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The Concept of “Transfer” in Zionist Thinking and Practice: Historical Roots and Contemporary Challenges

* Nur Masalha



Introduction

Land and demography were always at the heart of the conflict between the Zionist colonial-settlers in Palestine and the indigenous Palestinians. Today most scholars of colonialism recognize that, unlike traditional European *colonialism* in Asia and Africa, which was aimed at exploiting indigenous peoples, the “logic of elimination,” displacement, and seizure of land are at the heart of *settler colonialism*, with Zionist settler-colonization in Palestine continuing to expand relentlessly until the present day, creating hundreds of settlements across the West Bank.

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Some authors point to the overall current (Arab-Jewish) “demographic parity” in historic Palestine (in the area between the River to the Sea), while overlooking the fact the Israeli state presently controls directly over 90 percent of the lands of Mandatory Palestine, and the Palestinians are largely confined to crowded “enclaves” and South-African style “Bantustans” in the Gaza Strip and West Bank; much of the land between the River and the Sea is now designated for exclusive Israeli-Jewish use and Zionist settlements.

Zionist historiography provides ample evidence suggesting that from the very beginning of the Zionist Yishuv (settlement) in Palestine, the attitudes of the majority of the Zionist groups toward the indigenous Arab population ranged from a mixture of indifference and patronizing superiority to outright denial of their national rights, uprooting and “transferring” them to neighboring countries.

During the earliest days of Zionist settler-colonization in Palestine, the Zionist leadership grappled with what it termed the “Arab question” (hashelahha’arvait): the problem of creating a Jewish-majority settler state in Palestine where the indigenous Palestinian Arabs were the overwhelming majority of the population and owned much of the land. For most mainstream Zionist leaders, the most favored solution became known as “transfer”: a euphemism denoting ethnic cleansing and the organized removal of the Palestinian population to neighboring Arab countries. From the founding father of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, to the founding father of the Israeli state and its first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, all important Zionist leaders embraced the notion of “transfer” in one form or another; the differences focused on the modalities and practicalities of “transfer.”

Furthermore, the evolution and crystallization of the Zionist concept of “transfer” during the Mandatory period should be contextualized. The Palestinians remained the

overwhelming majority in Palestine until the end of 1947. Also, strong indigenous Palestinian resistance to Zionism and the “displacement” of the Palestinian peasantry through Zionist land purchases during the Mandatory period, and the impact of this local resistance on the policies of the British colonial Mandatory authorities, also influenced Zionist thinking. For instance, for the most important Zionist leader, David Ben-Gurion, “transfer” (or as he put in his Personal Diary, *gerush*, Hebrew for expulsion) became — following the great anti-colonial (peasant-led) Palestinian rebellion of 1936-1939, which led to the creation of the British Peel Commission and the issuing of the British White Paper in 1939 — an obsession and the solution in the period 1936-1948. In June 1938, Ben-Gurion told a meeting of the Jewish Agency, "I support compulsory transfer. I don't see anything immoral in it." Ben-Gurion also wrote his diary in 1937 that Zionism could achieve in future control of the whole of Mandatory Palestine (from the River Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea) in stages.

Another consistent and obsessive advocate of "compulsory transfer" was Yosef Weitz, the director of the Settlement Department of Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the head of the Israeli government's official Transfer Committee of 1948. Weitz was at the center of the Zionist land purchasing activities for decades. His intimate knowledge and involvement in land purchase made him sharply aware of its limitations. As late as 1947, after half a century of tireless efforts, the collective ownership of the JNF, which constituted about half of the Zionist Yishuv total, amounted to a mere 3.5 percent of the land area of Palestine.

However, while during the Jewish Agency Executive internal debates of 1938 some key Zionist leaders commented that “internal transfers” (that is, “localized “transfers” and internal “displacements” of Palestinian peasants) were carried out in the 1920s and 1930s to make way for new Jewish settlements, (following Zionist land purchases and under British military protection, from the mid-1930s onwards) the consensus emerging among the Zionist leadership in 1937-1938 was that “mass transfer” of Palestinians to neighboring Arab countries and outside the geographically envisaged boundaries Jewish state was the only solution and sine qua non for the creation of a demographically viable Jewish state in Palestine.

