

# IBUCS 2010

Committee: Assemblée Nationale of Lebanon

Topic: The Future of Palestinian Refugee Camps

The role of the Palestinians in modern Lebanese affairs cannot be understated; from the integral presence of its' settlements in the Lebanese civil war to its' status as a breeding ground for both pro-Palestinian and Islamist militants, the refugee camps both encapsulate and symbolize the unique socioeconomic and cultural problems of both Lebanon and the Middle East. Before looking at the modern problems of the Palestinian refugee camps, especially in regards to Hezbollah and the 2006 war in Lebanon, it is crucial to understand both the history and culture of the Palestinians, along with their relationship with Israel, Jordan, and Syria, among other Middle Eastern and Western powers.

## **History of the Problem**

Prior to the heavy Zionist expansion of the 1920's, Palestinians existed as a rural, traditionally peasant society in modern-day Israel. Class divisions, remnants of the former Ottoman Empire, combined with heavy socioeconomic inequalities between the ruling and peasant classes, dictated a heavily stratified society, with much of the population existing in small communities organized around a few families. According to Rosemary Sayigh in *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, the strong ties to village life, combined with a weak peasant connection with upper echelons of society, allowed for Zionist forces to effectively colonize and displace the Palestinians. Though insurrections against the incoming Zionists were undertaken throughout the expansion process, none bore enough fruit to stop more Jewish settles from encroaching onto Palestinian territory. With the creation of Israel and the effective displacement of the Palestinians from their land, known as the Uprooting, leading to their subsequent exodus into Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and other nations, known as he Nabka,

Palestinians became one of the largest refugee populations in history. While many members of the upper class could emigrate to Western nations, many of the lower class had little access to such options.

After Israel rejected United Nations Resolution 194, which would allow for suitable repatriation of all Palestinian refugees, many were placed into makeshift camps that eventually, under the guidance of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), became refugee settlements. While nations like Jordan gave full citizenship to Palestinian refugees, Lebanon, and to an extent Syria, had very unique ways for dealing with the refugee population. Syrian officials sought to keep the Palestinian issue under their thumb, fearful of a powerful, potentially militant opposition to the shaky political alliances already forged in the nation.

In 2006, the Lebanese War took place, which was primarily based as a conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, and it becomes important to understand the interaction of other nation's interests in the Palestinian cause - like the example of Syria, much of the Middle East, specifically nations with a significant Palestinian population, had a vested political and religious interest in the Palestinian cause, not merely for the stability of groups like the PLO and Fateh, but for internal stability as well.

Though the camps themselves, created under the auspices of the UN, were subject to rule of the Lebanese, specifically under the Deuxième Bureau, an intelligence branch of the Lebanese army, the internal confessional conflicts of Lebanese society, coupled with the new politicization of Palestinian youths within the camp, quickly led to a series of destabilizations, the withdrawal of the DB from the refugee camps, and the eventual rise of militant Palestinian groups, such as Fateh and the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The PLO, founded and supported via

grassroots economic support for the displaced Palestinians, coupled with militant action in order to secure their homeland, quickly began to take control over many of the refugee camps, imposing both socioeconomic development and a general sense of protection for the Palestinians that were heavily isolated, especially economically, from Lebanese society. Many other groups began to sprout from underneath the umbrella of PLO. With the Lebanese civil war of 1975, the role of the Palestinians, moreover those of the camps, came under extreme contest. During the period of uncertainty and instability that followed, Hezbollah, a pro-Palestinian group, and Amal, an anti-Palestinian group, were founded. In the time following their creations, the two groups battled for control over the Palestinian people and eventually, Hezbollah won out.

### **Discussion of the Problem**

Moving to the present, one must look at the Palestinian issue not only in terms of Hezbollah or confessional politics, but in terms of what the Palestinians mean for both the stability of the Middle East and Lebanon in general.

Questions to consider:

1. Hezbollah is a pro-Palestinian group with global ties to “terrorist networks.” Is it safe to have a group like that within Lebanon?
2. The Camps themselves are incredibly isolated, both socially and economically, from the everyday workings of the country. Is this something that needs to change, and if so, how?
3. Should Palestinians even be living in Lebanon?
4. Is there a way Lebanon can mitigate a solution to the violence between Palestinians and Israelis?
5. Is it Lebanon’s job to provide for the Palestinians within the country, and if so, what services should be offered?

## **Bloc Positions**

*Hezbollah:* Hezbollah garners much of its support from the Palestinians within the refugee settlements. Besides providing them with basic infrastructure requirements previously given by the PLO (hospitals, clothing, schools, etc.) Hezbollah is one of the only routes in which Palestinians have a voice within the confines of the Lebanese confessional system. Hezbollah would most like to see Palestinians stay within Lebanon and have a larger voice in Lebanese affairs. These wishes, concurrent with desires for both socioeconomic development within the refugee camps and a larger overall Shi'a presence within the *Assemblée nationale*, makes Hezbollah one of the more radical, yet interesting, political parties in Lebanon.

*Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (Future Tide):* While this group is anti-Syrian in nature, yet has its ties to both the Sunni (via Saad Hariri, son of former prime minister Rafik Hariri) and the Druze (via Walid Jumblatt, son of the former head of the Lebanese National Resistance Front), the group is sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. The fear of a demographic shift in the country, especially in terms of the confessional makeup, would cause serious trouble with the roles of the Druze, Sunni, and Maronite populations in Lebanese affairs. Cautious changes for Palestinians living in the camps would have to be made, but with the consideration of maintaining the confessional system.

*Free Patriotic Movement:* Headed by the famous Phalangist General Michael Aoun, this party caters to the interests of the minority Maronite confessional. The maintenance of the status quo, especially in terms of both perceived demographics of the country and the stipulations of the Ta'ef Accords, is the first priority of the FPM; the Maronite dominance of the presidency, based

on the National Pact, was severely weakened under the Ta'ef Accords, and as a result, any further changes to the confessional system of government, especially in terms of a new population being introduced into the political landscape, would be viewed as hostile to the interests of the FPM.