

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006



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Chapter Eight

The Palestinian Demographic Indicators

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The Palestinian Demographic Indicators

Introduction

The brutal Israeli siege of the Palestinian people that characterized the year 2006 is still in place and at unprecedented levels. The occupation actively pursues policies of starvation and racial discrimination, and the Separation Wall, that extends across the WB from the north to the south, swallowed further Palestinian lands, isolated the population from each other, and made their social and economic life extremely miserable and unbearable. The occupation's ultimate objective behind these inhuman measures is to compel the inhabitants to quit their land.

The Israeli repeated penetration into GS during the course of this year, 2006, coupled with their tight land, sea and air siege, and the closure of the frontier passages, had virtually transferred GS into a big prison. Israel continued its old and new measures of assassination, forced emigration and arrest of the Palestinian citizens, confiscation and curettage of their land, uprooting of trees and crops, separation of inhabited areas and their transfer into isolated cantons, and the establishment of permanent and temporary road blocks that limited and obstructed peoples' mobility to their work places and farms. By these humiliating and suppressive measures, the occupiers intend to demoralize the Palestinians and force them to surrender to the de facto situation, and helplessly accept the Israeli "partial" solutions. Besides, the Israelis systematic work to put the Palestinians under such circumstances that may force them out to the diaspora in search of security, stability and decent livelihood, thus tilting the demographic scale in Palestine that has been consistently in favor of the Palestinian side.

The hardships and miseries that more than five million Palestinians in the diaspora were subjected to throughout the year 2006 had never deterred them from aspiring to return to their homeland, a right that they firmly adhere to notwithstanding the change in time and place. Meanwhile, the Palestinians of the interior have stuck to their land and rights in spite of the Israeli policies of emigration, siege and starvation. They, furthermore, staunchly and genuinely believe that no stability and peace can be achieved in the region without the realization of their rights, including return to their homeland.

First: The Palestinian Census Worldwide

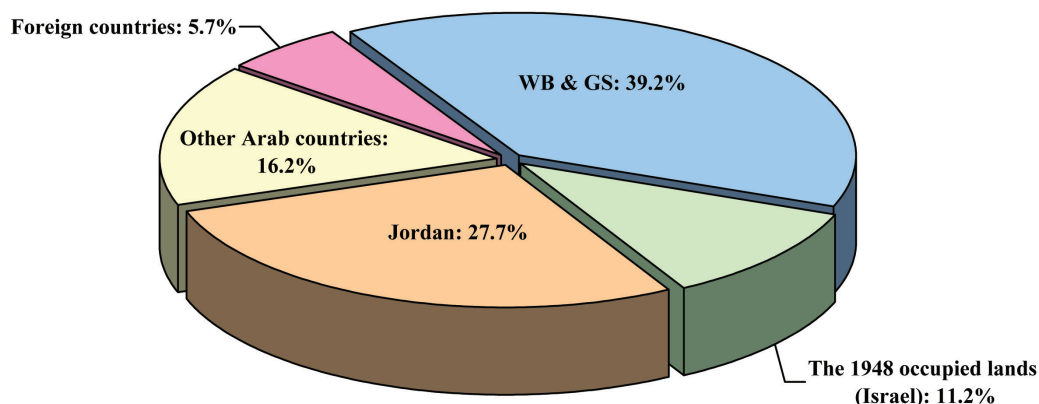
The updated figures of the PCBS estimated the total number of Palestinians in the world by the end of 2006 to be 10.1 million persons, of whom more than half, (50.4% to be exact, about 5.09 million persons) live in historical Palestine, and the rest (5.01 million) stay in the diaspora as refugees, displaced, voluntary or forced emigrants and vagabonds, who have been deprived by the Hebrew state from the right of return to their homes irrespective of the numerous decision issued by the international community that guarantee this right for them.¹

Of the Palestinians living in historical Palestine, about 1.13 million persons stay in the 1948 occupied Palestinian lands (Israel), and about 3.95 million stay in the 1967 occupied lands, GS and the WB, including East Jerusalem area that had been forcefully annexed by Israel in 1967. We should record here that Israel unlawfully considers the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights as part of its population. The rest of the Palestinians stay in neighboring Arab countries, particularly Jordan that houses by the end of 2006 about 2.8 million Palestinians (i.e., more than half of the Palestinians in the diaspora), whose majority carries the Jordanian nationality. The other host Arab countries are Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, where 16.2% of the Palestinian live. As for the Palestinians living in foreign countries, they total about 573 thousand, i.e., 5.7% of those in the world, and concentrate in the USA, Latin America, Canada, Britain, Germany and other European countries. The following table shows the worldwide distribution of the Palestinians according to their places of residence.

Table 1/8: The Distribution of the Palestinian Population Worldwide according to their Places of Residence by the End of 2006²

Place of residence	No. of inhabitants (in thousands)	Percentage %
WB & GS	3,952	39.2
The 1948 occupied lands (Israel)	1,134	11.2
Jordan	2,799	27.7
Other Arab countries	1,636	16.2
Foreign countries	573	5.7
Total	10,094	100

The Distribution of the Palestinian Population Worldwide according to their Places of Residence by the End of 2006



We should record here the difficulty of ascertaining the exact numbers of Palestinians staying in foreign countries, and in the other Arab countries. Most likely they exceed the numbers given in several studies, as most of them had left Palestine before the 1967 war, even before the 1948 war, or have secured for themselves, their sons and grandsons the nationalities of these host countries; thus becoming their nationals rather than being Palestinians or Jordanians per se.

Moreover, several Palestinians had secured the nationalities of the Arab countries in which they stayed. This is particularly so in Jordan where the WB had been up to 1988 incorporated in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Besides, are the close and distinguished social and family ties between the inhabitants living across the two banks of the Jordan River along the borders between GS and Egypt.

Second: The Demographic Characteristics of the Palestinians

1. The WB and GS

The PCBS estimates the total number of Palestinians in the WB and GS by the end of 2006 as 3.95 million persons, of whom about two million are males and the rest (1.95 million) females i.e., a percentage of 102.8 males for every 100 females.³ 2.48 million of them are in the WB, while 1.47 million reside in GS, a percentage of 63 and 37 respectively. By the end of 2006, this population was distributed among 16 governorates, five in GS and 11 in the WB. Hebron Governorate, inhabited by

about 552 thousand persons, is the biggest and most densely populated of them all, followed by Gaza Governorate that housed 515 thousand, followed by Jerusalem Governorate that housed 412 thousand in the same year; while the least populated governorates, Jericho, Tubas and Salfit, housed 44 thousand, 49 thousand and 65 thousand persons respectively.

The Palestinian society in the WB and GS is characterized by its vigor and youth. By the end of 2006, 45.7% of its population were below 15 years of age, which means that the dependency ratio there is comparatively high, reached 94.2 towards the end of 2006. However, this ratio has progressively declined over time to be 101.3 in 1997 and 100 in 2001, mainly because of the gradual and slow decline of fertility in the WB and GS, which has correspondingly reduced the percentage of the below 15 years age group.

However, there is a significant difference between the percentage of this age group in the WB and GS, 43.9% in the former and 48.8% in the latter, which means that the dependency ratio is comparatively high in GS compared to that of the WB. Nonetheless, the percentage of this ratio had generally progressively declined in both regions, in the WB from 94.7 in 1997 to 88.5 in 2006, and in GS from 114.5 to 104.7 during the same period. This is primarily due to the significant rise in the fertility and birth rates in GS compared to the WB.

The statistics issued by the PCBS record an increase in the marriage contracts, from 23,492 in 1997 to 28,876 in 2005 i.e., an increase of 673 contracts per year. However, crude marriage rates were reduced from 8.4 per one thousand persons in 1997 to 7.7 only in 2005, though the number of marriage contracts during the *Intifadah* had significantly decreased to reach their lowest ebb in 2002, i.e., 22,611 only.

As for the cases of divorce, they increased from 3,449 in 1997 to 4,211 in 2005, while the crude divorce rates were reduced from 1.2 per one thousand persons in 1997 to 1.1 in 2005.⁴

According to the annual report of the office of Palestinian Supreme Judge for the year 2006, the marriage contracts for this year totaled 28,452, while divorce cases were 3,796 i.e., a percentage of 13.34.⁵

With regard to the family composition, official statistics indicate a progressive increase in the numbers of the nuclear families at the expense of the extended families. The percentage of nuclear families increased from 73.2% in 1997 to

83% in 2004, while their counterpart, extended families, dropped during the same duration from 23% to 12.6% only. The rest of the families during these two years were either single or complex families that had not been noticeably affected by these changes.⁶

Correspondingly, the size of the average family was reduced from 6.4 persons in 1997 to six persons in 2006. Hence, though fertility rates had decreased, the rates of family composition remained comparatively high because of this very decrease in the size of the family.⁷

2. 1948 Occupied Palestinian Lands (Israel)

Depending on Israeli sources, the PCBS estimates the number of the Palestinians living in the Hebrew state as 1.13 million persons. However, this figure does not include the Palestinians living in the Golan Heights, the J1 Area of Jerusalem Governorate and the Lebanese Arabs who temporarily reside in Israel, whom Israel usually include in its population.

The available statistics on the gender issue among the Palestinians in Israel indicate that by 2005 there were 103.7 males to every 100 females. Moreover, 40.6% of the population belongs to the below 15 years age group, while the elderly, those of 65 years and above, constitutes 3.2%. The total fertility rate in 2003 was 3.7 births per woman, and the crude birth rate was 28.6 per one thousand persons in 2005, while the average size of the Palestinian family was about five persons.

As for the crude death rate, it was 2.8 deaths per one thousand of the population in 2005, but it rose in the case of infant babies to eight deaths per one thousand surviving children. The illiteracy rate among the 15 years and above Palestinians in Israel was 6.2%, while that of those who received university and postgraduate degrees was 7.4%.⁸

3. Jordan

Depending on the statistics of the Jordanian Department of Statistics (DOS), and on the assumptions that the Palestinians constitute half of Jordan's population and that the annual rate of the country's growth is 2.3%, the PCBS estimates the number of the Palestinians in Jordan as 2.8 million.⁹

According to the statistics of the UNRWA, the Palestinian refugees in Jordan up to 31/12/2006 totaled about 1.86 million.¹⁰ However, we have to note that a sizeable numbers of the Palestinians in Jordan, including 13% of those in the

refugee camps, are, for different reasons, not registered as refugees with the UNRWA, and that 95% of the resident Palestinians in Jordan carry the Jordanian nationality.

Out of the total Palestinians in Jordan, 41.7% belong to the age group of below 15 years and 4.2% are senior citizens (65 years and above), while the total fertility rate is 4.6 births per woman and the dependency rate reached 85.4 in 2000.¹¹

4. Syria

Up to 31/12/2006, the number of the Palestinian refugees registered with the UNRWA was 442,363 persons, belonging to 106,062 families.¹² However, the PCBS records that 95.6% of the Palestinians in the refugee camps are registered with the UNRWA. The rate of the below 15 years age group there was about 33.1% in 2006 and that of the senior citizens (65 years and above) was 4.3%. The crude birth rate was 18 births per one thousand Palestinians, while the 2006 total fertility rate was 2.4 births per woman, and the average size of the Palestinian family in Syria was 4.9 persons.¹³

5. Lebanon

According to the statistics of the UNRWA, the number of its registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon up to 31/12/2006 was 408,438, living in 105,041 families,¹⁴ and the average size of the Palestinian family there was 4.9 persons. The gender rate of the Palestinians in Lebanon was 98.5 male per 100 females, while the rate of the below 15 years age group was 33%, and that of the senior citizens (65 years and above) was 5.5%, a relatively high rate when compared with that of the senior Palestinian citizens elsewhere. In 2006, the crude birth rate was 16.3 births per one thousand of the population, while the total fertility rate was 2.3 births per woman.¹⁵

