

- **About Us**
  - [Israel & Overseas](#)
  - [Washington](#)
  - [Job Opportunities](#)
  - [Annual Report](#)
- **Our Work**
  - [Israel & Overseas](#)
  - [Vulnerable Populations](#)
  - [Jewish Life](#)
  - [Social Action/Advocacy](#)
  - [Youth Programs in Israel](#)
- **Give**
  - [Annual Campaign](#)
  - [Planned Giving and Endowments](#)
  - [Israel Terror Relief Fund](#)
  - [Young Leadership](#)
  - [Women's Philanthropy](#)
  - [Young Leadership Cabinet](#)
  - [Communal Advancement](#)
  - [Overseas Giving](#)
- **General Assembly**
- **Missions**
  - [About Missions](#)
  - [Incoming Missions](#)
  - [Resource Guide](#)
  - [Contact Us](#)
- **News & Events**
  - [Federation News & Contacts](#)
  - [The Federation Connection blog](#)
  - [Events Calendar](#)
- **Jewish Resources**
  - [Jewish Directory](#)

Work

Home > Work

Myth  
Enco

Mitchell G. Ba  
Jewish Virtual Library

# Myth and Fact: Did Arab Leaders Encourage Palestinians to Flee in 1948?

**Myth**

*"Arab leaders never encouraged the Palestinians to flee."*

**Fact**

A plethora of evidence exists demonstrating that Palestinians were encouraged to leave their homes to make way for the invading Arab armies.

The Economist, a frequent critic of the Zionists, reported on October 2, 1948: "Of the 62,000 Arabs who formerly lived in Haifa not more than 5,000 or 6,000 remained. Various factors influenced their decision to seek safety in flight. There is but little doubt that the most potent of the factors were the announcements made over the air by the Higher Arab Executive, urging the Arabs to quit... It was clearly intimated that those Arabs who remained in Haifa and accepted Jewish protection would be regarded as renegades."

Time's report of the battle for Haifa (May 3, 1948) was similar: "The mass evacuation, prompted partly by fear, partly by orders of Arab leaders, left the Arab quarter of Haifa a ghost city... By withdrawing Arab workers their leaders hoped to paralyze Haifa."

Benny Morris, the historian who documented instances where Palestinians were expelled, also found that Arab leaders encouraged their brethren to leave. Starting in December 1947, he said, "Arab officers ordered the complete evacuation of specific villages in certain areas, lest their inhabitants 'treacherously' acquiesce in Israeli rule or hamper Arab military deployments." He concluded, "There can be no exaggerating the importance of these early Arab-initiated evacuations in the demoralization, and eventual exodus, of the remaining rural and urban populations" (Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 590.)

The Arab National Committee in Jerusalem, following the March 8, 1948, instructions of the Arab Higher Committee, ordered women, children and the elderly in various parts of Jerusalem to leave their homes: "Any opposition to this order... is an obstacle to the holy war... and will hamper the operations of the fighters in these districts." The Arab Higher Committee also ordered the evacuation of "several dozen villages, as well as the removal of dependents from dozens more" in April-July 1948. "The invading Arab armies also occasionally ordered whole villages to depart, so as not to be in their way" (*Middle Eastern Studies*, January 1986; See also Morris, pp. 263 & 590-592).

Morris also said that in early May units of the Arab Legion ordered the evacuation of all women and children from the town of Beisan. The Arab Liberation Army was also reported to have ordered the evacuation of another village south of Haifa. The departure of the women and children, Morris says, "tended to sap the morale of the menfolk who were left behind to guard the homes and fields, contributing ultimately to the final evacuation of villages. Such two-tier evacuation — women and children first, the men following weeks later — occurred in Qumiya in the Jezreel Valley, among the Awarna bedouin in Haifa Bay and in various other places."

*In his memoirs, Haled al Azm, the Syrian Prime Minister in 1948-49, also admitted the Arab role in persuading the refugees to leave:*

*"Since 1948 we have been demanding the return of the refugees to their homes. But we ourselves are the ones who encouraged them to leave. Only a few months separated our call to them to leave and our appeal to the United Nations to resolve on their return" (The Memoirs of Haled al Azm, Beirut, 1973, Part 1, pp. 386-387).*

Who gave such orders? Leaders like such as Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Said, who declared: "We will smash the country with our guns and obliterate every place the Jews seek shelter in. The Arabs should conduct their wives and children to safe areas until the fighting has died down" (Myron Kaufman, *The Coming Destruction of Israel*, NY: The American Library Inc., 1970, pp. 26-27).

