

Arab Jews versus Palestinians: Israel's Refugee Pawns

By [Jonathan Cook](#)

Global Research, October 02, 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Religion](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

In the shadow of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's theatrics at the United Nations last week, armed with his cartoon Iranian bomb, Israeli officials launched a quieter, but equally combative, initiative to extinguish whatever hopes have survived of reviving the peace process.

For the first time in its history, Israel is seeking to equate millions of Palestinians in refugee camps across the Middle East with millions of Israeli citizens descended from Jews who, before Israel's establishment in 1948, lived in Arab countries.

According to Israel's deputy foreign minister, Danny Ayalon, whose parents were originally from Iraq and who has been leading the government campaign, nearly a million Jews fled countries such as Iraq, Egypt, Morocco and Yemen. That figure exceeds the generally accepted number of 750,000 Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war.

Israel's goal is transparent: it hopes the international community can be persuaded that the suffering of Palestinian refugees is effectively cancelled out by the experiences of "Jewish refugees". If nothing can be done for Arab Jews all these years later, then Palestinians should expect no restitution either.

Over the past few weeks that has been the message implicit in a social media campaign called "I am a refugee", which includes YouTube videos in which Jews tell of being terrorised while living in Arab states after 1948. Ayalon has even announced plans for a new day of national commemoration, Jewish Refugee Day.

This month, the Israeli foreign ministry and US Jewish organisations formally launched the initiative, staging a conference in New York a few days before the opening sessions of the General Assembly.

Israel's choice of arena - the UN - is not accidental. The campaign is chiefly designed to stifle the move announced by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in his General Assembly speech last week to begin seeking UN status for Palestine as a non-member state.

After opposition from the US forced the Palestinians to abort their bid for statehood at the UN Security Council last year, Abbas is expected to delay making his new request until November, after the US presidential election campaign to avoid embarrassing President Barack Obama.

Abbas's move has spurred Israel to take the offensive.

Anyone who doubts that the Israeli government's concern for Arab Jews is entirely cynical only has to trace the campaign's provenance. It was considered for the first time in 2009, when Netanyahu was forced – under pressure from Obama – to deliver a speech backing Palestinian statehood.

Immediately afterwards, Netanyahu asked the National Security Council, whose role includes assessing strategic threats posed by the Palestinians, to weigh the merits of championing the Arab Jews' case in international forums.

The NSC's advice is that Arab Jews, known in Israel as Mizrahim and comprising a small majority of the total Jewish population, should be made a core issue in the peace process. As Israel knows, that creates a permanent stumbling block to an agreement.

The NSC has proposed impossible demands: contrition from all Arab states before a peace deal with the Palestinians can be reached; a decoupling of refugee status and the right of return; and the right of Arab Jews to greater compensation than Palestinian refugees, based on their superior wealth.

Israel is working on other fronts too to undermine the case for Palestinian refugees. Its US lobbyists are demanding that UNRWA, the UN agency for the refugees, be dismantled.

Bipartisan pressure is mounting in the US Congress to count as refugees only Palestinians personally displaced from their homes in 1948, stripping millions of descendants of their status. While another – and seemingly contradictory – legislative move would insist on Arab Jews being granted the same refugee status as Palestinians.

The Palestinians are deeply opposed to any linkage between Arab Jews and Palestinian refugees. Not least, they argue, they cannot be held responsible for what took place in other countries. Justice for Palestinian refugees is entirely separate from justice for Arab Jews.

Moreover, many, if not most, Arab Jews left their homelands voluntarily, unlike Palestinians, to begin a new life in Israel. Even where tensions forced Jews to flee, such as in Iraq, it is hard to know who was always behind the ethnic strife. There is strong evidence that Israel's Mossad spy agency waged false-flag operations in Arab states to fuel the fear and hostility needed to drive Arab Jews towards Israel.

Likewise, Israel's claim that it has a right to represent Arab Jews collectively and lay claim to compensation on their behalf ignores the reality that Israel was compensated handsomely for absorbing Jews, both through massive post-war reparations from countries such as Germany and through billions of dollars in annual handouts from the United States.

But there is a more fundamental reason to be sceptical of this campaign. Classifying Arab Jews as "refugees" skewers the central justification used by Zionists for Israel's creation: that it is the natural homeland for all Jews, and the only place where they can be safe. As a former Israeli MP, Ran Hacoen, once observed: "I came at the behest of Zionism, due to the pull that this land exerts, and due to the idea of redemption. Nobody is going to define me as a refugee."

Netanyahu's government is making a deeply anti-Zionist argument, one it has been forced to adopt because of its own intransigence in the peace process.

Its refusal to countenance a small Palestinian state in the 1967 borders means the global community feels compelled to reassess the events of 1948. For most Arab Jews, that period is now a closed chapter. For most Palestinian refugees, it is still an open wound.

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His latest books are "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jkcook.net.

A version of this article first appeared in The National, Abu Dhabi

New Books from Global Research



The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Jonathan Cook](#), Global Research, 2012

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Jonathan Cook](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca