memories of his past. Occasionally, he would let out a mournful sigh, a few tears; yet he never accepted his defeat, or the idea that Beit Daras was forever gone.

“Why bother to haul the good blankets on the back of a donkey, exposing them to the dust of the journey, while we know that it’s only a matter of a week or so before we return to Beit Daras?” he told his bewildered wife, Zeinab, as they hauled their children to navigate an endless exile. I cannot pinpoint the moment when my grandfather discovered that his “good blankets” were gone forever — that all that remained of his village were two giant concrete pillars, and piles of cacti.

It isn’t easy to describe a history that, only seven decades ago, was, along with every standing building of that village, blown to smithereens with the intent of erasing it from existence. Most historic references written of Beit Daras, whether by Israeli or Palestinian historians, were brief, and ultimately resulted in delineating its fall as just one among nearly 600 Palestinian villages that were often evacuated and then completely flattened during the war years. It was another episode in a more



Ramzy Baroud is a journalist, author and editor of Palestine Chronicle. His latest book is ‘The Last Earth: A Palestinian Story’ (Pluto Press, London, 2018).
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compounded tragedy that saw the dispossession and expulsion of more than 700,000 Palestinians.

But, for my family, it was much more than that. Beit Daras was our very dignity. Grandpa’s callused hands and leathery, weathered skin attested to his decades of hard labor tending the rocky soil in the fields of Palestine. It was a popular pastime for my brothers and I to point to a scar on his body and have him tell us a gut-busting tale of the rigors of farm-life.

Later in life, someone would give him a small hand-held radio to glean the latest news and he would, from that moment, never be seen without it. As a child, I recall him listening to the Voice of the Arabs news on that battered radio. It had once been blue but had faded to white with age. Its bulging batteries were duct-taped to the back. Sitting with the radio up to his ear and fighting to hear the reporter amidst the static, grandpa listened and waited for the announcer to make that long-awaiting call: “To the people of Beit Daras: Your lands have been liberated, go back to your village.”

The day grandpa died, his faithful radio was lying on the pillow close to his ear so that, even then, he might catch the announcement for which he had waited so long. He wanted to

comprehend his dispossession as a simple glitch in the world’s consciousness that was sure to be corrected and straightened out in time. But it wasn’t. Seventy years later, my people are still refugees. Not just the Badrasawis, but millions of Palestinians, scattered in refugee camps all across the Middle East. Those refugees, while still searching for a safe path that would take them home, often find themselves on yet another journey, another dusty trail, being pushed out time and again from one city to the next, from one country to another, even lost between continents.

My grandfather was buried in the Nuseirat cemetery, not in Beit Daras as he had wished. But he remained a Badrasawi to the end, passionately holding on to the memories of a place that for him — for all of us — remained sacred and real.

What Israel still fails to understand is that the “right of return” for Palestinian refugees is not merely a political or even a legal right to be overpowered by the ever-unfair status quo. It has long surpassed that and moved into a whole different realm. For me, Beit Daras is not just a piece of earth but a perpetual fight for justice that shall never cease, because the Badrasawis belong to Beit Daras and nowhere else.



ILLUSTRATION: ALEX GREEN

Israel-US ‘solution’ a recipe for disaster

MANUEL HASSASSIAN

Nakba Day, which falls on May 15, is the annual commemoration of the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people in 1948. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the forced displacement of the Palestinians and the destruction of Palestine, when three-quarters of the population became refugees virtually overnight. The recent killings of unarmed protestors in Gaza by the Israeli army and the maiming of thousands more have made this year’s Nakba remembrance even more heart-rending. Some 70 percent of Palestinians in Gaza are refugees, displaced in planned and calculated terror operations carried out by Zionist militias.

The grief every Palestinian feels is heightened by the near-simultaneous anniversary that marks the creation of the state of Israel on the ruins of their destroyed homes. This year, Israel held lavish celebrations to mark what it says is the 70th anniversary of its independence. This only serves as a terrible reminder that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state is so very long overdue and the current US administration’s Middle East policy and sycophantic support of Israel has finally sounded the death knell of the “peace process.” The relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem is a tragically poignant symbol of this. This is the same “peace process” Israel has used for 25 years as a cover to extend its illegal settlements as the US looked on. Today there are more than 600,000 illegal Israeli settlers on stolen Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the

occupied West Bank. At least the veil has fallen and the pretence of American mediation has been exposed for what it really was: A fake peace process.