Deeply rooted in racist colonial demography and in mainstream Zionist thinking, consciousness and practice, the threat of “transfer” for Palestinians still has relevance today at a time when there is talk among Israeli officials and ministers of legally annexing large parts of the West Bank.

In two of my books¹ I tried to contextualize the historical roots and evolving concept of “transfer” in mainstream Zionism within the framework of the history of modern Palestine, with the expulsion of the Palestinians and Palestinian Nakba, or “catastrophe,” of 1948 being a major theme. Largely based on Israeli archival documents, my book *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of “Transfer” in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948* (1992), reveals extensive internal discussions of “transfer” by the Jewish Agency Executive (then the government of the Zionist Yishuv in Palestine) in the mid-1930s; and a number of secret Zionist “transfer schemes” were worked out in the second half of the 1930s and early 1940s as well as in the run-up to 1948.

Transfer Mindset, War, and Nakba (1948)

Until 1947, the European Zionist settlers and migrants were a minority in Palestine. The 1948 Palestinian Nakba was the culmination of over half a century of Zionist efforts, secret plans, and eventually brute force.

During the Mandatory period, the Zionist political leadership (Ben-Gurion in particular) concluded that the practical applications of “transfer” and expulsion of the Palestinians could be implemented much more easily during wartime, by marshalling and combining military, security, strategic, territorial, settlement, demographic and ideological considerations, than during peace time. Evidently, in 1948 Ben-Gurion and his close associates (who dominated the Haganah, later to become the Israeli army) entered the 1948 war with a transfer mindset and a determination to solve the demographic “Arab problem” — a question (combined with strong indigenous resistance to colonization) which presented the strongest challenge to Zionism for more than half a century before 1948.

Labor Zionism dominated political Zionism (and later the Israeli state) in the period from 1930-1977. Essential to mainstream Labor Zionist strategies of the mid-1930s, especially from 1936 onwards, was the doctrine of pursuing “maximum land with a minimal number of Arabs” in a projected Jewish state. The modalities of this doctrine evolved over the years and across developing historical contexts in Palestine, and later Palestine-Israel after 15 May 1948. The expulsion of more than half of the Palestinian population in 1948 and the capture of 78 percent of Mandatory Palestine by and large ensured, albeit not fully, the achievement of this Zionist territorial-demographic strategy.

In 1948, Israel took over much of Mandatory Palestine through the ethnic cleansing of most of the original Palestinian population. The Israeli strategy in 1948 was: maximum land, minimum Arabs. In 1948, given the demographic realities of Palestine and Arab land ownership in the country, it was not possible to create a Jewish state in the country without the expulsion of the Palestinians and the destruction of much of Palestinian society. From the territory occupied by the Israelis in 1948, about 90 percent of the Palestinians were driven out — a large number at gunpoint. Transfer, in the form of specific “expulsions” orders, was explicit in Plan Dalet, the Haganah Master Plan for the military conquest of Palestine, formally adopted in March 1948 and implemented in subsequent weeks. The 1948 war simply provided the opportunity for the implementation of the Zionist “transfer” concept and the creation of a Jewish state largely free of Palestinians. The war consolidated the Zionist mindset, and provided the security, military, and strategic excuses for purging the Jewish state and dispossessing the Palestinian people. In my books I have produced mountains of documentary evidence and Israeli archival material about the Zionist “transfer” mindset and debates and about the facts of the Nakba, and about Israel’s responsibility for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. Other historians have also uncovered strong evidence for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians in 1948. Today, more than 50 percent of the Palestinians are refugees; over 80 percent of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip are Palestinian refugees from what became Israel in 1948.

The Israeli strategy in 1948 of “maximum land and a fewer Arabs” partly explains the

survival of a Palestinian minority within the Green Line, equivalent to 13 percent of the population in 1949 — a figure that has risen today to 20 percent of Israel’s population. Israeli annexation (with the agreement of King Abdullah I of Jordan) of the “small triangle” of Arab villages adjacent to the Green Line within the West Bank in 1949 added more Palestinians to the Israeli state in those early years. Driving out most Palestinians from a vastly enlarged Jewish state in 1948 and minoritizing the Palestinians from a big majority to a minority within the Green Line was deemed to be a fairly successful strategy by the then Labor Zionist leadership. This strategy would also resurface after June 1967, couched by Israeli Labor ministers to the post-1967 territories in these terms: “maximum land, minimum Arabs,” or “maximum geography for Israel, minimum Arab demography in Israel.”

