

The Political Implications of Palestinian Refugees:
A cross-national case study

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Abstract

Increasingly, Arab-Israeli peace talks envision a large role for Arab host countries to absorb Palestinian refugees. This paper undertakes a cross-country case study of the three largest host countries: Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Through examining the history, current living situations of refugees, and political concerns refugees pose for each country, I examine the viability and willingness of each country to integrate Palestinian communities. Each community has vastly different political implications: In Jordan, integration poses concerns for economic well-being and national identity. In Syria, absorption threatens the ruling elite and politicians are wary it may be seen as a concession to Israel and the West. Finally, Palestinian integration in Lebanon poses a threat to the demographic makeup of the country and the political system based on demographic composition. There is no over-arching solution that can account for the unique characteristics of these communities and countries. Each must be examined independently, keeping in mind the rights of all parties involved.

Introduction

Peace in the Middle East is a security concern for the entire world. Refugees are a symbol of instability and volatile politics. Scholars agree that the three major impediments to an Arab-Israeli peace treaty are the questions of territory, Jerusalem, and the Palestinian refugees. While territory claims, settlements, and the question of Jerusalem are at the forefront of public discussion, refugees are often less emphasized. The peaceful conclusion to the decades old Arab-Israeli conflict cannot possibly be approached until there is consensus on the future of the Palestinian diaspora. Often considered the most complex and pervasive conflict, the Palestinian refugee crisis is rooted in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, continued through the 1967 Six Day war,

and has been worsened by the ongoing violence in the region. According to UNRWA, there are 4.7 million registered Palestinian refugees with an average annual growth of 2.0%.¹ This population, a large majority of which resides in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza, and the West Bank, causes security concerns to host countries as they are economically burdensome and can potentially destabilize political regimes. Some academics and politicians have proposed integration into host countries, others emphasize the necessity of right of return, and others still promote third-country resettlement. Despite the urgent need to address this growing problem, parties seem as far from a peace treaty as they did in 1948.

Often, Palestinian refugees are considered a “problem population” and the diaspora is seen as a homogenous community. In fact, they vary widely from country to country and there is no simple approach to finding a sustainable solution. When framed as a “problem,” refugees are stripped of their humanity and individuality. Solutions often attempt to solve for all refugees without observing the different needs and aspirations of refugees across various countries. This research paper examines the variability of refugee populations in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, the political implications their presence poses to the host government, and the viability of integration into the communities in which they currently live.

Research Questions

This research paper attempts to answer the question: What are the political implications of Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria and how does their presence impact future solutions to the refugee crisis? The cross-country research intends to test the hypothesis: As a result of the extreme variation of the political and social situation of Palestinian refugees in

¹ This figure is politically charged in and of itself as different groups and organizations define who qualifies as a Palestinian Refugee. For UNRWA, only those who were displaced between the years of 1946-48 as a result of the 1948 conflict and their offspring are accounted for in UNRWA figures. This will be discussed further in the following pages. UNRWA.org

Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, each population must be considered independently to ensure a sustainable, peaceful, and just solution to the Palestinian refugee crisis.

Contribution

The Palestinian refugee crisis has been researched extensively on many levels. Scholars have provided historical accounts, demographic statistics, and anthropological studies. While some argue for integration, others argue that the crisis will not be solved until a policy of right of return is implemented. Still others promote the idea of third-country resettlement. Few, however, have looked at Palestinian refugee populations from a cross-country perspective and studied how solutions are invariably different in each country. I will contribute to this field by researching whether a broad solution can be applied to all Palestinians or whether their future should be addressed on a country-by-country basis.

Characteristics of Diasporas

The Palestinian diaspora can be defined as both ethno-political and transnational. An ethno-political diaspora consists of “members who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries...to maintain a common identity, diasporans identify as such, showing solidarity with their group and entire nation, and they organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic, and political spheres.”² Because they are minorities and often politically motivated, they “face the possibility of expulsion, as well as social, political, and economic hardships and rejection.”³ Gabriel Scheffer asserts that members of diasporas who assimilate usually do not take part in diaspora politics but those who find a host country unfriendly, intend to only temporarily reside in a host country, or have a strong desire to return to their homeland will be the most active participants in self-determination. According to this analysis, mitigating

² Scheffer, Gabriel. *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 78.

the Palestinian refugee crisis and the political implications they pose could be achieved through integrating populations into the host countries. While many refugees hold fast to their desire to return to the homeland, others who desire to integrate into other societies are often denied citizenship and basic rights

The Palestinian diaspora is particularly interesting because of the variability of influence and activity of diaspora populations across countries. Additionally, the persistence of the Palestinian movement is surprising due to the extremity of opposition the community faces. The fact that the Palestinian debate continues to be at the forefront of international politics is testament to the highly sophisticated organization of the movement as well as the plethora of external actors who have given support to the movement, including multi-national organizations such as the Arab League, autonomous governments like Syria and Libya, and grassroots organizations throughout the world.

Palestinian refugees and the Arab-Israeli conflict: A brief history

The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), a body established in 1949 to “carry out, in collaboration with local governments, the direct relief and works programmes as recommended by the Economic Survey Mission and to consult with interested Near Eastern governments concerning measures to be taken in preparation for the cessation of international assistance for relief and works projects,”⁴ was left to define who can be considered a refugee as the UN never offered a formal definition. The definition was largely a result of the necessity to limit UNRWA aid recipients. According to UNRWA, “a Palestinian refugee shall mean any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period of June 1, 1946 to May 15, 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of

⁴ UNGA res. 302 (IV), 8 Dec. 1949, paragraph 7.

the 1948 conflict.”⁵ It should be noted that this definition does not include those displaced by any other conflict, including the Six Day war.

While the Palestinian diaspora spans the entire globe, the majority of these UNRWA-defined refugees reside in Jordan (42%), Gaza (23%), the West Bank (16%), Syria (10%), and Lebanon (9%).⁶ Often falsely characterized as camp dwellers, less than 30% of refugees reside in refugee camps. Save for Lebanon and Gaza, where 53% and 46% of refugees reside in camps (respectively), the majority of refugees are integrated into host societies.⁷ Most, however, maintain their Palestinian identity, even 2nd and 3rd generations. Other definitions yield different figures; according to the PLO’s definition, there are approximately seven million refugees, a little more than twice the number UNRWA recognizes.⁸ Definitions vary based on political ambitions, self-definition, and administrative aims.

Upon the fall of the Ottoman Empire, French and British mandates divided the Middle East to undermine the realization of a pan-Arab single nation. Great Britain administered Palestine under the British Mandate from 1920-1948. In 1947, the UN partitioned the mandate into an Arab and Jewish state. Palestinian Arab leaders rejected the new boundaries and sectarian violence erupted in the region. While Israel was able to establish a state, Jordan annexed the West Bank and Egypt oversaw Gaza after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The UN redrew borders in 1967 and Israel has occupied the territories since that date. As such, Palestine has gone through a series of land swaps and territorial ambiguity, which has impeded state building. Territory and borders have become highly politicized in the international arena and continue to cause divisive disagreements.

⁵ Bocco, Riccardo. “UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History Within History.” *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Vol. 28, (2010), 237.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁸ PLO. *The Palestinian Refugees Factfile*. Jerusalem/Ramallah: PLO Department of Refugee Affairs April 2000.

Refugees stem from two major conflicts: the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and the 1967 Six Day War. The Palestinian War, which refers to the 1947-1948 civil war in Mandatory Palestine and the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, caused some 720,000 Palestinians refugees to seek refuge in neighboring countries or within Palestinian territory. During the civil war (November 1947 to May 1948), Israelis and Palestinians fought and British forces gradually withdrew from the territories, rarely intervening in the rapidly escalating conflict. Israel's declaration of independence in 1948 spurred yet another conflict: the Arab-Israeli War. The war commenced when Arab countries rejected UN General Assembly Resolution 181 that called for the creation of a Jewish state next to an Arab state. Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria attacked Israel and sent forces into Palestine. Seen as both a tactical and strategic Arab failure, the war ended with the 1949 Armistice Agreements. Directly following the war, Egypt administered the Gaza Strip while Jordan oversaw the West Bank.