6. General Comparisons between the Palestinians

The following table gives a resume of the most important comparisons of some primary demographic indicators between Palestinians for the year 2006 (unless recorded otherwise between brackets):

Table 2/8: Selected Demographic Indicators for the Palestinians according to the Place of Residence¹⁶

Indicator	WB	GS	Total (WB and GS)	Israel	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon
Percentage of individuals 15 years and below %	43.9	48.8	45.7	40.6 (2005)	41.7 (2000)	33.1	33
Percentage of individuals 65 years and above %	3.3	2.6	3	3.2 (2005)	4.2 (2000)	4.3	5.5
Dependency ratio % (per 100 individual 15-64 years)	88.5	104.7	94.2	77.9	85.4 (2000)	59.7	62.6
Gender ratio % (male per 100 females)	102.8	102.7	102.8	103.7 (2005)	-	102.3 (2002)	98.5
Crude birth rate (1 birth per 1,000 of the population)	33.7	41.7	36.7	28.6 (2005)	-	23.3 (2001)	16.3
Crude death rate (1 death per 1,000 of the population)	4	3.8	3.9	2.8 (2005)	-	3.3 (2001)	-
Total fertility rate (1 birth per woman)	4.1 (2003)	5.8 (2003)	4.6 (2003)	3.7 (2003)	4.6 (2000)	2.4	2.3
Natural increase rate %	3	3.8	3.3	2.6 (2005)	-	2 (2002)	-
Average household size (an individual per each family)	5.7	6.6	6	5 (2005)	6.2 (1999)	4.9	4.9

(-): Means not available.

In spite of the difference in the time frame for some of the indicators, the following may be noted from the above table:

- a. The Palestinian society is a young society, but the distribution of the age groups glaringly differ according to the place of residence. Hence, the highest percentage of the below 15 years age group is in GS, followed by the WB, and the lowest is in Syria and Lebanon. This results in high dependency rate in GS and the WB, which increases the economic pressure on the families' breadwinners in the 1967 occupied Palestinians lands. Moreover, the highest percentage of senior citizens (65 years and above) is in Lebanon, and the least is in GS.
- b. The gender percentage in all of the Palestinian residential areas exceeds 100 with the exception of Lebanon, probably because of the higher percentage of male emigration compared to females, and the increase in the death rate among males during the last decades.
- c. The highest crude birth rate is in GS and the WB, and the least is in Lebanon and Syria, which, in particular, generates population explosion in the excessively populated GS, where the density of population reached by the end of 2006 about 4,032 persons per km². If this situation is allowed to drift, the density of population in GS will progressively accelerate, hence adding a further impetus for the return of the refugees, who constitute 69.2% of the total population in GS, to their homelands, and make it necessary to implement the right of return for all refugees in different places.
- d. The acceleration of the birth rate in GS will increase its population well over the total population in the WB and GS, hence planners and decision makers should seriously consider new initiatives in these regions. The percentage of the population in GS had increased from 35.7% in 1997 to 37.2% by the end of 2006.
- e. The crude death rate is almost similar in all regions, however the highest is in the WB and GS and the lowest is in Israel. This is primarily due to the oppressive and discriminatory policies that the occupation have persistently pursued over several decades in GS and the WB. Particularly so are its assassination operations and poor health services that cannot by any means be compared with those that Israel offers to its own citizens. On the contrary, there are viable indications that Israel adopts a policy of racial cleansing

against the Arabs in Palestine through such measures as the “transfer” that compels the Palestinians to reluctantly emigrate, or make it impossible for them to return. In addition to the Israeli drive to adversely affect the physiological ability of the Palestinian women to conceive and deliver babies.¹⁷

- f. The average size of the Palestinian family remains high in the WB and particularly in GS, besides Jordan, but it is at its lowest levels in Syria, Lebanon and Israel.
- g. The rates of the natural increase will remain high among the Palestinians compared to neighboring communities, and is expected to be more than 2.5% during the next decade.

Third: The Palestinian Refugees

Understanding the concept of the refuge among the Palestinian people and its measurement is indeed problematic,¹⁸ because of the frequent wars and conflicts that swept the region during the last century, particularly the wars of 1948 and 1967 and the consequential occupation of Palestine, and the Palestinian *Intifadah* of 1987-1990 and *al-Aqsa Intifadah* 2000-2005. Besides, there is the complexity of administration in the Palestinian regions since the time of the British Mandate and the incorporation of the WB in Jordan as well as the Egyptian control of GS during the period 1948-1967.

Moreover, there are the multiple reasons for the Palestinian exodus and population movements during different periods, e.g., the successive Israeli policies and measures to transfer the Palestinians either mandatorily or voluntarily, the continuous constraints that compelled Palestinian families to go into the diaspora in search of security and better life, and the variety of measures adopted by the host countries on matters related to nationality, residence and employment of the Palestinian refugees.

The Palestinians in the diaspora include individuals and families who voluntarily left Palestine before 1948, or during the period 1948-1967. As is the case in all other countries, some Palestinians went abroad for education and work, but were unable to return because of the occupation.

Some restrict the definition of refugees in the case of the Palestinians only to those who left the country after the 1948 catastrophe, but this is unacceptable as they should also include those who quitted after the 1967 catastrophe. Others view the refugees as those living abroad only, while a third group considers them to be those in the refugee camps only. But these are also limited definitions, because they do not include the Palestinian refugees in the WB and GS and those who reside outside the camps.