“The Israeli strategy in 1948 of “maximum land and a fewer Arabs” partly explains the survival of a Palestinian minority within the Green Line, equivalent to 13% of the population in 1949 ”

The Post-1967 Period: Maximum Land, Minimum Arabs

Once again in June 1967, under the cover of war, about 300,000 Palestinians were driven out of the West Bank into Jordan. Furthermore, the same Zionist doctrine (which is closely related to the “transfer” notion) of maximum land, minimum Arabs was clearly applied by then ruling Labor Zionist Party to the 1967 occupied territories, and the establishment of Jewish settlements in these territories, especially in the West Bank and Gaza, immediately after 1967. This was clearly evident in the semi-official Allon Plan (1967-1970). The Allon Plan was also strategically couched in the doctrine that Israeli sovereignty over a large part of the Israeli occupied West Bank and keeping the Israeli army on the River Jordan were central to Israel's doctrine of defense, an argument which was subsequently embraced by all Likud governments in the post-Oslo period, especially in the last two decades. This also partly explains the revival of the “transfer debate,” both officially and in public, in Israel in recent decades.

We know that, mainly for “demographic reasons,” Israeli strategies after June 1967 were not to formally and legally annex the territories occupied at the time, with the exception of East Jerusalem, which was formally annexed more than three decades ago. Rather, Israeli strategies have been to obliterate the Green Line with the West Bank; no Israeli government since 1967 has been prepared to return to the 1967 borders. All Labor governments pursued “pragmatic expansionism” and sought to annex in a *de facto* way, through the creation of settlement facts on the ground, while keeping most Palestinians outside the geographically expanding Jewish state. Also, the political consensus in Israel was that the Jordan Valley

portion of the West Bank, where Israeli settlements were created after 1967, would ultimately be annexed to the Israeli state.

The Oslo and The Post-oslo Periods

Land and demography, central to the struggle between Settler and Indigenous in Palestine and once again at the heart of the way the Oslo Accords, were framed and applied on the ground — accords which did not recognized fundamental Palestinian rights such as self-determination, statehood, or the “right of return” for the refugees. For the Rabin government of the early 1990s, Oslo was meant to tackle the “Arab demographic problem” in the West Bank and Gaza and provide some sort of answer to the challenge of the First Palestinian Intifada. From the same Israeli perspective, and as it turned out in reality and on the ground, the Oslo process and the creation of the Palestinian Authority in the early 1990s in effect repackaged many of the Israeli ideas about “Palestinian autonomy” in parts of the West Bank — ideas originally suggested explicitly in the Allon Plan — while Israel remained in overall control of the land from the River to the Sea. Crucially, Israel was in direct and exclusive control of two-thirds of the West Bank, the so-called “Area C” — an area with hundreds of Israeli settlements and outposts is treated by the current Israeli government in recent years *de facto* as part of Israel. According to Israeli rights group B’Tselem (May 2023), “Israel’s policy’s goal to allow the state to take over more and more Palestinian land to be used by Jews, is [now] applied across the West Bank against dozens of Palestinian communities. This policy is illegal. Forcible transfer is a war crime.”

From an Israeli point of view, Oslo fit in reasonably well with the notion of “maximum land with a minimal number of Arabs.” Through the Oslo II Accord of September 1995, this “pragmatic expansionism” also led to the breakup of the West Bank into three areas: Area A, in which “autonomy” was granted to the main Palestinian urban centers and cities; Area B, in which partial autonomy was granted to Palestinian towns and villages surrounding the main cities of Area A; and Area C, which has a minority of Palestinians (about 200,000) but constitutes about two-thirds of the West Bank remaining under direct Israel control. Area C is also designated by Israeli policy makers to eventually become an integral part of the Israeli state. This *de facto* partitioning of the West Bank under the Oslo Accords between Israel and the “autonomous” Palestinian Authority was first mooted in the Allon Plan of 1967–1970.

“ From an Israeli point of view, Oslo fit in reasonably well with the notion of ‘maximum land with a minimal number of Arabs’ ”

Once again, we can see how the Zionist doctrine of maxim land, minimum Arabs

worked in practice and was being implemented by Israel throughout the Oslo and post-Oslo process and how the doctrine became inherent in the way West Bank was portioned into Area A, Area B, and Area C — a division which has since 1993 enabled Israel to treble its settler colonial population in the West Bank, initially under the cover of the Oslo process. Israel has sought to create irreversible settlement and demographic facts on the ground in the form of hundreds of settlements/colonies. These facts on the ground, a key Zionist strategy which spans a century of Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine, were designed to ensure effective and irreversible annexations of large parts of the West Bank, and also to pre-empt the creation of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel. From an Israeli point of view, the idea of “Palestinian autonomy” in the shape of the Palestinian Authority confined to Area A (5 percent of the West Bank) and Area B was meant to solve Israel’s “demographic problem,” i.e., taking the large Palestinian population centers out of the Jewish state. Today, most Palestinians in the West Bank are confined to Areas A and B, which are governed partially by the “autonomous” Palestinian Authority, an Authority which can only function in close cooperation with the Israeli occupation authorities.

More recently, following the massive expansion of hundreds of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Benjamin Netanyahu has attempted to transform the practical *de facto* annexation of parts of the West Bank into a legal (*de jure*) annexation.

Although Israel’s allies among Western governments (especially the US) were reluctant recently to support legal annexationism, these governments did nothing to stop Israeli *de facto* annexationism of Area C, and the European Union has been financially subsidizing the Israeli occupation for the last three decades.

“ Following the massive expansion of hundreds of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Benjamin Netanyahu has attempted to transform the practical *de facto* annexation of parts of the West Bank into a legal (*de jure*) annexation ”

Demography and the Withdrawal from Gaza in 2005: Minimum Loss of Geography, Maximum Loss of Demography

We know that under former prime minister Ariel Sharon Israel withdrew unilaterally from Gaza in 2005, again within the ideological framework of “maximum land, minimum Arabs” — i.e., losing very little land and getting rid of many Palestinians,

But in fact, it was the failure to “transfer” the Gaza refugees to northern Sinai in the late 1960s and 1970s that formed part of the historical background to the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. This withdrawal in 2005 thus took more than two million

Palestinians out of the Jewish state while losing little territory, in addition to imposing a crippling siege on Gaza's Palestinians — a siege which was a factor in Hamas' attacks of 7 October 2023.

In 2005, there was Israeli majority backing that withdrawal move or for getting rid of a huge Palestinian Arab demographic problem in Gaza. But today, with the murderous war waged on Gaza, there are also voices within the Israeli government demanding permanent occupation of parts of the Gaza Strip and thinning out of the Palestinian population of Gaza.

Revival of The “Transfer” Debate and “Creeping Transfer”

The revival of the threat of “transfer” or expulsion that Palestinians face in recent decades is a threat rooted in the historical and current Israeli settler-colonial policies in the West Bank. However, while the notion of “transfer” was often discussed in secret and approved in the inner sanctums of Zionist institutions in the pre-1948 period, the revival of the concept of “transfer” gained legitimacy in Israeli political discourse openly in since 1980s, gaining further official legitimacy in the post-Second Intifada period as the best means of dealing with both the Palestinian “demographic problem” in the occupied territories and “Palestinian resistance” to Israeli *de facto* annexation of large parts of the West Bank.

East Jerusalem, with its 300,000 inhabitants, was occupied unilaterally, formally, and legally annexed by Israel long ago. However, in recent years much of Israel's settler-colonial policies in East Jerusalem have focused on penetrating and breaking up Palestinian neighborhoods and thinning Palestinian demography. In effect a *de facto* “creeping transfer” of Palestinians from the unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem, is largely being implemented through a variety of administrative, bureaucratic, and legal procedures.

After the collapse of the Oslo process following the Second Intifada, and with the absence of any political process in the last two decades (combined with the marginalization of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank by successive Israeli governments dominated by Benjamin Netanyahu), “transfer” ideas have once again promoted by semi-official and official circles. This “official option” has been recommended by one of Israel's most prestigious academic centers, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Herzliya, which advises Israeli ministers and senior officers of the Israeli army.