As previously noted, UNRWA includes only this population in their definition of a Palestinian refugee and disregards the additional 300,000 refugees resulting from the 1967 Six Day War. During the 1967 war, Israel once again proved victorious over Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria. Upon victory, Israel seized control of the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. It is no coincidence that refugees fled to these countries; those in the West Bank largely resettled in Jordan, those in Gaza went to Egypt, and those in the Golan Heights fled to Syria. These refugees are unable to access UNRWA services as they do not fall under the organization's definition of who is a refugee.

Vital to refugee claims is the 1948 UN Resolution 194, which states, "refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the

earliest predictable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for the loss or damage to the property.” Palestinians use this resolution as justification to demand their right to return to their homes, the majority of which have since been demolished or inhabited by Israeli citizens. Israel has never supported the claim to right to return, arguing that return would upset the Jewishness of the state. They have, however, seriously considered compensation to address the refugee crisis.⁹

UNRWA has become an important institution for Palestinian refugees. As an international organization, its existence ensures that Palestinian refugees have a global hearing. UNRWA is a major source of employment for refugees; 99% of employees fall under the refugee definition.¹⁰ It operates within Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and runs fifty-eight camps and 689 schools.¹¹ UNRWA receives its funding solely from donors and as such is often required to take donors’ political interests into account. Although it attempts to be politically non-affiliated, their assistance to refugees is often criticized as being politicizing. Some argue that the essential services provided by UNRWA protect refugees and their cause. These same sources argue that without such an organization, Palestinians would be more receptive to integration into host societies.¹² Despite criticism, there continues to be a need for an international organization to provide essential services to Palestinian refugees as they are often in a state of political limbo and unable to access government services. The living conditions of refugees since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000 (al-Aqsa) have been

⁹ Dumper, Michael. *The Future for Palestinian Refugees: Towards Equity and Peace*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007, 26.

¹⁰ Bocco, 238.

¹¹ Bocco, 238.

¹² R. Bowker, as qtd. in Bocco, 236.

rapidly deteriorating.¹³ Not only is the refugee situation a social and political concern, it is also a humanitarian crisis.

The Refugee Question in Peace Negotiations

In the various countries to which they fled, Palestinians fought for a voice but remained largely unrepresented until the 1970s. They were not cohesively represented until 1964 when the Arab League founded the PLO. The newly recognized PLO took up arms and engaged in guerilla warfare targeted at Israel to promote self-determination and the right of return. Subsequently, the PLO was forcibly expelled from Jordan by the government in 1970 after clashes with the Jordanian military threatened political stability. It then reestablished itself in Lebanon, from where it was expelled in 1982 by the Israeli army. It was not until 1988 that the PLO officially endorsed a two-state solution and abandoned paramilitary activity. By 1993, the PLO's relationship with Israel took a surprising turn when secret peace negotiations lead to the Oslo Accords. The Accords outlined a peace process that included the PLO's renunciation of terrorist acts, an establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and the withdrawal of Israel from most of the Gaza Strip and from Jericho. As for the refugee crisis, the accords failed to offer a solution, instead agreeing that the future of refugees would not be addressed until five years after the PNA was established. While the Oslo accords were largely ineffective, it was a hopeful sign that negotiations between Israel and Palestine were possible.¹⁴

The 2000 Camp David Accords, hosted by President Bill Clinton, also failed to resolve the refugee question. President Clinton outlined five possible outcomes for the refugees: Repatriation to the state of Palestine; resettlement in areas of Israel transferred to Palestine via a land swap; rehabilitation in a host country; resettlement in a third country; and admission to

¹³ Bocco, 243.

¹⁴ Dumper, 30.

Israel.¹⁵ While the Accords failed overall, this was one of the first indications that the international community realized the centrality of the refugee issue to peace.

During the Taba talks in Egypt in 2001, Israel agreed to the return of a limited number of refugees on the basis of family reunification and discussed compensation, but ultimately failed to reach a lasting agreement.¹⁶ During the Arab Summit Declaration of 2002, the Arab World offered the normalization of relations and security for Israel in return for Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories, the return of refugees, and the creation of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel, however, did not agree to these demands. The continued attacks on Israel, particularly the second intifada and the violent victory of the radical Islamist Resistance Movement (Hamas) over Fatah for control of the Gaza Strip in 2006, have complicated negotiations further. Throughout these talks many refugees “have felt that their rights were being traded away in favor of obtaining the basic territorial components of a Palestinian state.”¹⁷ Refugees’ lack of representation in peace talks has caused further disgruntlement.

Literature Review

The literature on solutions to the Palestinian Diaspora is extensive, complex, and debated at every level. Taking into account the wide spectrum of viewpoints represented, most literature can be roughly divided into two camps:

1. The Palestinian right to return to their homeland is a human right and therefore the international community is obligated to promote and uphold it; Israel must acknowledge its responsibility for the refugee crisis.

¹⁵ As qtd. in Dumper, 31.

¹⁶ Dumper, 32.

¹⁷ Dumper, 33.

2. The return of Palestinians to historic Palestine is impossible given the social, economic, and political implications it would pose; Arab countries are largely responsible for finding alternative, sustainable solutions to the crisis.

Many scholars and activists simplify these two strands of thoughts into the “Palestinian viewpoint” and the “Israeli viewpoint,” respectively. While there are certain aspects of each theory that align with the vision of these two populations, it is overly simplistic to delineate the debate as such and entrenches harmful stereotypes. In the following sections, I will explain these two viewpoints by offering examples of scholars and politicians that adhere to each and demonstrate the variation, value, and shortcomings within each.

The Right of Return as a Human Right and International Obligation

Mohamed Hawary, Manuel Hassassian, and Rashid Khalidi all use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and various United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions to support their argument that Palestinians have a fundamental right to return to their homes in Palestine. The extent to which they uphold this right, however, varies from Hawary’s position that all Palestinians must have the option to return to historic Palestine (now Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank) to Khalidi’s more pragmatic vision of a blend of compensation, repatriation, and resettlement in modern-day Palestine and Arab host countries.

An Egyptian professor of Jewish Studies at Ain Shams University in Cairo, Mohamed Hawary argues that Palestinians have certain undeniable rights, including: the right to return to their homes, humanitarian services, self-determination, Palestinian nationality, and civil and religious rights.¹⁸ He argues that refugees in any situation are entitled to return to their homes when wars end, supported through the UDHR and achieved historically in cases such as the 1971

¹⁸ Hawary, Mohamed, “Between the Right of Return and Attempts of Resettlement.” In *Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems-New Solutions*, Ginat, Joseph and Edward Perkins, 34-45. Brighton: University of Oklahoma Press 2001.

return of twelve million Bangladeshis at the conclusion of the India-Pakistan war. Palestinians, therefore, should enjoy the same rights. According to Hawary, Israel, at the very least, should accept several tens of thousands of refugees, particularly family reunification cases. Because this protection is an international and historic norm, the United Nations and international community have a moral and legal obligation to facilitate the return of Palestinian refugees to their rightful homes.

Hawary, along with scholars who make similar arguments, rely heavily on UNGA Resolution 194. Ratified by the UN in 1948 and reiterated every year since, Resolution 194, paragraph 11 reads:

Refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.¹⁹

Hawary calls on international bodies to fulfill this decades-old resolution and advocates intervention by the International Court of Justice if necessary. Hawary argues, “well-meaning people who suggest that the Palestinians should have a homeland either in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip or elsewhere outside their homeland are the victims of Israeli-Zionist propaganda.”²⁰ He continues to explain that a proposal that suggests that Palestinians should settle in Arab countries of current residence denies Palestinians their right to a homeland. Furthermore, it coerces Arab countries to unwillingly absorb people who are not citizens and can potentially disrupt the traditional demographics of those countries. The protracted existence of Palestinian populations as a separate community within host countries across the Arab world illustrates that

¹⁹ UNGA res. 194, December 11, 1948.

²⁰ Hawary, 39.