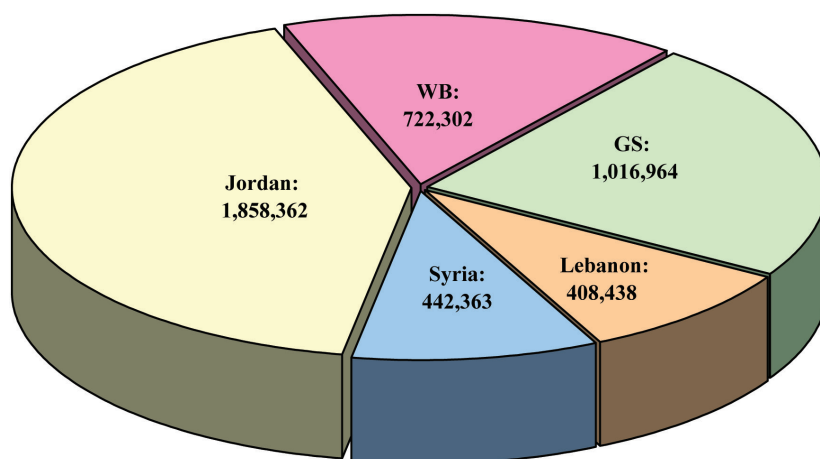
If we assume that the Palestinian refugees include those living abroad and in the WB and GS, then their total number, according to the statistics of the PCBS, is around 6.74 million persons (5.01 million in the diaspora and 1.73 million in the interior). This means that 66.7% of the Palestinians are refugees, who urgently need to return to the homes in which they, or their ancestors, lived in the lands occupied in 1948 or 1967.¹⁹

The following table shows the numbers of Palestinians in the registers of the UNRWA up to 31/12/2006. However, these statistics are not absolutely accurate as registration with the UNRWA is voluntary. Therefore the figures reflect only the numbers of refugees who regularly register themselves with the UNRWA.

Table 3/8: Number of Refugees Registered by UNRWA in Different Areas until 31/12/2006²⁰

Area	No. of individuals	No. of births	No. of families	No. of camps	No. of individuals in camps	Percentage of individuals in camps %
WB	722,302	7,802	180,003	19	186,479	25.8
GS	1,016,964	24,287	220,495	8	478,272	47
Lebanon	408,438	2,964	105,041	12	215,890	52.9
Syria	442,363	8,688	106,062	9	119,055	26.6
Jordan	1,858,362	22,620	362,528	10	328,076	17.7
Total	4,448,429	66,361	974,129	58	1,327,772	29.8

Number of Refugees Registered by UNRWA in Different Areas until 31/12/2006



We note from the above table that the total number of refugees registered with the UNRWA is 4.45 million persons, of whom about 41.8% stay in Jordan, 39.1% in the 1967 occupied lands (22.9% in GS and 16.2% in the WB) and the rest, 19.1%, in Syria and Lebanon.

However, due to several factors, the number of Palestinians living in any country in the world cannot be estimated with an acceptable degree of accuracy. The above figures could therefore change from time to time, based on the available information.

A close look at the statistics of the registered refugees for 35 years, 1970-2005, shows that their numbers rose from about 1.43 million in mid 1970 to about 4.28 million by mid 2005. By applying the reliable natural exponential model, the permanent annual increase in their numbers during this period will be 3.14%. This means that the numbers of the registered refugees will be doubled within 22 years.

Fourth: Population Growth Trends

We have sufficient evidence to maintain that the Palestinian population rate of growth is comparatively high when compared with those of other peoples. But it is slowly decreasing over time due to some interrelated demographic, economic social and political factors.

Research on the trends of population growth for the Palestinians worldwide is, indeed, problematic, as the rates of this growth vary according to the geographic location and standards of living for the Palestinians. Besides, there are differences between the sources of the data, and their methodologies and in the time frame, as well as in the degree of inclusivity and in some of the geographic concepts. Hence, we will concentrate here on the general indicators for this growth, with special emphasis on the WB, GS and historical Palestine.

Like in all countries and localities, the indicators of Palestinian growth are primarily determined by fertility, death rate and emigration. The latter do not affect the overall estimates of the numbers of the Palestinians in the world, but rather on their distribution in different localities, and on their places of residence.

The statistics of the PCBS indicate that the rates of fertility decreased in the WB and GS during the last decade of the 20th century. The population census of 1997 showed that the total fertility rate was 6.04 births, but, according to the demographic health survey of 2004, they decreased to 4.6 births in 2003.

The above sources also indicate differences in the rates of fertility in the WB and GS. In the WB, the total fertility rate decreased from 5.6 births in 1997 to 4.1 births in 2003, while the decrease for the same years in GS was from 6.9 births to 5.8 births. The mean number of children ever born to women (who had ever married) in 2004 totaled about 4.5 children, 4.3 in the WB and 4.9 in GS.

The natural increase rates of the population in the WB and GS decreased during the period 1997-2006 from 3.8% to 3.3%. Correspondingly, the crude birth rates decreased during the same period from 42.7 births per one thousand of the population to 36.7.

However, the negative impact of this decrease in fertility on the population growth has been partly compensated by the decrease in the crude death rates during the same period, from 4.9 deaths per one thousand of the population in 1997 to 3.9 in 2006. Additionally, is the corresponding increase in the life span for both sexes, from 70.2 to 71.7 years for males and from 71.7 years to 73.2 for females. However, during the course of the year 2006, there were differences in life expectancy between the WB and GS, 71.9 years for males and 73.6 years for females in the former, and 71.4 years for males and 72.5 years for females in the latter.

The outcome of all this is a slight annual decrease in the natural increase rate, from 3.8% in 1997 to 3.3% in 2006, and it is expected to be 2.8% in 2015. These statistics indicate a 0.7% decrease in the natural increase rate during the period 1997-2006. However, even if this tendency continues during the next decade, the annual natural increase rate will remain comparatively high, more than 2.5%.

If we presume the impact of emigration to be nil, the annual natural increase rate in the WB during the period 1997-2006 decreased from 3.6% to 3%, i.e., an annual decrease of 0.066%. In GS alone, the decrease is from 4.1% to 3.8%, i.e., an annual decrease of 0.033%. Notwithstanding this expected decrease in the population growth, we can safely maintain that the numbers and density of population in GS will continue to increase at comparatively higher rates than those in the WB.