Top Israeli public figures on the extreme right in the current ruling coalition have been most vocal about this scenario. And current public and official debates in Israel over “transfer” of the Palestinian population out of the ‘territories’ openly advocated by Israeli officials and media commentators also appear as “policy proposals” and in “policy papers” submitted by academics to the government, which very few in Israel now dare to condemn.

I. The War on Gaza and a “Silent War” on the West Bank: “Internal Displacements” (Within the West Bank) Versus “External Transfer” from the West Bank

The vast majority of Gaza's population (more than 80 percent of the 2.3 million people) are

the descendants of Palestinian refugees uprooted and expelled from what became Israel in 1948.

The devastating current Israeli war on Gaza, the destruction of much of the civilian infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, and the “internal displacement” of nearly two thirds of Gaza’s population have serious implications for all Palestinians, but more so for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Calls from within Israeli official circles for a mass expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in both the West Bank and Gaza have proliferated since the current war began six weeks ago, in what some Israel rights groups say is a process of “mainstreaming” transfer and mass deportation in the Israeli discourse.

Moreover, the mistake many authors mistakenly believe that the Zionist notion of “transfer” applies only to the organized removal of Palestinians from Palestine to neighboring Arab countries. In fact, a quarter of all Palestinians within the Green Line (about half a million) are “internal refugees” and internally displaced people, whose lands and villages had been taken over by Jewish settlers. Historically, about three dozen Palestinian villages disappeared during the British Mandatory period and their lands and sites were transferred to Jewish settlers. Therefore, historically speaking, the Zionist concept of “transfer” has been applied to both “internal displacements” of Palestinians within Mandatory Palestine (and later Israel) as well as to the “external transfer” and expulsion of the Palestinians during the 1948 Nakba. And this concept of “internal and external transfer” has serious implications for what is currently taking place within the West Bank.

Today there is no distinction between the “settler leadership” in the West Bank and the Israeli government, and this is clearly evident from the anti-Arab racist rhetoric they espouse and the accelerated settler-colonization drive in the West Bank. Protected by the Israeli army, the hundreds of thousands of Zionist settlers in the West Bank pose an existential threat to the Palestinian people. As Israel wages its war on Gaza, Israeli settlers in the West Bank opened “another front”: a silent war against the Palestinians in the West Bank with daily violence and the threat of expulsion. They attacked Palestinian villages and towns in the West Bank and invaded Palestinian private lands, seeking to create a new reality on the ground. According to many reports, with the international attention focused on the Gaza War, the settlers, backed by Israeli soldiers in the West Bank, have exploited the War and have been stepping up a campaign to try and redraw the map in the West Bank and intimidate and displace vulnerable Palestinian communities; in particular they seek to force out Palestinians from Area C — the mostly rural hinterland of the West Bank — and to confine the Palestinians in enclaves in Area A, which includes the urban centers of the West Bank. One of the main areas of displacement thus far is to the south al-Khalil hills. Evidence of the vanishing of Palestinian communities can be seen on hilltops and in valleys of the south al-Khalil hills and the Jordan valley, which are now empty except for a few structures. Most of the residents took refuge in the larger villages or towns of Area A. If the settlers succeed in their campaign, this would be the largest “internal transfer” and expulsion drive in decades.²

“As Israel wages its war on Gaza, Israeli settlers in the West Bank opened “another front”: a silent war against the Palestinians in the West Bank with daily violence and the threat of expulsion ”

The Palestinians on the West Bank are fully aware of what is happening on the ground and of Israeli mass displacement plans. “We are against transfer to any place, in any form, and we consider it a red line that we will not allow to be crossed,” Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for Mahmoud Abbas, said recently. “What happened in 1948 will not be allowed to happen again.”³ However, the Palestinian Authority, which is vulnerable and financially dependent on those European countries which have so far backed the Israeli war on Gaza, has not been able to stop the displacement of Palestinian communities driven out from their lands in Area C of the West Bank by the Israeli army-protected settlers.

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What about “external transfer” from the West Bank to Jordan?

The objectives of the current Israel government are identical with those of the Israeli settlers in the West Bank, and both have exploited the Gaza War and used the Israeli army to fuel violence against local Palestinian communities. Mass displacement from the West Bank is also their favorite option, but there are a number of obstacles which militate against this scenario in the current situation.

