

# Palestinians, Arabs, and the Holocaust

## INTRODUCTION

One of the major Palestinian Arab arguments regarding the establishment of the state of Israel is that the West facilitated its founding out of guilt over the Holocaust. Palestinians insist that the Holocaust is a purely Western and Christian crime that has nothing to do with them or other Arabs.<sup>1</sup> For example, Palestinian activist Omar Barghouti writes as follows:

...Palestinians—and Arabs more generally—bear no responsibility whatsoever for the Holocaust, a European genocide committed against mostly European Jews, Roma, and Slavs, among others. It is therefore not incumbent upon Palestinians to pay in our lives, lands, and livelihoods the price for relieving Europe's conscience of its collective guilt over the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup>

Jibril Rajoub, a member of the Fatah Central Committee and former Palestinian Authority security chief, asserted on July 24, 2014 that “it was the Nazis, not us, who did the Holocaust to them... We are paying the price for Europe's crimes against them in the previous century.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, PLO official Husam Zomlot recently stated that “the Nazis were responsible for it [the Holocaust]. The Palestinians had nothing to do with it. The Israelis were responsible for the Nakba.”<sup>4</sup>

This argument is part of the overall Palestinian narrative which maintains that Palestinians are the innocent victims of an injustice inflicted by others, especially Westerners and Zionists. According to Barghouti, “the conflict is a colonial conflict...based on ethnic cleansing, racism, settler colonialism, and apartheid,”<sup>5</sup> and the state of Israel “was

created through...[a] well-planned campaign of ethnic cleansing.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the *nakba*—the tragedy of the Palestinian refugees who were displaced by the war of 1948—is entirely the fault of the Zionists and their Western supporters, not of the Palestinians themselves. According to this narrative,

in 1948, the Zionists were waging a war of preplanned ethnic cleansing, not a war of self-defense against Palestinian aggressors with genocidal intentions and a history of Nazi collaboration. Therefore, any accusation of genocide and genocidal hatred should be directed only at Westerners and Zionists, not at Palestinians or Arabs.

However, the claim that Palestinians and Arabs had nothing to do with the Holocaust is false. In fact, Arab and Palestinian leaders played a significant role in aiding and abetting the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews in Europe and they hoped to implement the genocide in the Middle East. A growing number of publications, including extensive original, high-quality archival scholarship, proves this beyond a shadow of a doubt. Among the major authors are: Zvi Elpeleg,<sup>7</sup> Klaus Gensicke,<sup>8</sup> Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers,<sup>9</sup> Matthias Küntzel,<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Herf,<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Schwanitz,<sup>12</sup> and Barry Rubin.<sup>13</sup> A careful examination of this history shows that it is neither fair nor accurate to portray the Arab-Israel War of 1947–9 as an unprovoked war of aggression by Zionists bent on the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs. In fact, it was a war of self-defense against a ruthless, pro-Nazi, and openly genocidal Palestinian leadership that enjoyed enormous popularity among the Arab and Palestinian masses.

The refusal of many Palestinians to face their moral and political failings honestly contrasts with their lip-service to achieving “peace with justice” in the Middle East. If they cared about justice, they would apportion a substantial share of the blame for the *nakba* or “catastrophe” of 1948 to

themselves and would admit the existence of widespread Jew-hatred in the Arab and Islamic world and its role in undermining peace between Jews and Arabs from the 1920s to the present.

This essay will present a survey of the historical evidence of Arab and Palestinian complicity in the Holocaust. We shall divide the history into three periods: 1920– 1941; 1941–1945; and 1945 to the present, and explain the relevance of this history to the present day, especially to the failure of the various attempts to make peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

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