Palestinians have neither the desire nor the intention of accepting their current residencies as a long-term solution. Finally, he asserts:

“Compensation” does not mean that this compensation should be paid to “all refugees” as a price for their forgotten homeland. A “homeland” is not for sale...(Their homeland) is a great value, which they have inherited from their ancestors, and should be bequeathed to their descendants.²¹

Similar to Hawary, Manuel Hassassian, in “The Political Refugee Problem in the Light of the Peace Process,”²² uses the UDHR to argue Palestinian’s right to return. He highlights several articles of the UDHR that protect this right, including Article 13, which outlines the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state and the right to leave any country and return to a home country. Hassassian outlines several necessary elements a solution must encompass, namely an analysis of the absorptive capacity of the West Bank and Gaza and the economic implications of a mass influx of Palestinians into those territories, a phasing out of UNRWA and handover of refugee services to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the cooperation of Arab countries to respond to the reality that some refugees desire to stay in host countries, and the costs at all levels to mitigate the crisis and an understanding of who will pay for the implementation of a solution.²³ While Hassassian and Hawary both argue that the right of return is an international obligation, Hassassian takes a less stringent approach and argues for the return of Palestinians to the current borders of the West Bank and Gaza instead of to their 1947 homes.

Cited by many scholars as pragmatic and “middle-road,” Rashid Khalidi, a scholar at Columbia University, outlines a solution that is often used as an example of a just solution that

²¹ Ibid., 43.

²² Hassassian, Manuel. “The Political Refugee Problem in the Light of the Peace Process.” *Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems-New Solutions*, Ginat, Joseph and Edward Perkins, 57-76. Brighton: University of Oklahoma Press 2001.

²³ Hassassian, 59.

focuses on the rights of Palestinians instead of political ambitions. In numerous essays, including “The Palestinian Refugee Problem: A Possible Solution,” Khalidi puts forth the following conditions for a resolution:

1. Israel must acknowledge its accountability for the creation of the Palestinian Diaspora and must accept, in principle, the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland,
2. Palestinians must recognize that this right cannot be literally exercised and be willing to accept repatriation into the West Bank and Gaza,
3. Israel should accept tens of thousands of refugees, particularly family reunification cases,
4. Reparations should be made for those not allowed to return and compensation should be paid for those who lost property in 1948, and
5. Palestinians who choose to remain in Jordan should be offered full citizenship and those in Lebanon must be granted the option of returning to Palestine or being granted permanent residency in Lebanon.²⁴

This solution seeks a compromise while still supporting the right of return. However, it fails to establish a detailed explanation of how clauses one and two could be realistically implemented. Israel’s acceptance of the right of return is problematic because it assumes that a large number of refugees will choose to remain in the country of current residence but does not address the possibility that the majority of refugees will seek to return. If this were the case, the size of the West Bank and Gaza and their fragile infrastructure would be unable to accommodate all the returnees. Additionally, it does not take into account internally displaced people (IDPs) in the West Bank and Gaza or assess responsibilities to fund repatriation and compensation.

²⁴ Khalidi, Rashid. “The Palestinian Refugee Problem: A Possible Solution.” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 2 (4) (Autumn 1995): 72-78.

As evidenced by the three scholars above, there exist levels of gradation among proponents adhering to UN Resolutions that promote Palestinians' right to return. While all make valid points, the most cited activists, such as Khalidi, attempt to strike a fine balance between protecting the rights and well-being of both Israelis and Palestinians. The PNA has maintained the official position that the right of return in some form is necessary for any sustainable solution, yet seems to have ignored the issue in several peace talks.

Alternative Viewpoints on the Right to Return

Representing another school of thought, the Israeli government denies any refugee the right to return, except in exceptional family reunification cases, and views any admission of Palestinians as a political claim to be determined in future peace negotiations. Published on the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, Ruth Lapidoth's article, "Do Palestinian Refugees Have a Right to Return to Israel?" refutes arguments based on UN resolutions or prior Israeli-Arab agreements. According to her argument, UDHR clause 13, the right to return or enter one's country, "is intended to apply to individuals asserting an individual right. There was no intention here to address the claims of masses of people who have been displaced as a by-product of war or by political transfers of territory or population."²⁵ As for UN resolutions used by those supporting the right of return, she argues that all UN resolutions are non-binding. In her argument, she notes that Arab States originally rejected resolution 194 and anti-Israeli activists isolate paragraphs to support their argument to use only where they see beneficial results. Additionally, resolutions never specifically identify return as a right, but rather "recommend that the refugees "should" be "permitted" to return."²⁶ Finally, the resolution makes two conditions

²⁵ Lapidoth, Ruth. "Do Palestinian Refugees Have a Right to Return to Israel?" *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, January 15 2001. Web <www.mfa.gov.il>.

²⁶ Ibid.

for return: that the refugee wishes to return and that he or she is willing to live in peace with his/her neighbors. Lapidoth uses the ongoing attacks by Palestinians on Israeli territory as evidence that refugees have not adequately demonstrated a desire to live in peace. In regards to agreements between Israel and its neighbors, such as the 1978 Camp David Framework for Peace in the Middle East and the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian agreement, Lapidoth supports her argument by pointing out that the right of return was never specifically mentioned. Lapidoth concludes her argument that the right of return is an empty claim by asserting: “if Israel were to allow them to return to her territory, this would be an act of suicide on her part, and no state can be expected to destroy itself.”²⁷

Israeli politicians maintain similar viewpoints. They argue that Arab countries have a large responsibility to solve the refugee crisis because the 1947 War was a war of aggression and therefore Arabs caused the expulsion of Palestinians. They also point out that Arab countries have a larger capacity (both financially and geographically) than Israel to absorb refugees and that security and political concerns inhibit Israel from accepting refugees. Furthermore, an influx of Palestinians would undermine the Jewish character of the state. When pushed to concede, some Israeli negotiators have attached specific figures to the number of Palestinians Israel should allow into the country (during the 2001 Taba Talks, the number 25,000 was suggested). Others call for original 1948 refugees to be allowed admittance because they pose little threat to the demographics of Israeli as they are well beyond reproductive age.²⁸ In a 1999 Knesset speech, Ehud Barak expressed regret for the refugee crisis, but insisted that regret was not based on a feeling of guilt or responsibility for the emergence of the conflict or its results.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ PRRN. “Palestinian Refugees and Final Status: Key Issues.” Web. <PRRN.mcgill.ca>.

²⁹ Arzt, Donna. “Actual Repatriation: A Minimal Israeli Gesture.” *Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems-New Solutions*, Ginat, Joseph and Edward Perkins, 122-138. Brighton: University of Oklahoma Press 2001.

Furthermore, Israel rejects accountability for further refugee settlements and encourages the creation of a new international body to be tasked with rehabilitation, compensation, and the funding of conflict mitigation.³⁰ This isn't to say, however, that Israelis are uninterested in the well-being of Palestinians. Ze'Ev Schiff, Ha'aretz military correspondent, argued, "Israel should participate in a humanitarian effort to rehabilitate refugees, recognizing that it bears no responsibility to compensate these refugees for damages suffered during a war initiated by others during which Israelis themselves suffered greatly."³¹

These viewpoints are problematic because they disregard the willingness of other countries to cooperate and absorb refugees as well as largely ignore Israel's role in solving the crisis. Additionally, arguing that an influx of Palestinians would undermine the Jewish character of the State homogenizes Arab countries as they too have a unique national identity that would be threatened with the resettlement of large Palestinian populations. Largely, these viewpoints point fingers at who should be held responsible rather than provide an outline for how to move forward.

A Possible Compromise

Within these opposing viewpoints, some scholars attempt to find a tough compromise. Notably, Donna Arzt firmly states that both parties need to "get real" and concede on certain elements. She outlines elements that a refugee solution must entail:

1. Realistic options for Palestinians, including the option to remain where they are and receive a compensation package to rehabilitate themselves;
2. The option to move to the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, with aid from the international community to reconstitute these areas;

³⁰ Benn, Aluf. "Trenches, Obstacles to be built Between Israel." *Haaretz*, June 21 2000.

³¹ As quoted in Arzt, Donna, p. 130.