First, the Jordanian government has no interest in aiding and abetting any forced displacement from the West Bank and would not accept any Israeli attempts to do so, under the cover of war. Jordan had recalled its ambassador from Israel and told the Israeli ambassador to stay away in protest at the Israeli war in Gaza. Also, a significant number of people in Jordan are of Palestinian descent. Any attempts at mass displacement from the West Bank would bring not only the Jordanian government into conflict with Israel, but the entire population of Jordan (Palestinians and Trans-Jordanians); the people of Jordan, the government in Amman and the Jordanian army would resist these attempts. In fact, in late November 2023, Jordan went further by increasing the presence of its army along the Jordan

River and its borders with Israel, warning that any Israeli attempts to force Palestinians across the River Jordan would threaten its 1994 Wadi Araba Treaty with Israel.

“ Jordanian government has no interest in aiding and abetting any forced displacement from the West Bank and would not accept any Israeli attempts to do so, under the cover of war ”

Second, generally people in Palestine are extremely sensitive to this issue and they know that mass forced removal would be tantamount to another Nakba. Palestinians would resist any future Israeli attempts to do so, while mobilizing the growing pro-Palestine international solidary movement to frustrate these Israeli moves. Support against mass displacement from the West Bank would come from both international human rights organizations as well as from Israeli rights organizations.

Also, at the moment, Western backers of Israel (especially the US administration) have no interest in widening the Gaza war to the West Bank. They also have no interest in a wider confrontation with the Arab and Islamic worlds. The current US administration, in particular, has been critical in recent weeks of Israeli attempts to use the Gaza War to create a new reality on the ground in the West Bank.

“ Western backers of Israel (especially the US administration) have no interest in widening the Gaza war to the West Bank ”

II. The War on Gaza:

The “Transfer Report” of The Israeli Intelligence Ministry

Within the official mindset in Israel now (as shown in an official Israeli ministry report: a “position paper” on war options (see below)), the most favorable scenario is to drive out the Palestinian population from Gaza to north Sinai in Egypt under the cover of the war, combined with the massive destruction of Gaza’s civilian infrastructure. Framed as a “security necessity” for the current Israeli government, this scenario would contribute to eliminating the Palestinian nationalist cause and to facilitating the legal and final annexation of parts (or most) of the West Bank into Israel. But in view of strong opposition from Egypt and the Palestinians themselves, this “favorite Israeli scenario” is not easy to achieve presently. Crucially, there is no international legitimacy or support for this scenario. However, the very

existence of such an official paper reflects the “transfer mindset” and actual thinking within certain circles of the Israeli government.

The current Israeli war on Gaza, which includes a large-scale ground invasion and whose declared objectives include the “elimination of Hamas,” immediately followed Hamas’ ferocious raid of 7 October. This raid was a product of nearly two decades of a suffocating Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip and decades of occupation and ethnic cleansing in Palestine. As the Israeli army launched a massive bombing campaign of Gaza, systematically destroying its civilian infrastructure, schools, universities, hospitals and mosques, and massacring thousands of Palestinian civilians, men, women, and children, one Israeli Minister publicly declared that the Israeli military was now carrying out a “Nakba” against Gaza’s Palestinians, with clear reference to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. Another Likud member of the Israeli Knesset, Ariel Kallner, urged the repeat of the 1948 Palestinian Nakba.

Furthermore, the current official Israeli-Zionist “transfer mindset” was also evident during the early stages of the Gaza war by the fact that some Israeli officials began publicly floating the idea of “pushing” the Gaza population into northern Sinai and the “forced transfer” and “resettlement” of the Gaza refugees in northern Sinai. This idea has deep roots in the Allon Plan of the post-1967 period but was met with no practical success — this idea was also recently totally rejected by the Egyptian government which has no interest in going along with such plans. The Egyptian government was particularly concerned when an official Israeli Intelligence Ministry proposed the mass deportation of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to Egypt as part of a “position paper” on war options.⁴ This Israeli Government Ministry, which conducts research and proposes “policy options” to the Israeli government, drafted a 10-page document, dated 13 October, which proposed the “transfer” of the Gaza Strip’s 2.3 million people to Egypt’s Sinai peninsula. The authors of the report furthermore offered “three alternatives,” all designed “to effect a significant change in the [demography and] civilian reality in the Gaza Strip”, but they deem the “transfer alternative” to be the most desirable for Israel’s security. The official report proposes moving Gaza’s civilian population to tent cities in northern Sinai, then building permanent cities and an undefined “humanitarian corridor.” An Israeli “security zone” would be created inside Gaza to block the displaced Palestinians from returning to the Strip. The report also speaks about Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Qatar, and Canada supporting the scheme financially and by taking in uprooted Palestinians from Gaza as refugees. The document did not specify what would become of the Gaza Strip once most of its population is cleared out, but the implication is that parts of the Gaza Strip would be annexed to Israel and new Jewish settlements would be created in it.