The US’ “deal of the century” will be a knife in the back for Palestinians. Imposed solutions are not solutions. The unilateral actions of the US and Israel cannot negate the inalienable rights of Palestinians. At the recent meeting of the Palestinian National Council — the highest Palestinian political authority guiding the policies of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority — the current crisis was discussed and the determination to continue the struggle for independence through an agreed political program was established as the strategy to gain freedom and to end occupation.

The chaos and confusion sown by the US administration’s actions and words, however, causes more insecurity for the whole Middle East. The Americans claim they have won the war against Daesh, which they say has been dismantled, bringing greater stability to Iraq, Syria and the whole region. If this is true, it would be the optimum time to make bold steps to implement a just solution for the Palestinians that would lead to regional peace and security. The US administration has done the opposite. Its mind-boggling decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has made any plan, even if it had some workable components, utterly impossible to realize.

A solution without Jerusalem as the capital of an independent Palestinian state, albeit



Professor Manuel Hassassian, born in Jerusalem, has been the ambassador of Palestine to the United Kingdom since 2005.

jointly with Israel, has negated the efforts of the majority of the international community to support an even-handed solution for the Palestinians.

The US and Israel are following policies that are an attempt to create a regional reality without solving the Palestinian question. Yet, if there is no real solution for the Palestinians — not even the ephemeral hope offered by an Israeli-sabotaged peace process — there remains a major question mark over the whole Middle East, as well as other regional powers.

The current Palestinian leadership is facing some of its greatest ever challenges, both financial and legal. It now needs the support of the international community more than ever to recognize an independent Palestinian state and to support Palestine in UN institutions such as the International Criminal Court. Internally, the long-awaited and hoped-for reconciliation with Hamas and the formation of a unity government does not seem any nearer and it may be that presidential elections will soon have to take place, which will create more uncertainty.

All of us who have worked a lifetime for the Palestinian cause can no longer rely on long-accepted international frameworks for peace. Instead, we look on with dismay at what is happening in Syria and Iraq.

As the last vestiges of optimism have evaporated, it is clear now that all the talk, posturing, and think-tank analyses of the two-state solution was a cover for the theft of vast and strategic areas of Palestinian land, making

a sovereign Palestinian state an impossibility and a Bantustan Palestine the only reality. This has worked in tandem with the incremental ethnic cleansing of Palestinians inside Israel’s borders and in the Occupied Territories, and the strengthening of its apartheid regime. Israel, as it loses its last traces of pretension, may feel emboldened enough to expel still more Palestinians from their homes and land until the numbers reach the tens of thousands. This idea of mass expulsions and transfer does not seem so far-fetched if we think of the fate of the Rohingya, and who would have imagined five years ago that 10 million Syrians would become displaced?

What Israel is cooking up, with US backing, is a recipe for disaster for the Palestinians and the whole region, where instability and violence will reign supreme. Unless there are strenuous efforts to resolve the Palestinian question through the recognition of a Palestinian state on 1967 borders by the majority of world governments, through new strategies for peace, and through private investment and economic development, little hope remains on the horizon.

There are things that Palestinians can do while they live this endless nightmare, suffer its consequences and wait. They can attempt to restructure their social, economic and political institutions, to make reforms within the PLO and PA, to embrace BDS and other forms of peaceful resistance, and continue to work relentlessly on every diplomatic front available. As Palestinians, we have no choice but to do what we can until our time for freedom and justice comes.

Nakba 70 YEARS ON

These images show Jerusalem before and after the events of 1948

Jerusalem's Old City

BEFORE A boy sells bagels in the Old City of Jerusalem. Reuters
AFTER People walk in an alley of the Old City. Reuters



Mount of Olives

BEFORE An Israeli brigade observe the city from their command post on the Mount of Olives during the 1967 war. Reuters
AFTER Visitors take pictures on the Mount of Olives. Reuters



Damascus Gate

BEFORE Crowds near the Damascus Gate, one of the main entrances to the Old City. Getty Images
AFTER The gate now, located at the edge of the Arab bazaar and marketplace. Alamy



Musrara neighborhood

BEFORE This neighborhood was built in stages in 1860 outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. Tarek Bakri
AFTER Its location between religious and secular areas has contributed to its diverse population. Tarek Bakri



The turning point for all Palestinians

As the number of witnesses dwindles, efforts are being made to preserve the Nakba, that remains an open wound

Roger Hercz Ramallah

As Palestinians worldwide mark the Nakba today, the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948, Sara Al-Hilwa clearly remembers the day that changed her life.