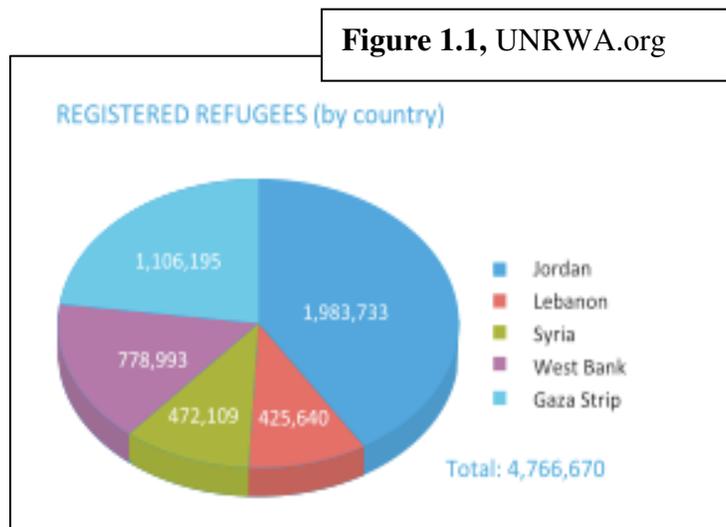
3. An Israeli acceptance of some 75,000 Palestinians to symbolically carry the burden while demonstrating their desire to cooperate with Arab neighbors.³²

Joseph Ginat and Dale Eickelman, in “From Refugees to Citizens: A Regional Proposal,” examine the viability of host countries absorbing refugees.³³ They determine that Palestinians have a strong sense of family ties and kinship. Because they have lived in host countries for multiple generations, it is best to reconstruct refugee camps into towns to maintain the community cohesion that already exists.

Compromises such as these are most promising because they avoid blaming a particular party and attempt to equitably distribute the responsibility of all involved to once and for all end a crisis that has existed for far too many generations. However, these compromises fail to account for the multitude of issues that extending host-country citizenship to Palestinians would pose for particularly politically fragile countries, examined in the remainder of this paper.

Country Case Studies

The majority of mainstream solutions envision a large role for Arab countries hosting refugees to resolve the crisis. As seen in figure 1.1, UNRWA-registered refugees are distributed across five main countries/territories, though the



Palestinian diaspora spreads throughout the entire world. While host countries are a valuable resource that can have a huge impact on the future of the refugee crisis, each country varies in its

³² Ibid.,125

³³ In *Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems-New Solutions*, Ginat, Joseph and Edward Perkins, 139-149. Brighton: University of Oklahoma Press 2001.

capacity and willingness to absorb refugees. Therefore, it is important to study the refugee situation in each country to understand how best to approach each government and involve them in future solutions. Many Arab countries are hesitant to extend citizenship to refugees because they view such an act as a concession to Israel or because it may disrupt their political and economic state and national identity. States cannot be forced to absorb refugees. These countries, along with refugees themselves, must be part of negotiations and talks. In the following sections, I will examine countries with large refugee populations and the political implications refugees have in each.

Jordan

By UNRWA accounts, there are 1.9 million Palestinian refugees currently in Jordan, who account for 41.6% of all UNRWA registered refugees.³⁴ 17.2% of the 1.9 million reside in thirteen camps; ten are administered jointly by UNRWA and the government, and three by the government alone.³⁵ Palestinian refugees have always comprised an overwhelming percent of the population in Jordan; it is estimated that anywhere from 55 to 70% of the population is of Palestinian descent.³⁶ The large range of this estimate is testament to the complicated, intertwined history of Jordan and Palestine. Jordan has both benefited from and been burdened by the refugee crisis: it has been a recipient of substantial aid for refugee services, but the cost of additional services, such as education and infrastructure in camps, has had a negative impact on the economy. It has benefited from refugee participation in the labor force, yet struggles with an official 13.5% rate of unemployment (some sources estimate unemployment to be as high as

³⁴ UNRWA. "In Figures: As of 1 January 2010." Web. <www.unrwa.org>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Sharp, Jeremy. "Jordan: Background and US Relations." CRS: 2010, 3.

30%).³⁷ Remittances from Palestinians working in the Gulf have aided public and private sectors. All in all, Jordan has proven to be the most successful example of Palestinian integration.

History: Palestinian Refugees in Jordan

When Arab countries were defeated in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Palestine was divided into three regions. Jordan protected the West Bank region and in 1952 included it as official Jordanian territory in the constitution. As a result of the unification of the two banks,³⁸ the population of Jordan tripled within two years.³⁹ While this acquisition aided the monarchy in gaining legitimacy by increasing both population and territory, it proved to be extremely burdensome to the economy. All Palestinians who were incorporated into Jordan as a result of the war and the annexation of the West Bank were extended Jordanian citizenship. Citizenship, however, did not translate to national identity and the government embarked upon vigorous programs to try to unify the society and encourage Palestinians to join in the government. Despite a large number of Palestinians integrating into society, gaining jobs and property, and forming the bulk of the Jordanian middle class, they maintained their Palestinian identity and often treated their citizenship as “a temporary means for claiming public rights.”⁴⁰

Another 300,000 refugees fled to Jordan as a result of the 1967 Six Day War. Israel captured the West Bank and Jerusalem, though Jordan did not formally renounce territorial claims until 1988. When it did renounce territorial and administrative control, it withdrew Jordanian citizenship from Palestinians living in the West Bank. Those in the East Bank were

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The two banks refer to banks of the Jordan River. The East Bank refers to current Jordan and the West to current Palestine.

³⁹ Haddad, Mohanna. “Palestinian Refugees in Jordan and National Identity, 1948-1999.” *Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems-New Solutions*, Ginat, Joseph and Edward Perkins, 150-168. Brighton: University of Oklahoma Press 2001, 154.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 156.

not affected, even if they were of West Bank origin. Refugees who came via Gaza and after 1967 fared far worse than prior refugees and still do not have citizenship.

After the 1967 war, there was an increase in Palestinian paramilitary activity within Jordan by Palestinian militant groups, called the *fedayeen*. Armed and seen as a threat to Jordan's security and sovereignty, King Hussein attempted to thwart the *fedayeen* and in September 1970, Jordanian forces expelled these factions. The military conflict, commonly referred to as Black September, caused thousands of deaths (the majority of which were Palestinian), and estranged many Palestinian-Jordanians from the host society.

The last wave of Palestinian refugees sought haven in Jordan during the 1991 Gulf War, during which Jordan absorbed 300,000 Palestinians expelled from Kuwait. These refugees increased the Jordanian population by approximately 5% and exerted further pressure on infrastructure, housing, and public services.⁴¹

Jordan and Israel have maintained peaceful relations since the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty signed in October 1994. Since the second intifada in September 2000, Jordan has increasingly acted as an intermediary between Israel and Palestine. The Jordanian government plays an important role in the peace process, maintaining open communication, training many Palestinian security force personnel, and engaging in negotiations.

Current Living Conditions: Palestinian Refugees in Jordan

As previously mentioned, only 17.2% of refugees live in thirteen camps run by UNRWA and the Jordanian Government. Within these camps, refugees have access to education, health, occupational training, and basic infrastructure. Refugees living outside of camps have comparable living conditions to non-refugee citizens and fertility, infant mortality, and education

⁴¹ Arneberg, Marie (ed.). *Living Conditions Among Palestinian Refugees and Displaced in Jordan*. Norway: Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science 1997.

rates are only slightly different. As testament to the level of integration of those living outside of camps, 70% own their own home and 95% have Jordanian citizenship.⁴² Services provided by UNRWA are sometimes superior to those provided to Jordanians by the government and can cause tension between the two communities.⁴³ Refugees are less active in political affairs, though not drastically: 55% participated in elections versus a 67% voter turn out for non-refugees.⁴⁴ Unemployment in camps is extremely high, where 22% of the population was unemployed in 1997.⁴⁵ The increasing reduction in camp dwellers is largely a result of laws forbidding the expansion of housing units in the camps.

Refugee services for camp dwellers are extremely burdensome to the Jordanian government. In 1998, costs of services, including education, infrastructure, social aid, policing, and health services reached \$350 million.⁴⁶ With 1998 GDP equaling \$7.9 billion, refugee services constituted 4.5% of total GDP.⁴⁷

Political Ambitions and Implications: Palestinian Refugees in Jordan

As a result of the rights they enjoy, scholars project that only 10-13% of the refugee population would choose to return to Palestine if given the opportunity.⁴⁸ Those projected to return include refugees who originated from Gaza and do not enjoy Jordanian citizenship. Of all the countries with large Palestinian populations, Jordan is best suited to absorb Palestinian refugees already residing in the country due to the large population already integrated into society. Within a solution, however, Jordan will have to receive international donor support for providing services to refugees as well as funds to assist those in camps find permanent residence.

⁴² Arneberg, 17, 25, 16.

⁴³ Haddad, 158.

⁴⁴ Arneberg, 61.

⁴⁵ Haddad, 158.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 160.

⁴⁷ The World Bank. Web: < <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>>.