Drawing condemnation from the Egyptian authorities and worsening tensions between Egypt and Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office subsequently sought to play down the significance of official report, describing the report compiled by a Ministry in this government as a “Concept Paper.” But Netanyahu himself openly drew on ancient scriptural references, evoking the biblical nation of ‘Amalek’ to explain Israel’s position in the ongoing conflict, which has resulted in more than twelve thousand Palestinian civilian deaths: he cited the Old Testament from First Samuel 15:3, saying: “*You must remember what*

Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible. 'Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.' The quotation was interpreted by many observers as an intention to wage a total war on Gaza, raising concerns about potential genocide.

The Israeli official report and Netanyahu's statement deepened long-standing Egyptian fears that Israeli current war objectives include driving Gaza's population into Egypt; these plans also revived for Palestinians memories of another traumatic Nakba — the destruction of historic Palestine in 1948 and the uprooting of half of the Palestinians during the 1948 Nakba. Crucially, Egypt, which has long feared that Israel wants to force a permanent expulsion of Gaza's Palestinians into its territory, has made clear throughout this Gaza war that it will resist the pushing of a new wave of Palestinian refugees into Egypt.

In addition to strong opposition from Egypt and the Palestinians themselves, another tool which should be applied to frustrate Israeli transfer plans in Gaza is International Law. "Population transfer," (including "forced removal," "ethnic cleansing," "expulsion," "removal" and "forced relocation and resettlement") is a grave crime in modern International Law, with prohibition and prosecution following these war crimes. Investigation by the International Criminal Court into the war crimes committed in Gaza are urgently needed. International pressures for ceasefire in Gaza are increasing. However, what is required now is not only a strong international intervention to ensure an immediate and unconditional ceasefire but a clear international position against Israeli "forcible transfer" of the Palestinian population out of Gaza and all over the occupied Palestinian territory, along with the urgent establishment of a global humanitarian relief system to meet the massive needs of Gaza's displaced, destitute, and traumatized population.

Above all, in order for a new Nakba not to occur in Gaza, there must be Palestinian unity in the face of the war of ethnic cleansing and genocide in Gaza, and in the West Bank as well.

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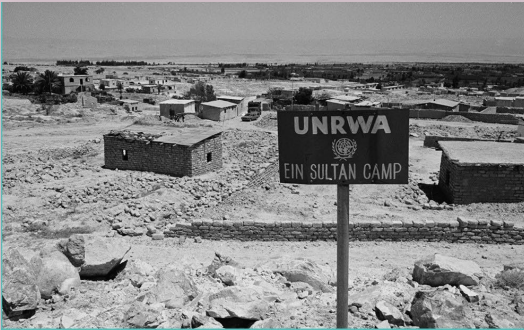
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NAKBA AND SURVIVAL

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ADEL MANNA

* Author's Bio

Nur Masalha is a Palestinian writer, historian, and academic. He is an associate member at the Centre of Palestine Studies at SOAS, University of London. He is a historian of Palestine and formerly professor of religion and politics and director of the Centre for Religion and History and the Holy Land Research Project at St. Mary's University.


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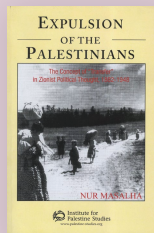
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From his Books Published by IPS:

[Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948](#)

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Institute for Palestine Studies, Anis Nsouli st. - Verdun, Beirut - Lebanon

+961 1-80-49-59

www.palestine-studies.org

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