"My father came home with a truck. My parents had heard of the Deir Yassin massacre, and were afraid the Jews would come to us next. We took whatever we could, and drove off," the 76-year-old said, as she sat at her current home — a simple bedroom in Al-Amari refugee camp, south of Ramallah.

Sara Al Hilwa's family was not alone as more than 710,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from their villages and cities over the following days. Some fled to Lebanon and Syria, others to Jordan or Gaza. Palestinian society has never been the same since. Now, 70

years later, many still have makeshift lives in refugee camps all over the Middle East.

The uprooting is an open wound still for Palestinians. While doing academic research in Gaza, Norwegian social anthropologist Dag Tuastad noticed a pattern in how the communities had come to terms with their lost society: "Around two thirds of the refugees chose to marry people from their original village or city."

"While families or clans are not so large in the refugee camps, decades later they still had a mechanism for maintaining their identity."

Palestinian leaders promised the refugees the day would come when they would all be able to return home to what is today Israel. In many Middle Eastern countries, such as Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, refugees endured discrimination, on the grounds that they were



We took whatever we could, and drove off.

Sara Al-Hilwa, in Al-Amari Camp

temporary residents. But after lifetimes spent in simple housing, devoid of hope, many refugees today feel manipulated by their leaders, and accuse them of selling them illusions.

"It is just empty talk," said Hajjem Yousef Mahadi, a 74-year old refugee, also in Al-Amari camp, who came originally from the city of Lydda. After decades living as a temporary refugee, she no longer believes that she will ever return home. She, too, remembers the day she was uprooted.

What she did not know at that time is that her fate, alongside that of tens of thousands of others, had been sealed with a simple, dismissive wave of a hand.

After Lydda fell in July 1948, military commander Yigal Allon turned to David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, and asked what do to with the local population.

Ben-Gurion said nothing, but merely waved his hand in a wordless gesture that everyone seemed to understand. Soon Yitzhak Rabin, who was to win a Nobel prize later, wrote the formal order: "The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly, without regard to age."

Sara's family was among the exodus from the city, embarking on a long march to the West Bank.

"We got on a cart, and a mule pulled us, slowly, with lots of others in front of us and behind us," she said. The expulsion from Lydda, which is now next to Israel's Ben

Gurion International Airport, was one of the largest of the 1948 war.

The growing feeling among refugees today of having been sold illusions is understandable: Recent leaks from the official Palestinian negotiation teams confirm that the Palestinian leaders gave up demanding a return to what is today Israel.

According to the so-called Palestine Papers, a collection of 10,000 documents from the Palestinian negotiating team that were leaked to Al Jazeera and the Guardian newspaper in 2011, the Israelis and the Palestinians were negotiating the return of only about 10,000 of the around five million refugees to their homes.

For Ghassan Khatib, a former Palestinian government minister, the Nakba is not only about the refugees.

"The Nakba is the turning point for all Palestinians. Commemorating

the Nakba is about taking a stand for resistance, and in particular for self-determination and statehood," he told Arab News.

"For Palestinians, the Nakba is also a continuing affair that only started in 1948, but continued through 1967 and until today, with Jerusalem," he said.

As Palestinians commemorate the Nakba, the US, under President Donald Trump, has moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

"You see, it never ended," Khatib said of the highly contested diplomatic move.

Now, 70 years on, a handful of the refugees are still around to tell their stories. While Palestinians still do not have their own state, museums have sprung up in the self-rule area of the West Bank dedicated to telling the Palestinian story, and keeping memories of the Nakba alive.

Just north of the Birzeit University is the Palestinian Museum,

functioning like a national museum. Children are bussed from all over the West Bank to the \$24 million complex. Currently the main exhibition shows hand-made embroidered clothes by Palestinians.



Embroidery, a rich tradition in pre-Nakba days, is now a powerful symbol of Palestinian identity, showcased and celebrated in West Bank museums.

famous grapes in the pattern," she said as she showed us around the colorful exhibition hall.

Visitors hear how traditional embroidery was affected by the Nakba. People had less money, so

we haven't seen a renewal of our leadership," Khatib said. The main problem, however, he said, rests with the Israeli side.