As for the Palestinian population worldwide, estimated by the end of 2006 as 10.1 million of whom 50.4% live in historical Palestine, it is expected to markedly and continuously increase annually, and at rates higher than those of the Jews, though the annual natural increase rate will slightly decrease during the next two decades. Assuming an average annual increase of 2.8%, the Palestinians worldwide are expected to be about 13 and 15 million by the end of 2015 and 2020 respectively. On the basis of this modest hypothesis, the number of Palestinians in the world is thus expected to double to 20 million in the year 2030.²¹

Fifth: The Controversy over the Numbers of Palestinians in Historical Palestine, especially in the WB and GS

Investigation around issues related to population estimates should always be conducted cautiously and with a measure of reservation because the accuracy of any forecast depends on the degree of the realization of the hypotheses on which a study is based. This is particularly so in the Palestinian case, which is characterized by largely unforeseen changes in the security, political, economic and social realities, and by the de facto policies and measures undertaken by the occupation, which vary from stage to stage.

This issue of Palestinian population growth, and the duration during which the Jews will be of equal numbers to the Palestinians in historical Palestine constitutes a major concern, in fact an obsession, to some prominent Israeli thinkers.

A study conducted by the famous Rand Corporation expected an annual decrease in the natural increase rate of Palestinian population within a quarter of a century (up to the year 2030), from 4% to 2.2%. The study estimated the numbers of Palestinians in the WB and GS to be about five million within five years, a figure that is very close to the estimates of the PCBS.²²

The study also indicates that Israel will, by no means whatsoever, be able in future to control and determine the destiny of five million Palestinians, nor deprive them of their citizenship rights. Since the occupation cannot possibly continue forever, the only possible solution is withdrawal to frontiers accepted by the Palestinians and the world community. Quoting *Yedioth Ahronoth*, Sever Plocker said:

Rand researchers are convinced Palestinians must enforce development and construction efforts, and will discover the need to slow population growth, limit immigration and focus on raising their living standards. However, until this occurs, remember the prediction: Five million Palestinians within five years. Time is working against us.²³

Meanwhile, Israeli politicians, from both the left and right, have been more concerned by the entrenchment of the Palestinians in historical Palestine than by the quest for peace and security.

During debates and deliberations on the issue by a group of rightist Israeli-American experts during the first half of the year 2005, it was mentioned that by the year 2020 the Palestinians will outnumber the Jews in Palestine from the sea to the river,²⁴ and that the only solution would be to undertake a surgical operation of mass expulsion (transfer) of the Palestinians from Palestine.

On the other hand, another group of rightists argues that the Palestinians will not outnumber the Jews before the year 2050. Hence, they demand, the Israelis should cool down, continue the status quo, and never withdraw from the WB and GS. However, we should note here that in spite of their declared withdrawal from GS, the Israelis had made GS a virtual prison, and continued their policies of infiltration and assassination throughout the year 2006.

The Israeli leftists foresee a Palestinian demographic supremacy within a short period. Hence, to maintain the Jewish majority, they support the conclusion of a permanent settlement and withdrawal from the WB. Some even demand the incorporation of some of the 1948 heavily populated Palestinian areas, like the triangle (*al-Muthallath*), to the WB, and the annexation of some big Jewish settlements in the WB to Israel.

Meanwhile, the updated and most recent statistics of the PCBS estimate the number of Palestinians in historical Palestine by the end of 2006 to be 5.01 million persons, and the Jews to be 5.3 million. By 2010, the numbers of the Palestinians and the Jews is expected to be the same, 5.7 million each.²⁵

By 2020, the Palestinians in historical Palestine will be 7.6 million compared to 6.4 million Jews. Assuming that other factors remain constant, the Palestinians will then constitute 54% of the population in historical Palestine.

Since the establishment of Israel, the demographic Jewish-Palestinian struggle has provoked an apparently futile debate between different rightist and leftist Israeli quarters, who mix up politics with statistics, declared with concealed objectives, facts with half-facts, and fully substantiated scientific conclusions with weak or completely unfounded ones. Some quarters were occasionally so misled that they presumed that an Israeli side sympathize with the Palestinian cause and work for the attainment of Palestinian interests.

Meanwhile, the Israeli tendencies, hypotheses and policies have differed on the ground in accordance with the declared and undeclared objectives in each phase of the Palestinian conflict. For the leftists and rightists alike, this conflict constitutes a double-edged weapon wherein both sides are based on the Zionist ideology that strives to establish the predominantly Jewish state of Israel in the land of Palestine from the sea to the river.

Hence, Israel witnessed throughout the first half of the year 2005 a series of meetings, conferences and heated debates, that have been highlighted by the Jewish media, on the so-called “demographic danger” in Israel, which is actually related to the existence of the Palestinian population in the WB and GS. The discussions were based on a study conducted by the American-Israel Demographic Research Group (AIDRG), under the leadership of Bennett Zimmerman and Yoram Ettinger, and published in January 2005 under the title “Arab Population in the West Bank and Gaza: The Million and a Half Person Gap.” This study (more than 100 pages) starts with the dismissal of the hypothesis that the Arab population in the WB and GS constitutes a demographic threat to Israel, and argue that it should be profoundly reconsidered. The study challenged the 3.8 million estimate of the Palestinian population for the year 2004 that had been given by the PCBS, and claimed that the figure is actually 2.4 million only, i.e., with a decrease of 1.4 million persons.²⁶

We are not bothered here to give a detailed response to all the particulars of this study, but suffice to say that it lacks scientific methodology, and is based on some selective sources that are neither primary nor original. Furthermore, its ulterior political motive is to obstruct the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from GS, or, at least, to prevent a future similar withdrawal from the WB that would lead to the dismantling of the Jewish settlements there. The rationale for this presumption is that the Palestinians do not constitute a demographic threat to Israel, particularly if they are isolated in small cantons under tight Israeli control. Under such conditions, Israel may sanction the construction of modes of transportation between these isolated cantons, and redraw the hypothetical boundaries that would maintain a Jewish majority of Israel.