The Secretary of the Arab League Office in London, Edward Atiyah, wrote in his book, *The Arabs*: "This wholesale exodus was due partly to the belief of the Arabs, encouraged by the boastings of an unrealistic Arabic press and the irresponsible utterances of some of the Arab leaders that it could be only a matter of weeks before the Jews were defeated by the armies of the Arab States and the Palestinian Arabs enabled to reenter and retake possession of their country" (Edward Atiyah, *The Arabs*, London: Penguin Books, 1955, p. 183).

"The refugees were confident their absence would not last long, and that they would return within a week or two," Monsignor George Hakim, a Greek Orthodox Catholic Bishop of Galilee told the Beirut newspaper, *Sada al-Janub* (August 16, 1948). "Their leaders had promised them that the Arab Armies would crush the 'Zionist gangs' very quickly and that there was no need for panic or fear of a long exile."

On April 3, 1949, the Near East Broadcasting Station (Cyprus) said: "It must not be forgotten that the Arab Higher Committee encouraged the refugees' flight from their homes in Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem" (Samuel Katz, *Battleground: Fact and Fantasy in Palestine*, NY: Bantam Books, 1985, p. 15).

"The Arab States encouraged the Palestine Arabs to leave their homes temporarily in order to be out of the way of the Arab invasion armies," according to the Jordanian newspaper *Filastin*, (February 19, 1948).

One refugee quoted in the Jordan newspaper, *Ad Difaa* (September 6, 1954), said: "The Arab Government told us: 'Get out! Get out! So that we can get in. So we got out, but they did not get in.'"

"The Secretary-General of the Arab League, Azzam Pasha, assured the Arab peoples that the occupation of Palestine and Tel Aviv would be as simple as a military promenade," said Habib Issa in the New York Lebanese paper, *Al Hoda* (June 8, 1951). "He pointed out that they were already on the frontiers and that all the millions the Jews had spent on land and economic development would be easy booty, for it would be a simple matter to throw Jews into the Mediterranean... Brotherly advice was given to the Arabs of Palestine to leave their land, homes and property and to stay temporarily in neighboring fraternal states, lest the guns of the invading Arab armies mow them down."

national states, but the game of the invading Arab armies blew them down.

The Arabs' fear was naturally exacerbated by stories of real and imagined Jewish atrocities following the attack on Deir Yassin. The native population lacked leaders who could calm them; their spokesmen, such as the Arab Higher Committee, were operating from the safety of neighboring states and did more to arouse their fears than to pacify them. Local military leaders were of little or no comfort. In one instance the commander of Arab troops in Safed went to Damascus. The following day, his troops withdrew from the town. When the residents realized they were defenseless, they fled in panic. "As Palestinian military power was swiftly and dramatically crushed, and the Haganah demonstrated almost unchallenged superiority in successive battles," Benny Morris noted, "Arab morale cracked, giving way to general, blind, panic, or a 'psychosis of flight,' as one IDF intelligence report put it" (King Abdallah, My Memoirs Completed, (London: Longman Group, Ltd., 1978), p. xvi; Morris, p. 591).

According to Dr. Walid al-Qamhawi, a former member of the Executive Committee of the PLO, "it was collective fear, moral disintegration and chaos in every field that exiled the Arabs of Tiberias, Haifa and dozens of towns and villages" (Joseph Schechtman, The Refugee in the World, NY: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1963, p. 186).

As panic spread throughout Palestine, the early trickle of refugees became a flood, numbering more than 200,000 by the time the provisional government declared the independence of the State of Israel.

Even Jordan's King Abdullah, writing in his memoirs, blamed Palestinian leaders for the refugee problem:

The tragedy of the Palestinians was that most of their leaders had paralyzed them with false and unsubstantiated promises that they were not alone; that 80 million Arabs and 400 million Muslims would instantly and miraculously come to their rescue (Yehoshofat Harkabi, Arab Attitudes To Israel, Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972, p. 364).

*"The Arab armies entered Palestine to protect the Palestinians from the Zionist tyranny but, instead, they abandoned them, forced them to emigrate and to leave their homeland, and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which the Jews used to live."*

— *Palestinian Authority (then) Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) (Falastin a-Thaura, (March 1976)*

 [E-mail this Page to a Friend](#)

 [Printer-Friendly Page](#)