The Palestinian Refugee Problem and the Demand for a “Right of Return”

written by Dr. Adi Schwartz | 20.06.2024

The Palestinian-Arab war against the pre-state Jewish community in the land of Israel, and afterwards in the state of Israel, can be divided into a number of stages. Until May 1948 it was primarily a war of militias in the territory of the British Mandate. In the quarter-century after the declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel, it was a total Arab war, in which the Arab world hoped to defeat Israel by conquering the territory. After the failure of the Yom Kippur War, the Palestinian struggle changed its form and transitioned to a combination of terrorism inside and outside Israel, a diplomatic struggle in the international arena and a public relations effort to weaken Israel. In all of these stages, the Arab-Palestinian aspiration remained identical: to foil the establishment of the state of Israel; and after it was established, to oppose its existence within any borders.

This article will deal with one facet of the Palestinian struggle against Israel, and that is the use of the Palestinian refugee problem as a demographic tool to eliminate the Jewish state. It will present the Palestinian position on the refugee question during negotiations that took place between the PLO and the PA and Israel, and will clarify the status of the Palestinian demand for massive return of refugees to within Israel (what is known as “the right of return”). This position, and the use of demography as a tool to fight Israel, will be demonstrated via internal documents of the Palestinian negotiation team.

Together they present a clear picture of the use of millions of Palestinians, some of whom are fourth and fifth generation descendants of Palestinian displaced persons and refugees from the War of Independence in 1948, as a tool for turning Israel from a state with a clear Jewish majority into a state with an Arab majority, thereby rendering it an additional Arab state in the Middle East.

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