Besides advocating these ideas, the rightist groups had concurrently propagated the hypothesis that the Palestinians represent a real danger to the Hebrew state that could only be averted by their forceful expulsion (the so-called transfer).

These claims that center around the so-called one and a half million gap were propagated in Jewish newspapers, particularly in an article published by Shazar Ilan in *Haaretz* newspaper, which provoked some sensitive issues on the subject. But the PCBS, represented by its President Lu'ay Shabaneh, adequately responded to this press campaign, and convincingly dismissed the false claim of a one and half million gap.²⁷

To summarize the outcome of the controversy between the Israelis around the numbers of the Palestinians in the WB and GS, it may be appropriate to cite a report prepared by the Israeli CBS and published in the Israeli press under the heading "Demographically Correct," i.e., the Palestinians are right and the Israelis are wrong on the demographic statistics. The report, which was forwarded to the Knesset State Control Committee, explained the contradictions between the Israeli and Palestinian statistics, during the last decade, and addressed the claim of the new document of the AIDRG under the leadership of Bennett Zimmerman and Yoram Ettinger that the Palestinian population in the WB and GS in the year 2004 totaled about 2.4 million persons only.

This report frankly confirms the accuracy of the Palestinian census of 1997, and the rationality of its forecast on the population growth in the last decade, as well as its assumptions on the natural population increase. But it correctly dismissed as too exaggerated the Palestinian assumption of a positive impact of emigration during

the time of the *Intifadah* and the economic crisis. However, the Palestinian office had corrected its estimates of the emigration, and reduced the size of population from 3.8 million to 3.6 million. Nonetheless, the Israeli CBS was defective because it depended on erroneous standards and estimates and on the obsolete 1967 census. Hence, the Palestinian census was on the whole based on internationally recognized standards, and its figures were sound and correct.²⁸

From a professional statistic point of view, the falsity of the assumption of a one and a half million gap could be easily established. But we should indicate that this presumed gap, in the view of the writers of the study, is partly based on the 325 thousand diaspora Palestinians who were considered by the PCBS as part of the 1997 Palestinian population. But this is wrong as none of them was included in the overall census or the drop outs. Besides, the Palestinian drop outs included the Palestinians residing in Jerusalem, though Israel considers them to be part of its population. This is correct as Jerusalem is part of the land occupied in 1967, and Israel has no right to annex it to its territories. As for the “net positive emigration,” the PCBS had presumed some population drop outs after the 1997 census amongst which was the annual return of 45 thousand Palestinians during the years 2001-2010.²⁹ This was legitimate at that time when peace was on the air, and peoples were cautiously optimistic. But the continuous Israeli aggression during *al-Aqsa Intifadah* made these expectations beyond realization, which impelled the PCBS to correct their figures, and reduce the size of the Palestinian population in 2004 in the WB and GS from 3.8 million person to 3.6 million, and not 2.4 million as mentioned in the study. However, these forecasts would indeed be very low if political stability is achieved and the Palestinians in the diaspora were allowed to return to their homeland.

Sixth: The Israeli Repressive Measures and their Impact on the Palestinian Demography across the Green Line and in the WB and GS

Since its inception, Israel has adopted various repressive measures to affect the Palestinian demography across the Green Line. The heated controversy and differences among the Israelis over the issue of the numbers of Palestinians and

Israelis in historical Palestine, referred to above, has automatically taken different forms. Amongst them were the duration during which the Palestinians and Jews will be of equal numbers, the number of Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line, and the mechanism through which Israel, that has no fixed borders, would maintain its Jewish identity on both sides of this Line. Thus, Israel kept redrawing this Line on the ground, or it has been seriously reconsidered for redrawing by Israeli politicians and experts. This is particularly so because Israel considers many Palestinians to be in Israel or inside the Green Line, and many Jewish settlers to be within Israel though they actually live in the 1967 occupied lands.

This ongoing and heated debate over the Green Line glaringly demonstrate the importance of the demographic conflict to both the rightist and leftists in Israel, who, however, differ on the measures to be used to evict the Palestinians from their homes, and on the redrawing of the presumed frontiers along both sides of the Green Line.

Coupled with its operations of assassination, emigration and suppression, Israel imposes tight military, political and economic siege on the Palestinians. Additionally, it actively pursues a policy of discrimination on both sides of the Green Line that culminates in the confiscation of Palestinian lands, and the isolation of their settlements into virtual cantons and prisons, that compels some Palestinians to emigrate internally or abroad. Moreover, the well planned distribution of the Arab population on both sides of the Green Line distorts the social, cultural and economic fabric of their society. This is further aggravated by the so-called “security blocks” that humiliate the Palestinians and restrict their movements.

The Palestinian Emigration and Brain Drain

The Israeli repressive measures during the years of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* and their blockade of the Palestinian people throughout the year 2006, coupled with the political differences among the Palestinians factions and groups that were triggered by foreign intervention in Palestinian internal affairs, had, no doubt, adverse effects on the Palestinian cause. They gave Israel excuses to deny the Palestinian legitimate rights and to cover up its failure to resolve the Palestinian issue. Besides, these miserable conditions have compelled some citizens, particularly among the professionals, to quit the country for a better living, education, or to visit relatives and stay with them for long periods.

The Palestinian emigration is indeed a natural phenomenon that takes place among all peoples who are placed under brutal occupation for a long time, six decades in the case of the Palestinians.