The Palestinian leadership gambled on the peace process, which failed. The failure of the peace process created the gap seen today between the Palestinian leadership and the people.

There is no hope on the horizon.

There is no doubt, preserving the Nakba is part of the story," she said.

For the elderly refugees, who once wore the embroidery, there is little chance of ever returning to the homes the patterns celebrate. While the Palestinian struggle for independence continues, this year's Nakba commemoration has become a moment for introspection.

With a Palestinian state nowhere on the horizon, Palestinian leaders are seen as increasingly corrupt and disconnected.

"We haven't had elections, we haven't seen a renewal of our leadership," Khatib said. The main problem, however, he said, rests with the Israeli side.

The Palestinian leadership gambled on the peace process, which failed. The failure of the peace process created the gap seen today between the Palestinian leadership and the people.

With war and tension in neighbors such as Syria, Iraq and Iran, Arab states seem less supportive of the Palestinians. For the first time since 1948, the Arab-Israeli conflict no longer seems to be the most urgent matter facing the Middle East.

In the Al-Amari camp outside Ramallah, Sara's son, Khaled, should have had a bright future. Strong and handsome, but the 40-year old is also jobless, having been shot not twice in the legs by Israeli soldiers.

He spends his days watching Palestinians in Gaza demonstrating by the border near Israel, seeing the young people running towards Israeli bullets. As Israel has cut the Gazans off from the rest of the world, and Hamas runs an ever more oppressive regime, Khaled said he understands the protesters.

"The world must understand, these people have reached the point where death is better than life," he said.



Bishara, aged five, right, pictured with his brother, sister and cousins in Beit Sahour, a town near Bethlehem, at a family birthday. Right, Bishara with a photograph of his parents and below, a map of their orchard close to Jaffa. Brandon Sullivan

'Jerusalem will always be home, wherever I am'

Dr. Bishara A. Babbah, a professor of investment, finance and wealth management who lives in the United States, is one of many Palestinians whose family still has the deed to their land in Palestine, a 68-dunum orchard in the Lod-Jaffa area.

He also has his family's UNWRA food card which shows the monthly rations they received when they were living both in the Zarqa Refugee Camp and then the Old City of Jerusalem.

"In contrast," he wrote us when we were setting up this photograph, "I have on my wall my Harvard PhD which clearly demonstrates that even if Israel takes our lands, they can never take away our brainpower and our unshakable will and determination to succeed. They would have to chop off our heads from our bodies first for them to ultimately succeed." And with that, we thought it was best to let Dr. Babbah speak for himself.

Name
Bishara Assad Rizek Issa Babbah.

Age 60.

Where you live now United States.

Where your family lived in Palestine
The Old City of Jerusalem

What happened to you/them in 1948
My father, who was a barber, had a barbershop at the King David Hotel. When Zionists blew up the hotel, my father was in his shop at the hotel. Some woman, we don't know who, said to him: "Babbah, jump! A bomb is about to explode."

He jumped from the second floor

as the bomb was exploding. The shock caused my father's hair to turn grey within a few months. Shortly after, my family fled to Jordan and ended up in the Zarqa refugee camp, where they took shelter for two years. After that, the family returned to the Old City. One of my sisters was born in the refugee camp.

What memories do you have of your home?

Our rented house in the Old City still exists. Nine of us lived in one bedroom with no running water or electricity. I remember as a child studying using a lantern. I also remember when it rained, the water would seep through the aluminum blocks that made up the roof and the room would be full of buckets to catch the water.

However, my grandfather, on my mother's side, owned along with his brother, some 68 dunums (orchard) close to Jaffa. My grandparents fled and came to live with us at first in the refugee camp, and later in the Old City. You have a copy of the deed/map of the orchard. An Israeli hospital has been built on the family orchard and by most estimates the land is worth today more than \$100 million.

How do you identify yourself now, in terms of nationality?

I am a Palestinian national and a US citizen. I have no other passport than the US one. In 2009, Israel took away my Jerusalem residency, represented by the blue ID card that they issued. They claimed that since I



am now a US citizen, my center of life is no longer Jerusalem and simply took away my right to reside in Jerusalem. Now, when I go back to visit family, I go in using the US passport and I am given a 90-day visa like any other American citizen. Of course, I am fortunate that I have the US passport. At least I get to visit my own land.

Where is home for you?