⁴⁸ Haddad, 164.

Several political implications must be taken into consideration when determining the viability of a solution to the Palestinian refugees in Jordan. The granting of Jordanian citizenship to the Palestinians who do not yet have it (about 170,000 by UNRWA estimates) could undermine the ruling monarchy, Jordanian nationalism, and create instability in the Jordanian economy.

It is likely that Palestinians would constitute over half of the population in Jordan if more were extended citizenship. The overwhelming number of Palestinians could question Hashemite authority and pressure the government to refocus its policies to be more Palestinian-oriented. For example, the Palestinian population could possibly encourage the government to be more vocal with demands for Israeli concessions, provide more foreign aid to Gaza and the West Bank, and take a hard-lined stand on the Palestinian claim of Jerusalem. Additionally, Palestinians could lobby for more relaxed immigration laws, particularly in cases of family reunification, further increasing the Palestinian population in Jordan. For many Jordanians, this could be viewed as a slow process of undermining Jordanian nationality and an attempt to create a second Palestinian state. Historically, the PLO negatively impacted the Jordanian government and society during the 1970s when it tried to create state-within-a-state. After this experience, the government in Amman would regulate Palestinian-oriented political parties carefully to ensure that they did not pose a substantial threat to the current political system in Jordan.

If all were granted citizenship, Palestinians would constitute an even more important voting block than they currently do and would probably demand more representation in the government. Within Jordan, there is little opposition to the monarchy. If more refugees were granted citizenship, particularly those who have lived in Jordan with limited rights, they might show more loyalty to Palestinian political parties, such as the PLO and Hamas. Their numbers would be enough to energize the Palestinian population and force the monarchy to make

significant concessions to appease Palestinians and maintain power. However, it is unlikely that they would be a strong enough force to overthrow the monarchy.

Jordan's economy is highly volatile and dependent on remittances from abroad, Western donors, and trade with neighboring countries. These considerations play a central role in the foreign relations of the government. Jordan maintains close relations with the West and Arab neighbors and the government is aware that alienating countries would negatively impact the resource poor country. Therefore, any action Jordan takes concerning the Palestinian population will take into account existing relations Jordan has with the US, UK, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, to name a few. While Western countries would likely encourage Jordan to provide a permanent solution to the refugees, other Arab countries may see this as too large a concession to Israel. The granting of citizenship may be characterized as appeasing Israel and allowing it to escape its responsibilities for the refugees. Additionally, absorbing more refugees would prove to be extremely burdensome to Jordan, as it would necessitate the creation of jobs and the provision of social services to more citizens. With a large reduction of refugees, UNRWA would no longer be a major force. This would cause the elimination of a significant employer of many refugees as well as the removal of a huge portion of foreign aid targeted towards the refugee population. Jordan, with help from the international community, would have to pursue new ways to generate revenue to ensure future economic stability.

A final concern to take into consideration is whether the absorption of more Palestinians will set a dangerous precedent for future immigrant populations in Jordan. Currently, there are approximately 451,000 Iraqi refugees residing in Jordan.⁴⁹ If Jordan agrees to grant citizenship to Palestinians, the international community may assume that they would be willing to do the same with Iraqis unable to return to their homes. It is unlikely that Jordan desires to be

⁴⁹ UNHCR.org

characterized as a haven for all oppressed populations in the region for fear of undermining Jordanian nationalism. Therefore, the monarchy will inevitably consider what consequences future immigration policies towards Palestinian refugees may have.

Syria

History: Syrian-Palestinian Relations

Syria was part of the Ottoman Empire until World War I. Since independence from the French mandate in 1946, Syria has been enmeshed in the Arab-Israeli conflict and has had extremely strained relations with Israel. In 1948, Syria joined Arab forces in the war against Israel. While its forces were quickly defeated and expelled from Palestinian territory, they were able to maintain control of the Golan Heights, strategic territory on the Israeli-Syrian border that has been cause for continued friction between the two states and which is now occupied by Israel. Syria was extremely volatile for the first two decades of its modern statehood. From 1958-1961, it joined with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic. In 1963, the Ba'ath party took power. Until late April 2011, the country had been under an Emergency Law since 1963 under the pretense of continued conflict with Israel. Syria took an active role in the 1967 Six Day war, during which it sponsored Palestinian raids into Israel and used the Golan Heights as a staging ground for troops and a launching point for bombs directed at Israeli territory. As a result of the war, Israel captured two-thirds of the Golan Heights and continues to occupy it, though the territory is internationally recognized as Syrian. Syria also joined forces with Egypt in the Yom Kippur War (1973), though unlike Egypt, it did not seek peace with Israel after the war.

Syria has had only two presidents since 1970 and the country is not considered democratic in the international arena. It has been on the U.S. Department of State's State Sponsors of Terrorist list since December 1979. President Hafez al-Assad ruled Syria from 1970 until his death in 2000 and was succeeded by his son, current President Bashar al-Assad. Though the ruling Ba'ath party is secular and 74% of the country is Sunni,⁵⁰ the ruling elite, senior military personnel, and secret police are affiliated with the Alawites, a Shi'a minority religious group that composes less than 10% of the Syrian population. President Bashar al-Assad is Alawite himself. The regime is careful to give representation in the government to the many minority groups in Syria, including Druze, Shi'a, and various Christian sects.

Syria has a history of aligning with the Palestinian cause and has often supported Palestinian aspirations in the international community. In 1968, soon-to-be President Hafez al-Assad organized the highly controversial Syrian-controlled Ba'athist Palestinian political and military faction, called Sa'iqa, which was composed mainly of Palestinian refugees in Syria. This military force was very influential in the Ba'athists' rise to power and Assad's eventual accession to the Presidency. Today, it is an insignificant force outside of Syria, though it does maintain a presence in Lebanon. Instead of mobilizing these Syrian-organized troops, the government in Damascus has shifted its strategy from responding to the Arab-Israeli conflict directly to supporting Islamist factions such as Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. These terrorist organizations maintain offices in Damascus as well as training facilities in other parts of the country. The Syrian government has done little to distance itself from them despite international pressure.

⁵⁰ Shafie, 1.

Syria was also highly influential in the nascent PLO run by Ahmad Shukairy (1964-1967), known to be highly militant and anti-Israeli.⁵¹ During Black September in Jordan (1970), Syria sent troops to assist militant Palestinians in their struggle against the government in Amman. After its expulsion from Jordan, the PLO relocated to Lebanon and sparked an arms race among Lebanese political factions, which contributed to the Lebanese civil war from 1975-1990. Syria intervened in the 15-year conflict, attempting to control Lebanon and thwart Israeli forces in the south through guerilla warfare, heavily relying on Palestinian militants as a proxy force. Syria occupied Lebanon and the government in Damascus began to view the PLO's quasi state within a state as threatening to Syria's influence in the country. Relations between Damascus and the PLO soured, and Arafat claimed that Syria was attempting to "divide and control the PLO."⁵² Despite many attempts, Syria was unable to control the PLO, largely due to the loyalty of refugees to the PLO.⁵³ Throughout the Lebanese civil war, much of the confrontation between Israelis, Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese took place in refugee camps and refugees were often used as a military tool for the warring factions. It was not until 2005, after the Syrian-suspected assassination of Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri, that Syria withdrew troops. Syria's continued relations with Iran and Hamas cause suspicion within Israeli and Western governments.

Current Living Conditions: Palestinian Refugees in Syria

Information about Palestinian refugees in Syria is not as complete as other major host countries as a result of the closed nature of Syrian society.⁵⁴ UNRWA reports that 9.9% of all

⁵¹ Talhami, Ghada Hashem. *Syria and the Palestinians*. University Press of Florida: Gainesville, 2001, 91.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵⁴ Most primary data sources are outdated. I will be relying mainly on a Fafo report that interviewed refugees in 2001. Fafo assumes that statistics today only slightly fluctuates from those collected ten years ago. (Tiltnes, Age (ed.). *Palestinian Refugees in Syria*. Norway: Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science 2006.)

registered Palestinian refugees reside in Syria, or 472,109.⁵⁵ This number represents approximately 3% of the total Syrian population. 27.1% reside in camps.⁵⁶ Most refugees originate from northern Israel, Syria's western neighbor. The Syrian government has institutionalized the Palestinian refugee response by establishing the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR), which jointly administers camps with UNRWA and provides essential services to refugees.