An opinion poll conducted by Birzeit University indicated that 30% of the Palestinian look forward to emigrate, of whom the majority are youngsters. They are fed up by the deteriorating conditions in the WB and GS that are not limited to the brutality of the Israeli occupation but extended to serious conflicts between the Palestinian political leaders, a development that serve the Israeli strategy of evacuating Palestine from it original inhabitants.³⁰

A report published by *al-Hayat* newspaper on the dangerous phenomenon of emigration from the WB and GS mentions that 44% of the Palestinian youth aspire to emigrate, 50 thousand emigration applications were submitted by Palestinians to foreign consulates and 10 thousand youngsters had actually got entrance visas to foreign countries, particularly the USA, Canada and Chile. These applicants were from different localities and sectors of the Palestinian society, specially Christians. *Al-Hayat* newspaper, recorded the serious concern of a Palestinian priest, Bishop Riyah Abu al-‘Asal, on this massive Christian emigration, and reported that “The number of Christian families in each Palestinian village could now be easily counted.” Quoting some Jordanian sources, the newspaper added that 300 thousand Palestinians entered Jordan during the first five years of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, of whom none returned.³¹

Some Palestinian officials have cautioned against the serious repercussions of this increasing exodus, particularly that of some highly qualified government officials, professionals and artisans, on the Palestinian society. But they realized and emphasized that political and economic stability is a key prerequisite to limit this emigration and brain drain.³²

Statistics on Palestinian emigration are too diversified to be adequately summarized in this study, but they had to be referred to, in order to contain their future negative impact on the demographic conflict in the region. The Palestinian leadership and concerned quarters should take immediate measures to, prevent this phenomenon, or, at least, contain its impact. But, at the same time, they should not exaggerate it, particularly so as its underlying reasons and extent cannot be scientifically ascertained from official sources. What had been mentioned above intends just to establish the existence of the phenomenon not to measure its extent.

It should also be mentioned that calculating the difference between the departing and arriving Palestinians does not reflect a tendency for real and permanent emigration, but is most likely a temporary measure that will vanish with the end of the reasons behind it. It should also be noted that the Palestinians in the diaspora clutch to their residence permits in the WB and GS, notwithstanding their new nationalities and the long periods of stay abroad because they genuinely hope that they, or their sons and grandsons, will one day return to their homeland.

Seventh: The Diaspora Palestinians and the Right of Return

In spite of the numerous international resolutions, issued since 1948, including the UN General Assembly Resolution 194, that spelled out the rights of return and compensation to the Palestinian immigrants,³³ not a single migrant had returned by virtue of these impotent declarations. On the contrary, Israel has continued its repressive measures in the occupied Palestinian territories and placed their people under difficult conditions in order to force them to emigrate. But the Palestinian people has courageously faced these formidable challenges, stuck to their land and never surrendered their rights of return and self determination.

The results of an opinion poll on the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon conducted in 2006 by al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations showed that about 82% of the Palestinians in Lebanon are confident of their return to Palestine one way or another, while only 13% felt that they could not and the rest (5%) expressed no opinion on the subject. More than 98% of the respondents did not find in compensation, resettlement and naturalization in Lebanon a solution to their problem, about 80% accepted nothing but the return to their original cities and villages from which they were expelled, and about 5% accepted to return to the 1967 occupied territories, while the rest expressed their willingness to be settled inside or outside Lebanon. Meanwhile, 83% of the respondents supported Hamas' refusal to recognize Israel in spite of the formidable pressures and constraints.³⁴

Another opinion poll conducted by *Mada al-Carmel*, the Arab Center for Applied Social Research in Haifa, showed that 80% of the 1948 Palestinians supported the refugees' right of return or compensation, 42% wanted to have them both and 29% wanted to give the refugees the option to accept either return or compensation.

The poll revealed that 87% of the Palestinians insisted on the right of return and wanted their local leaders to deal with it as a principal political issue.³⁵

The final statement of the Fourth Palestinians in Europe Conference, which was convened in the Swedish city of Malmö in May 2006, included constructive and useful decisions for the future of the Palestinian people. It emphasized the utmost importance of their unity wherever they are, and their right of return. It demanded “the urgent implementation of this right in a manner that would enable the Palestinians to return to the homes from which they were forcibly expelled.” The conference asserted that the refugees “must be afforded due compensation as a result of all the physical and psychological losses which they and their descendants have suffered throughout the years of exile.”³⁶

The issue of return was the subject of many local, regional and international discussions during the year 2006 that were triggered by a series of flagrant acts of aggression committed by the occupation forces against the Palestinians in the WB and GS. Besides, were the discriminatory rules and measures against the 1948 Palestinians, especially confiscating lands and the transfer of Bedouin tribes to Negev in Southern Palestine. Additionally, was the expected disastrous impact of the Separation Wall, and the laws that prohibited Palestinian couples from staying in Israel if one of them happened to be from the WB or GS, which loosened family ties and adversely affected the previously solid social fabric on both sides of the Green Line.

In addition to the above gloomy conditions, is the assassination and terror campaign and displacement that the Palestinians in Iraq has been subjected to, and the hardships that they suffer along the Jordanian-Syrian frontiers, as well as the miserable life of the Palestinians in Lebanon, who are packed in over populated camps that lack essential services. Besides, as indicated in the reports of UNRWA, the Palestinians in Lebanon are deprived from many civil rights, including the right to work in more than 70 jobs. Over and above, is the heated debate among the Lebanese on whether to allow the settlement of the Palestinians in Lebanon or to transfer them to Arab or foreign countries until they return to their homes, or even to foreign countries like Canada and Australia. As mentioned by a source in the Arab League, this policy is associated with the American Israeli plans to overstep the right of return.³⁷

An article written by Mordechai Kedar and published in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, in which the author said towards the end of his discourse:

The conclusion ... is that peace with our Palestinian and Arab neighbors is not linked to whether we control some territory or other, but to whether we agree to the return of the 1948 refugees and their descendents to Israel, and thus destroy our Zionist identity ourselves. The refugees have lived in camps for nearly sixty years - in the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon - simply waiting to return to their homes inside Israel at the first opportunity.... When we withdraw from the Golan completely and when we leave all Judea and Samaria including Jerusalem we will find that the main problem that Israel has with her neighbors - the problem of Israel's very existence as encapsulated in the camps of the 1948 refugees - has not been solved and that it will continue to be a source of conflict even after we withdraw from the territories.³⁸

From the above, it is clear that there is no lasting solution for the problems of the Palestinian refugees worldwide except their return to their homes.