Home is in the United States. I cannot live in Jerusalem even though I lived there when Israel occupied Jerusalem.

I stayed in Jerusalem until 1976 when I went to the United States to continue my college education. I went back in 1983 after receiving my PhD from Harvard University and became the editor-in-chief of Al-Fajr newspaper.

My travels in and out of the country were the excuse that the Israelis used to strip me of my residency and right to live in Jerusalem.

Do you have hope that you will ever get the right of return?

Absolutely! It will always be home, no matter where I live in the world. In fact, I registered my children who were born in the United States in my UNRWA registry.

When I die, I want there to be a record that we are Palestinian and Jerusalemites. It is our eternal right and no one can take it away from us.

What would you like to tell the world about the Nakba?

The Nakba is a tragedy perpetrated against us by the world. The UN General Assembly voted to divide Palestine into an Arab and Jewish state.

It is the world's moral obligation for having given away what was not theirs (Palestine, my homeland) to the Jews/Zionists. By attempting to absolve themselves from the horrors that befell the Jews at the hand of Hitler, they committed a bigger injustice against the Palestinians. Shame on them.

Tarek Ali Ahmad, Dubai

"I live the Nakba every day and everywhere I go," Dr. Mohammed Hajjaj, a 71-year-old Palestinian doctor whose family was forced to leave Palestine during the 1948 mass exodus, told Arab News over a crackly phone line from his home in Amman.

Dr. Hajjaj was just four months old when Israel declared its independence 70 years ago. More than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were forced to flee the lands they inherited, the businesses they built, and the homes they had grown up in — an event that became known as the Nakba.

"I see that what happened with the Palestinian people, didn't happen to anyone else," the doctor said.

"I know that so many peoples were colonized, but the colonial

power came and the people stayed there. For the Israelis, for the Jews, they displaced the Palestinians, they sent them out of their land, they killed people, they made so many massacres in Palestine."

The son of orange exporters, Mohammed's journey started when his parents had to leave Jaffa, the second largest city in occupied Palestine. His mother took him to Lebanon with her family for six months while his father and grandmother went to Amman to find work.

Having been an infant at the time of their flight, Mohammed grew up in the aftermath of Nakba and the consequences that followed.

"The first thing I recall was that life was a tent for some time and then they built very simple houses — everything was difficult at that time. People lost all their resources,



Dr. Mohammed Hajjaj's keepsakes of his birthplace include shriveled oranges, a memento of his parents' farm in Jaffa, which they fled in 1948. Annie Sakrab

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"I have all the hope in the world. I will never ever surrender. I do believe that a day will come when I will return to Jaffa."

jobs were scarce. Jordan also was poor in resources," he said, adding: "I remember I lived a very, very difficult infancy and childhood."

Mohammed grew up surrounded by tents, with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency providing classes, care in medical clinics and aid. For a few years, they lived in camps made up from thin white or blue tarpaulins, which were just supported by a few pillars.

Coming from a very simple background, Mohammed went on to work and study hard to come out fifth in the country in his secondary school government examinations, before receiving a scholarship to Cairo University, where he studied medicine.

"In my childhood we didn't have electricity," he recalled. "I used to study at night on the kerosene lights and wake up early in the morning to study in the daylight."

Having been born in Palestine, raised in Jordan and educated in Egypt, Dr. Hajjaj refers to himself as an "Arabian citizen" rather than from a specific place.

"I was raised when we used to say that we are one nation from the Arabian Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean, so I believe we are all from one nation."

Nakba

70 YEARS ON

The right of return is non-negotiable and inalienable

Just before the violence broke out in the Jerusalem area in the spring of 1948, my father and my grandmother left their home in the Musrara neighborhood and fled to the Jordanian city of Zarqa, where my dad helped set up a school. My uncle Costandi waited as long as he could, but in the end the violence became unbearable and he had to leave.

When he arrived in Jordan, he assured his brother and mother that he had locked the house with two turns of the key and brought with him the big metal key with the hope of returning as soon as the fighting and violence ended. His departure saved his life, but their sister, my aunt Hoda, and her family did not leave, and their decision proved to be tragic. My aunt's husband Elias Awad was killed in clashes between Jordanian soldiers and Zionist underground fighters, leaving my aunt a widow with eight children.

My family's story was not unique. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled the fighting to save their lives and brought their house key with them, hoping that they would one day return. Dad even told us about the quality wood cupboard that my grandfather, a carpenter, had built inside their Musrara home.