There were several waves of refugees seeking protection in Syria: Firstly, the 70,000 original refugees that resulted from the 1947 war. An additional 125,000 refugees were displaced during the Six Day war, many of whom fled from the Golan Heights.⁵⁷ In 1970, another wave of refugees fled to Syria from Jordan as a result of Black September. Finally, a few thousand refugees sought shelter in Syria after Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1978.⁵⁸ For many of these refugees, Syria was their second or third country of relocation.

In 1965, Syria ratified the League of Arab States' Casablanca Protocol, which states that Arab countries should extend Palestinian refugees rights to employment, residency, and freedom of movement but maintain their Palestinian identity by not granting them citizenship. Currently, Syrian law reflects this protocol and states that Palestinians are treated, "like Syrians by origin in Syria, in all matters pertaining to...the rights of employment, work, commerce and national obligations and by keeping their nationality of origin."⁵⁹ They are able to access government education service, legally work in any sector, own homes and businesses, and own houses (though they are restricted from owning farmland). It should be noted, however, that similar

⁵⁵ UNRWA. "In Figures: As of 1 January 2010." Web. <www.unrwa.org>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Tiltnes, 4.

⁵⁸ Shafie, Sherifa. "Palestinian Refugees in Syria," Forced Migration Online Research Guide 2003. <www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo017/fmo017.pdf>, 3.

⁵⁹ Syrian Government. Law no. 260 July 10, 1956.

rights between Syrian citizens and refugees do not necessarily equate to protected human rights. Amnesty International observes that Syria is one of the most notorious human rights offenders, noting that peaceful dissent is often punished, torture by police forces is frequent, and arbitrary detention is common.⁶⁰ Donna Arzt explains that refugees are not immune to this mistreatment:

Hundreds of Palestinians are reportedly languishing in Syria's appallingly overcrowded prisons, many held without trial, others with sentences as long as 12 years, for crimes such as spying for the PLO, trying to emigrate without permission, traveling to Israel, or no known grounds...Some Palestinians claim that family members traveled to Syria, often to study, and then disappeared, as long as 20 years ago.⁶¹

In lieu of citizenship, Palestinians are granted six-year travel documents that allow them to leave and return to Syria at their free will. Palestinians not residing in Syria are not granted freedom of travel to Syria and those from Gaza and Jericho are prohibited from visiting Syria. The government "has taken strict measure to control the entry of Palestinian refugees with Egyptian, Jordanian, and Iraqi Travel Documents as a precaution against any possibility of their resettlement in Syria."⁶² This is troubling as over half of all households have close relatives living outside of Syria (primarily in the Gulf, Jordan, Lebanon, and Europe).⁶³ Palestinians in Syria can only gain Syrian citizenship through marriage (though only Palestinian females marrying Syrian males are eligible) and it is estimated that only about 3,500 refugees, less than 1%, have citizenship.⁶⁴

There are fourteen refugee camps in Syria, ten of which are recognized and run by UNRWA. Unlike in other host countries, camps are relatively well integrated with nearby towns and cities. While the Syrian government provides basic utilities in camps, there are frequent

⁶⁰ Amnesty International. "Syria- Amnesty International Report 2010." New York: Amnesty International 2010.

⁶¹ Arzt, Donna. *Refugees into Citizens: Palestinians and the End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1997, 48.

⁶² Shafie, Sherifa. "Palestinian Refugees in Syria," *Forced Migration Online Research Guide* 2003. <www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo017/fmo017.pdf>, 4.

⁶³ Tiltne, 10.

⁶⁴ Arzt, 48.

water supply shortages, sewage systems are outdated or nonexistent, and streets remain unpaved. One half of Palestinians in camps live at or below the poverty line.⁶⁵ Outside of the camps, the living situation, economic patterns, and educational achievements of Palestinian refugees are comparable to Syrian citizens.

Living conditions have improved substantially over time. Child mortality fell by one-third over a twenty-year period, fertility rates are at an all-time low at 3.3 children per woman, and life expectancy has risen to 74 years for women and 70 for men.⁶⁶ Education rates have soared as well. A mere 27% of 60-69 year-olds have completed elementary school or more and 60% are illiterate, starkly contrasted with the 90% of 15-29 year-olds who have completed elementary school and 10% illiteracy rate.⁶⁷ As compared with Jordan, Lebanon, and the Occupied Territories, both female and male refugees in Syria have the lowest unemployment and poverty rates.⁶⁸

Political Ambitions and Implications: Palestinian Refugees in Syria

As a result of the relative integration of Palestinians in Syria and the fact that they have basically the same rights as the host population, Syria can be considered a country likely to permanently absorb Palestinians. Additionally, they compose only 3% of the population, far less than the Palestinians in Jordan and Lebanon. However, there are several political factors that must be considered before proposing such a solution, including the threat Palestinians may pose to the Alawite ruling elite and the effect such an action would have on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

There are varied estimates for the number of refugees who would choose to remain in Syria with citizenship rights if given the opportunity. Donna Arzt estimates that citizenship

⁶⁵ Shafie, 2.

⁶⁶ Tiltnes, 10.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Arzt, 48.

should be granted to 400,000 refugees currently in Syria, assuming that the majority of refugees will remain as a result of the high levels of employment, education, and integration they enjoy.⁶⁹ Starkly contrasting this estimate, Dr. Hamad Said Al-Mawed conducted interviews with 137 refugees in Syria and reported that 96% said they would choose to return to their homeland.⁷⁰ The population most likely to move from Syria to Palestine if given the option is the 127,831 camp dwellers, who compose 27.1% of the total refugees in Syria.⁷¹

While the majority of the Syrian population is Sunni, the ruling elite is Alawite. The government has ensured that diverse groups have a voice in the government in order to try and curtail dissent, albeit often only in theory and not in practice. If Syria were to permanently absorb refugees, the government would have to consider how the new population would impact the current system, which is already facing internal pressure. Most likely, the government would have to make concessions and commit to a greater inclusion of Palestinians in the government, perhaps by means of reserved seats for Palestinians in the People's Council. Additionally, Syria's support of anti-Israeli militant movements, such as Hamas, indicates that it is unwilling to make concessions or grant citizenship that may indicate cooperation with Israel.

For decades, the authoritarian government has functioned through force, surveillance, and control of society. Much of this behavior stems from fear of an uprising that would overthrow the secular Ba'ath party. The recent upheaval in Syria, beginning in March 2011, has brought these fears to fruition. During this time of civil unrest, it is likely that the Palestinian question will be pushed even farther to the sidelines as the government struggles to maintain control. The future is uncertain, and it is difficult to make an educated guess about what may happen in the

⁶⁹ Arzt, 47.

⁷⁰ Al-Mawed, Hamad Said. *The Palestinian Refugees In Syria Their Past, Present and Future*. Ottawa: Expert and Advisory Services Fund International Development Research Centre 1999, 66.

⁷¹ UNRWA. "In Figures: As of 1 January 2010." Web. <www.unrwa.org>.

country. The ruling Alawites are now, more than ever, less likely to grant Palestinians Syrian citizenship as their own people are rising up and demanding rights. The government is cracking down on protests and ruling with an iron fist, which is unlikely to bode well for Palestinians in Syria as national laws do not protect the limited rights of Palestinians. Completely subject to the will of the government, the refugees are in a vulnerable position and the international community must be vigilant in monitoring their situation. These protests are questioning the status quo in Syria and demonstrating that a mobilized society can prove to be a powerful force. The situation is volatile and unstable and the future for Palestinians in Syria is even less certain than it was before.

Lebanon

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have the most limited rights of the three host countries examined within this study. While there is hope for resettlement of refugees in the two countries previously discussed, such a solution is not presently viable in Lebanon because of the sectarian nature of Lebanese society and the violent relations between Palestinians and Lebanese throughout the 20th century. Despite their status as second class citizens, some studies have found that Palestinians in Lebanon show reluctance to be resettled in a third country as they have already been forced to move many times, have established communities in Lebanon, and enjoy proximity to their homeland.⁷²

Palestinians in Lebanon came to the country in three waves: UNRWA-registered Palestinians originating from the 1948 war number now 406,342, or 9.6% of the Lebanese population. Additionally, some 25,000 refugees originating from the 1967 war have sought

⁷² Drake, Laura. "The Future of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon." *Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems-New Solutions*, Ginat, Joseph and Edward Perkins, 200-232. Brighton: University of Oklahoma Press 2001, 200.

haven within Lebanon's borders.⁷³ Finally, a disputed number⁷⁴ of Palestinians fled from Jordan after the expulsion of the PLO during Black September (1970). Due to the extreme hardship refugees face in the country, Lebanon is the only country in which UNRWA extends services to refugees outside of the strict 1948 definition. Refugees lack basic civil, political, and social rights and are barred from state services, many employment opportunities, and health services.