Conclusion

A thorough look at the problems of the Middle East in particular and international conflicts in general, during the second half of the 20th century, would reveal that their roots lie in the establishment of Israel in 1948, and the failure of the international community to implement just solutions that guarantee the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their complete and uncompromised right of return and the restoration of their lands and sacred places. It is clear that no lasting peace could ever be achieved without the full realization of all the Palestinian aspirations, including complete independence and freedom in their land.

The complexity of the Palestinian issue has reached such an unprecedented level that the Jewish-Palestinian demographic conflict have become one of its most important aspects, particularly so as the numbers of the Palestinians in historical Palestine are expected by 2010 to be equal to those of the Jews. No option is available to both the international community and the Israeli policy makers, from the extreme right to the extreme left, except to seriously engage themselves to resolve the Palestinian issue in a just manner that guarantees the establishment of a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian state, and the return of all the refugees to their homes and those of their fathers and grandfathers from which they were expelled.

Endnotes

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- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ *Al-Khaleej*, 7/3/2007.
- ⁶ See PCBS, *Kitab Filastin al-Ihsa'i al-Sanawi 1999* (Annual Palestinian Book 1999), Ramallah, Palestine, p. 146; and PCBS, *al-Mash al-Sihhi al-Dimughrafi-2004* (The Health Demographic Survey-2004), final report, Ramallah, Palestine.
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- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ PLO, Economic Department, Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources, *Palestinian Census Collection*, no.6, Damascus, 1993/1994.
- ¹⁰ See <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/pdf/uif-dec06.pdf>
- ¹¹ PCBS, *al-Filastiniyun fi Nihayat 'Am 2006* (Demographic and Socio-economic Status of the Palestinian People at the end of 2006).
- ¹² See <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/pdf/uif-dec06.pdf>; and <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/Refugees/pdf/TABLE1.PDF>
- ¹³ PCBS, *al-Filastiniyun fi Nihayat 'Am 2006* (Demographic and Socio-economic Status of the Palestinian People at the end of 2006).
- ¹⁴ See <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/pdf/uif-dec06.pdf>; and <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/Refugees/pdf/TABLE1.PDF>
- ¹⁵ PCBS, *al-Filastiniyun fi Nihayat 'Am 2006* (Demographic and Socio-economic Status of the Palestinian People at the end of 2006).
- ¹⁶ The table is prepared by the researcher, using PCBS data.
- ¹⁷ Mohsen Saleh and Basheer Nafi (editors), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2005* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2007), pp. 178-183.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-174; and see *al-Nazihun al-Filastiniyun wa Mufawadat al-Salam* (Palestinian Refugees and Peace Negotiations), <http://www.mic-pal.info/nkba/world/10.doc>
- ¹⁹ PCBS, *al-Filastiniyun fi Nihayat 'Am 2006* (Demographic and Socio-economic Status of the Palestinian People at the end of 2006), p. 31.
- ²⁰ On the statistics of the Palestinian refugees in the Arab countries see, <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/pdf/uif-dec06.pdf>; <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/Refugees/pdf/TABLE1.PDF>; and <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/Refugees/pdf/TABLE3.PDF>
- ²¹ Estimates by the researcher.
- ²² The Rand Palestinian State Study Team, *Building a Successful Palestinian State* (USA: Rand Corporation, 2005), p. 87.
- ²³ See <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3080831,00.html>; http://www.bahethcenter.net/A.W/alsahafa/sahafat_al3adow/5-5-2005/3-5-2005.htm; and *al-Hayat*, 4/5/2006.
- ²⁴ *al-Mashhad al-Isra'eli*, 14/6/2005.
- ²⁵ PCBS, *al-Filastiniyun fi Nihayat 'Am 2006* (Demographic and Socio-economic Status of the Palestinian People at the end of 2006).

- ²⁶ See “Arab Population in the West Bank and Gaza: The Million and a Half Person Gap,” American - Israel Demographic Research Group (AIDRG), published by the Begin - Sadat for Strategic Studies in Israel, 10/1/2005, www.padernographics.com
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- ²⁸ See Shahar Ilan, Demographically Correct, *Haaretz*, 7/6/2005; and *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 8/6/2005.
- ²⁹ PCBS, *Sukkan al-Tajamu‘at al-Filastiniyah 1997-2010* (Residence of the Palestinian Gatherings 1997-2010), Ramallah, Palestine, p. 17.
- ³⁰ *Albayan*, 27/10/2006.
- ³¹ *Al-Hayat*, 11/12/2006.
- ³² *Addustour*, 30/10/2006.
- ³³ <http://www.un.org/unrwa/arabic/Roll/index.htm>
- ³⁴ Mohsen Saleh (editor), Executive Summary of the Poll on the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon - May 2006, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, Beirut.
- ³⁵ *Al-Khaleej*, 5/1/2006.
- ³⁶ The Palestinian Return Centre (PRC), Final Statement of the Fourth Palestinians in Europe Conference, London, 6/5/2006, http://www.prc.org.uk/index.php?module=centre_activities&id=10a9eac14530c3b4ad9cf91e399bd995&offset=10
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- ³⁸ See http://omedia.org/Show_Article.asp?DynamicContentID=1861&MenuID=727&ThreadID=1014017; and see *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 17/11/2006.

This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is glad to present to its readers The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006, the second in an annual series. The Report aims at monitoring the Palestinian issue through an informative and analytical approach. The Report covers the Palestinian internal political situation, issues concerning the Land and the holy sites, the economy, the Palestinian demographic indicators, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations. It focuses on the Arab, Islamic and international stances towards the Palestinian issue. In addition, it devotes a chapter to discussing the Israeli war on Hizbullah and Lebanon.

This Report is distinct for its updated information till the end of 2006 and for its outstanding team of academics and experts.

Al-Zaytouna team did its best to be professional, scientific and objective. They hope that this Report be a distinguished addition to the Palestinian studies.

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006



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