My grandmother's family, the Fatallehs, also left their home in the Katamon neighborhood of Jerusalem. Their house still stands, not far from the King David Hotel.

Of course, my father, uncle, aunt,

grandmother and her family never returned to their homes. Years later, after the Israeli occupation in 1967, we tried to see my parents' house and noticed that it was occupied by an immigrant Jewish family. As we approached the house, we saw parts of the wooden closet we had grown up hearing about broken up in the yard.

While my uncle registered as a Palestinian refugee and received the usual rations from the UN refugee and works agency (UNRWA), my dad never did. I'm not sure whether it was pride or a lack of need but, with or without an official refugee card, that didn't stop my dad or the rest of our family from talking about Palestine and the right of return. The UN passed resolution 194 guaranteeing the right of Palestinian refugees to return and be compensated, but that, like so many other UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, has never been implemented because of Israeli rejection and America's protection of their spoiled child.

Our family has never lived in a tent, nor has it received any UN support, but we have never forgotten where we came from and what our national rights are. The more than 700,000 Palestinian refugees in 1948 are now five million, according to UN figures. The right of return is a non-negotiable, inalienable right, no matter how long it takes to be fulfilled. Israel has done everything possible to reject this right and, while the refugee question was one of five issues

DAOUD KUTTAB



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left for final status talks, Israel has always tried to avoid any negotiations on how this right was supposed to be implemented.

Many Palestinians who became refugees in 1948, like my father, uncle, aunt and grandmother, are no longer with us today. But the yearning and aspiration of Palestinian refugees everywhere is as alive today as ever before. Witness the current Great March of Return in Gaza and the efforts around the world to keep the refugee flame alive as proof of this right, even after seven decades.

If given the choice today, most Palestinian refugees and their descendants would not want to live under direct Israeli rule. Some, especially young Palestinians, including my children, are calling for equal rights in all of Palestine/Israel. They feel that a one-state solution would automatically address a large part of the right of return.

For me though, the issue is not the actual return but the right of return. And the issue is not about a house here, or a wooden closet there, and their compensation. I am sure I speak for many refugees and their dependents today when I say that what we want from the state of Israel is a simple statement in which the leaders of Israel recognize the historic and moral responsibility for having created the Palestinian refugee case. As to how to implement the right of return and the compensation guaranteed by UN resolution 194, I will leave that to the politicians and negotiators.



ILLUSTRATION: ALEX GREEN

Why Americans tend to favor Israel



KERRY BOYD ANDERSON

When I was growing up, I loved Leon Uris' novel "Exodus." Its main characters are Jews who escape Europe after the Holocaust and participate in the creation of Israel. The book and the 1960 film, starring Paul Newman, tell the Zionist story in a dramatic way. The story told in "Exodus" and the Nakba are two sides of the same coin, but the vast majority of Americans know only the Israeli story: One of multiple factors that explain the strong tilt in favor of Israel in US Middle East policy.

Living in the middle of the US, from a young age I was deeply interested in the Middle East and determined to study the region. In 1999, I finally had the opportunity to go to the region as part of a study abroad program. Before we left, the program leader asked us each to write a letter identifying the biases we carried with us. In mine, I wrote that I had no bias regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — over the next few months, I learned how naive that was.

On the study abroad program, I realized that I had known a lot about Israel before visiting the country. I did not encounter much there that was especially surprising. As I encountered Palestinians, however, I realized how little I knew, despite all my previous efforts at study.

Perhaps the most important lesson I learned was that I had come to the region with deeply embedded bias. As an American, my views of the conflict had been shaped by news media that mostly told the Israeli perspective and regularly expressed skepticism about Arab and Palestinian viewpoints.

Furthermore, along with nearly all Americans, I had lived in a culture filled with entertainment and ideas that are sympathetic toward Israel, such as the ones expressed in "Exodus." One of several reasons that the Palestinians have long struggled to gain sympathy and support among the American public is that there is no parallel depiction of the Nakba featuring an iconic, all-American film star like Newman.

In the few situations in which Americans might learn something about the Nakba, the story struggles to take root among a population that is primed to give more credence to the Israeli perspective than the unfamiliar Palestinian one. For me, it took meeting Palestinians and seeing their daily situation with my own eyes to shake off the bias that previously would have made me skeptical of Palestinians' stories about the Nakba, other parts of their history and what they deal with today.