Enmeshed in civil war from 1975-1990, Lebanon has had bouts of political instability that have adversely affected the country's political and social well-being as well as undermined the rights of Palestinian refugees. The country returned to relative stability upon the conclusion of the civil war, but was once again thrust into violence as a result of the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel. Integration of Palestinian refugees is highly unlikely in Lebanon due to sectarian divisions, popularity of the militant Shi'a party, Hezbollah, and the history of violence between Palestinians and the host country.

History: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

As a result of the 1948 conflict, approximately 100,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon, or 14% of all Palestinian refugees at the time. Most of these refugees fled from the North of Palestine. UNRWA established sixteen camps for refugees, though three were later destroyed during armed conflict. Prior to the outbreak of the civil war, Lebanese and Palestinians lived side-by-side in relative peace.

When the PLO was expelled from Jordan in 1970, it began to take root in the south of Lebanon. While it is impossible to name the final catalyst of the Lebanese civil war, many feel it stemmed from the arrival of these militant Palestinian groups. The groups grew strong in

⁷³ Amnesty International. "Economic and Social Rights of Palestinian Refugees." New York: Amnesty International December 2003.

⁷⁴ The Danish refugee Council cites this number at a mere 3,000 while the US Committee for Refugees estimates the number at 16,000. (Raffonelli, Lisa. "With Palestine, Against Palestinians: the Warehousing of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon." USCRI World Refugee Survey, 2004.)

Lebanon, eventually coalescing into a state-within-a-state in Western Beirut and Southern Lebanon and threatening the national government. They were able to recruit new members from disgruntled Palestinians who had been confined to refugee camps for twenty years. The PLO, which at the time was still a militant organization, began aligning itself with Lebanese Sunni movements and used their geographic proximity to attack Israel. At the same time, PLO militants began to engage in warfare with Lebanese Maronite militant groups, particularly the Phalange. The attacks soon escalated into a series of tit-for-tat attacks that resulted in heavy civilian casualties. In one instance in January 1976, the Phalange attacked the Palestinian refugee camp of Karantina near east Beirut, killing a large number of both PLO members and civilians caught in the crossfire. The PLO sought revenge by attacking the village of Damour, massacring 1,000 Christian civilians. These skirmishes led to further segregation between Lebanese Muslims and Christians and Palestinian refugees. Despite the violence, the PLO was economically strong enough in the period from 1969-1982 to provide basic services to refugees and they were extended social, economic, and civil rights comparable to those enjoyed by the Lebanese.⁷⁵ This vastly contrasts with the extensive denial of basic rights of Palestinians in Lebanon today.

Israel invaded southern Lebanon in 1982 under Operation Litani, responding to Fatah's hijacking of two passenger buses near Haifa, Israel, during which 37 civilians were killed. The fighting escalated in 1982 when Israel heavily bombed Beirut in hopes of ejecting the PLO from the city. Street-to-street fighting among militants lasted more than a month and resulted in over 7,000 civilian deaths. Finally, in 1982, multinational forces arrived to escort the PLO out of the country. Camps, left vulnerable to militant factions angered at the PLO's actions and in a final

⁷⁵ Firro, Kais. "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon since 1982." *Palestinian Refugees: Old Problems-New Solutions*, Ginat, Joseph and Edward Perkins, 193-199. Brighton: University of Oklahoma Press 2001, 195.

attempt to remove all PLO members hiding in the country, were often attacked during this time, including the 1982 Phalangist-led massacre of about 1,000 Palestinians in the camps Sabra and Shatila.⁷⁶ The civil war lasted for eight more trying years, though this was seen as the last major involvement of Palestinians in the conflict. Unlike Jordan, where the authoritarian government was able to use force to quickly and decisively expel the PLO, Lebanon's more open and liberal state did not possess the same instruments of authoritative force.

The tense situation began to dissipate after the militias were dissolved in 1991. Stability proved promising until 2006, when Hezbollah and Israel engaged in warfare for 34 days in the South of Lebanon. Palestinian refugees, concentrated in the South, were caught in the crossfire and were victims during the attacks. Many camps were isolated, cut off from access to basic necessities, employment opportunities, and education. In one instance, 75% of refugees fled from Wavel Camp after an IDF air strike killed two refugees.⁷⁷ The crisis brought to light the continued violence refugees in Lebanon are subject to and their disadvantaged status.

Current Political System in Lebanon

Lebanon's unique political system has sought to maintain a fine balance among its diverse population. The special system, known as confessionalism, attempts to distribute power among the main religious groups present in Lebanon: the Maronite Christians and other Christian sects, Sunnis, Shi'as, and Greek Orthodox. Since independence in 1943, the country has followed an unwritten agreement (most of which was formalized in the 1989 Ta'if Agreements) to ensure that all groups are represented: Christians occupy half of parliament seats and the other

⁷⁶ Shafie, Sherifa. "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon." Forced Migration Online Research Guide 2007. <<http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo018/>>, 8.

⁷⁷ UNRWA-Lebanon. "The Latest Development in the Living Conditions of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon." Conference on the Palestinian Refugee Issue. Jerusalem: Al Quds University 25 Nov. 2006

half are allocated for Muslim representatives,⁷⁸ the President is a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister is a Sunni, the Speaker of Parliament is Shi'a, and the Deputy Prime Minister is Greek Orthodox. The Parliament is democratically elected, the President is chosen by the Parliament, and together the President and Parliament elect a Prime Minister.

By supporting a political system that emphasizes the importance of distinct religions, Lebanon has founded its society on sectarian identities. While at times this power sharing produces positive results, Lebanon is also a hotbed for conflict, and the viability of political representation based on the religious makeup of the population is being questioned, partially due to the rapidly increasing Muslim population in Lebanon. Communities are often segregated based on their religious affiliation, even at the micro-level of schools and workplaces. Similarly, the Palestinian community is often isolated from mainstream Lebanese society. Much of the Lebanese public is wary of or outwardly opposes the integration of the Palestinian refugees, both politically and socially, arguing that the influx of voting Sunni refugees will disrupt the delicate political system.

The vast majority of political parties represent sectarian interest groups, such as the predominately Christian Free Patriotic Movement, the Shi'a dominated Hezbollah and Amal, and the Druze Progressive Socialist Party. Even among these groups, infighting can be severe. The militant and very vocally anti-Israeli Hezbollah led the March 8th Alliance, a coalition of several political parties that has controlled the government in Lebanon since January 2011. Currently, members of the alliance hold 68 of the 128 parliament seats. Hezbollah is supported by the Iranian and Syrian governments and is considered a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States, the Netherlands, Egypt, the UK, Australia, and Canada. Predominately Sunni countries,

⁷⁸ Originally, the ratio was 6:5 Christians to Muslims, based on the 1932 census, but the ratio was changed to 1:1 in 1990 at the conclusion of the Lebanese civil war.

such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, have condemned Hezbollah's actions. Hezbollah's consolidated power may drive further rifts between the religious communities in Lebanon. The group has already been responsible for the use of force against civilians and maintains an arsenal of weapons and militia, suggesting they could quickly mobilize against foreign and national forces. Many fear that they will run an oppressive campaign in Lebanon to strengthen the Hezbollah stronghold and transform the liberal Lebanese society into a conservative Islamist state.

Current Living Conditions: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

Palestinians in Lebanon are treated as second-class citizens. They have been subject to a number of forced migrations; 90% have been forcibly moved from their homes at least once.⁷⁹ This constant eviction ensures that refugees never consider Lebanon as home and keeps them in a state of constant limbo. The UNRWA-administered camps lack basic infrastructure, much of which was destroyed during past military campaigns. Due to strict building codes, camps have not been expanded since their foundation in 1948 and are burdened with an ever-growing population.⁸⁰ Unemployment rates among refugees in camps are higher than in any other country with an UNRWA presence. 52.8% of refugees in Lebanon reside in camps, a higher percent than in both Jordan and Syria.⁸¹ Unlike in Jordan and Syria, where the state partners with UNRWA to administer camps to defray the costs to both parties, the government in Lebanon provides no assistance to refugees. Due to these extreme hardships, UNRWA has widened the scope of the population to which it provides services. Lebanon is the only country where refugees originating from the 1967 conflict are also offered UNRWA services.