As Palestinians now commemorate the Nakba, I hope more Americans will hear their stories, better understand both sides of the coin and wish for peace equally on behalf of Israelis and Palestinians.

Kerry Boyd Anderson is a writer and political risk consultant with more than 14 years' experience as a professional analyst of international security issues and Middle East political and business risks.

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A new plan is needed if Palestinian state is to become a reality

Alan Cunningham, the seventh and last British High Commissioner of Mandate Palestine, on May 14, 1948, drove down the hill from Jerusalem to Haifa, where he lowered the Union Flag and boarded a ship back to the UK with the remainder of the British military and civil administration. The British Mandate had ended. There had been violent disturbances — including the 1936-38 Arab Revolt — and fundamental differences within the British government over how to manage the situation since the 1920s. After the UN Partition Resolution of November 1947 and with the imminent prospect of British withdrawal, serious fighting between Jewish and Arab forces had broken out.

Israel's victory in what it has come to know as the War of Independence, the failure of the Arab armies sent to crush it, and the inadequacy of the leadership of the Arab Higher Committee — notwithstanding the heroism at Kastel of Abdul Qader Al-Husseini — was a shock to an Arab public who had been told victory was certain. And the shockwaves soon spread to Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Yemen and Algeria. It was the end of an experiment begun a quarter of a century earlier

to reconfigure parts of the Middle East and North Africa as part of a European sphere of imperial interest in the flush of victory over the Ottomans in the First World War.

That experiment failed. So has the aftermath. For the Palestinians, the years since 1948 have been characterized by attempts by different Arab countries — Egypt, Syria, Libya and Iraq — to instrumentalize the Palestinian cause in their own interests.

The efforts of leaders such as Yasser Arafat to construct a truly independent and unified Palestinian national movement foundered on internal rivalries, external pressure and Arafat's own inability to move on from a model of charismatic, unquestioned and sometimes brutal leadership to one that was more collective, collegiate and accountable. He and his successors undermined others who sought to construct a state institution by institution, which is one reason why Salam Fayyad is now teaching at Princeton rather than moving the Palestinian Authority toward nationhood.

So where are we now? Hamas' attempts to show that it could make Gaza an exemplary state and therefore replace Fatah as the preeminent

SIR JOHN JENKINS



Sir John Jenkins is a senior fellow at Policy Exchange. He was the British ambassador to Saudi Arabia until January 2015.

movement in Palestinian politics has also failed.

Fatah remains split and fearful of what happens when Mahmoud Abbas goes. Some will say that international efforts to isolate Israel and spread the BDS movement more widely are having an impact. I think this is delusional. Israel's economy is doing fine and the fundamental alliance with the US — even if the relationship has become a more partisan issue than it has been for 50 years — remains strong. And, most importantly, the broader context in the Middle East has changed.

This is not to say that political and diplomatic normalization is on the cards. Until there is a fair settlement of the Palestinian issue and a credible Palestinian state, this is simply not going to happen, as the recent Arab League Jerusalem Summit in Dhahran made clear. But Israel as a fact has long been accepted.

More important, Israeli behavior no longer seems unusual. Now that we understand the way Iraqi governments since the 1960s sought to engineer population shifts and demographic facts on the ground in Northern Iraq; the way in which the Kurds have been treated over the last 50 years; the clearing of the Druze from the Chouf; Iranian oppression of the Baha'i; discrimination against

the Copts — it all looks surprisingly similar to some of the tactics Israeli governments have used over the years. Now we have a new Syrian law that authorizes the state to confiscate the properties of those Syrians — mostly Sunni — who have fled their land. This could have been copied from the Israeli Absentee Property Law of 1951 and its successors. This is the new normal.

And that leaves Palestinians with a dilemma. What is the new plan with which they can attract enough Arab and international support to make a Palestinian state a reality?

There is no substitute for a plan that seeks to secure wide Arab backing, on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative, for a state in return for an acceptance of Israel into the regional fold. For Israel, this is their moment. The issue now is no longer how much Palestinians want a Palestinian state, it is how much Israelis want one. And they should. They may think they can continue to ignore the issue, but something fundamental has changed in the power balances of the region. Israel needs to accept that its security is also the security of its neighbors. And this gives it strength to do a deal that will transform its standing. Seventy years on, if not now, when?