⁷⁹ Khalidi, M. A. "Palestinian refugees in Lebanon 2001." Beirut: Report of the Institute for Palestine Studies 2001, 10.

⁸⁰ Shafie, 14

⁸¹ UNRWA-Lebanon.

Palestinian refugees are not extended political, social, or civil rights, as doing so would be considered a step towards integration. In fact, the legal status of refugees has not been formally addressed since their arrival in 1948. Under 1962 law, Palestinian refugees are classified as foreigners and are required to obtain work permits to be eligible for employment. Palestinians are denied access to Lebanese public health facilities and must rely solely on the over-burdened UNRWA health systems and under-funded Palestinian Red Crescent Society. These organizations are almost always unable to provide specialized or advanced care to extreme health cases.⁸² Similarly, refugees are barred from public education. UNRWA is responsible for the education of approximately 46,000 students through 74 primary schools and 3 secondary schools.⁸³ Lebanon is the only country in which UNRWA provides secondary education opportunities. As one might imagine, these schools have huge class sizes and an inadequate amount of space and teachers. Drop out rates are high and education is substandard.

Opportunities for employment are also scarce. The main employers of refugees are UNRWA operations, Palestinian organizations, agricultural sectors, and shops within refugee camps. Many refugees rely on remittances from family members working abroad. Palestinians are denied access to some 72 trades and professions, and Lebanese forces often shut down Palestinian clinics, pharmacies, and shops.⁸⁴ Because they are considered foreigners, Palestinians are unable to form state-recognized associations in Lebanon. Refugees are denied social security, banned from owning property, are unable to participate in politics, and Palestinian NGOs are forbidden to operate in Lebanon. Only children born of Lebanese fathers are eligible for citizenship. Recently, the government has relaxed its restrictions slightly to give Palestinians more freedom: Palestinians who were born in Lebanon were granted the right to

⁸² Shafie, 12.

⁸³ UNRWA. "In Figures: As of 1 January 2010." Web. <www.unrwa.org>.

⁸⁴ Shafie, 12.

work in the private sector in 2005. Overall, however, Palestinians are denied basic rights and they often report discrimination, harassment, and unjustified detainment by security forces.⁸⁵

With the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982, civil society all but collapsed in Palestinian communities. There are about fifteen armed factions functioning within camps, such as Fatah and several Islamic groups.⁸⁶ These factions have little influence outside of their immediate surroundings and their freedom of movement is extremely restricted. By and large, refugees rely on international organizations and NGOs such as UNRWA, UNICEF, OXFAM, Badil, and Human Rights Watch for basic services. Because these organizations rely on funding from donors, services are almost always inadequate.

Political Ambitions and Implications: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

Divisive politics have threatened to tear the country apart, but there has been one consensus among regional actors: Palestinians should not be granted Lebanese citizenship. Unlike Jordan, Lebanon did not open its borders to the streams of Palestinians over the years, but was rather forcibly thrust into the position of host country. It is highly unlikely that any of the mainstream political parties would agree to the permanent resettlement of refugees due to the historical animosity and the threat Palestinians pose to the political makeup of the country.

Current government officials would not support refugee settlement because it violates the national constitution, which states that Palestinians are foreign visitors. To change the constitution would require a constitutional amendment; such a proposal would mean political suicide as the permanent settlement of 425,000 Palestinians would shift the delicate demographic balance, burden the economy, and anger many groups who do not support Palestinians in Lebanon. This unwillingness to confront the refugee crisis is evidenced by the fact that the

⁸⁵ Shafie, 9.

⁸⁶ Shafie, 5.

national government has been extremely hesitant to engage in multilateral negotiations. The Lebanese have only recently been able to exercise freedom of action with the expulsion of Syrian forces in April 2005 (who often acted as a shadow state). As such, they are eager to express their right to a Lebanese-controlled government and are unlikely to welcome the participation of Palestinian political parties.

Shi'a and Christian populations reject permanent resettlement because it would upset the demographic balance of the country. Palestinians, the vast majority of whom are Sunni, amount to 10% of Lebanon's population. For a country whose entire political system depends on the ratio of religious populations, this would allow Sunnis to demand more political representation. Currently, it is estimated that Shi'a and Sunni populations each represent 27% of the population. While it is true that the Muslim population is currently growing at a more rapid pace than the Christian population, the demographic transformation is a slow process. An additional 425,000 Sunnis would tip the balance overnight. The country already struggles with divisive sectarianism; there is little desire to add yet another complication to the system.

The powerful Hezbollah would not approve of the settlement of Palestinians because it would undermine their Shi'a stronghold. Hezbollah was founded on the tenet of expelling Israel from Lebanon when Israel invaded the country in 1982. Its platform has always had a negative stance towards Israel, which is a key reason for its strength and popularity to this day. Hezbollah would view the settlement of Palestinians as giving in to Israeli and Western powers. Hezbollah, with growing power in the government and in society, can be counted on to thwart any effort to settle Palestinians, as this would symbolize that they had accepted a two state solution.

Christians, particularly Maronite political parties, disapprove of Palestinian settlement because of the ever-increasing Muslim population that is slowly shifting the demographics of the

country. In 1990, the Christian population felt their power decrease when the ratio of constitutional seats was changed from 6:5 Christians to Muslims to a 1:1 ratio. An influx of Sunnis would further dilute the Christian population.

The PLO and Lebanon's conflict-ridden history have heightened the wariness of the Lebanese government and the greater society to accept Palestinians. The separation of communities within Lebanon is testament to this lack of interest in integration. Many Lebanese feel anger at the involvement of militant Palestinians in the civil war and there may exist remnants of animosity between Christian and Palestinian groups as a result of the PLO and Christian militias engaging in warfare in 1975. As Lebanon begins to gain legitimacy in the international arena in the aftermath of Syria's withdrawal, the government is hesitant to give legal status to a group that could potentially disrupt the fragile system.

Any hope that Lebanon would agree to even a partial settlement option is contingent upon engagement in direct talks and concessions, perhaps in the form of monetary aid. In any talks, it would be necessary to include all major political parties. Even if they did agree to resettle a percentage of the refugees, it would be extremely difficult to find an equitable and fair way to choose which Palestinians would be extended citizenship. Given the animosity felt towards Palestinians and the ongoing denial of basic rights, it is likely that Palestinians will one day be forcibly ejected from Lebanon's borders. When that day comes, there must be a plan for where to resettle these refugees- in neighboring countries, in countries abroad, or in Palestine. Refugees in Lebanon are the most at-risk Palestinian population as they have few protected rights. For this reason, Arab-Israeli peace talks must include alternative solutions for their resettlement.

Conclusion

As evidenced by this cross-national case study, the history, current living conditions, and political implications of Palestinian refugees vary vastly from country to country. There is not a blanket solution to the refugee crisis and negotiators and politicians must look at each population individually. Additionally, it is essential that the refugees themselves gain a role in peace talks, something that has been lacking since the crisis began in 1947. Compromises must be made at every level for a sustainable solution: Israel must agree to the repatriation of some refugees, particularly cases of family reunification; Palestinians must recognize and accept that a literal interpretation of the right of return is impractical and be willing to resettle in Gaza and the West Bank; Arab and Western countries must assist in resettling at-risk populations; and the international community must commit to aiding all parties in reaching a compromise. While it is possible for Jordan and Syria to integrate more refugees, there must be alternative solutions for at-risk populations and refugees with severely limited rights, such as those in Lebanon. Additionally, there must be an established system to allow those wishing to return to Palestine to do so. The refugee question has been a fringe debate for far too long. Too often, it is politicized and the over 4.7 million people who are impacted everyday by the inability to reach a solution are forgotten or treated as second-class citizens. Instead of being seen as individuals, they are referred to as a crisis population. A viable compromise may seem impossible after decades of animosity, but the human element of the crisis underscores the need for peace and for negotiations to make it possible for individuals to live with dignity and exercise human rights.

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