



April 15, 2008

Special Dispatch No. 1897

## Iraqi Author 'Aref 'Alwan: The Jews Have an Historic Right to Palestine

*In an article posted December 7, 2007, on the leftist website [www.ahewar.org](http://www.ahewar.org), [1] 'Aref 'Alwan, an Iraqi author and playwright who resides in London and is the author of 12 novels, [2] states that the Jews have an historic right to Palestine because their presence there preceded the Arab conquest and has continued to this day.*

*In the article, titled "Do the Jews Have Any Less Right to Palestine than the Arabs?" 'Alwan called on the Arab world to acknowledge the Jews' right to Palestine, because justice demanded it and also because doing so would end the violence and the killing of Arabs, as well as intra-Arab strife. He added that such a move would also open up new avenues for the Arab world that would be more consistent with the values and needs of modern society.*

*'Alwan writes that the Arab League is to blame for the refusal to recognize the 1947 U.N. partition plan, for starting a war to prevent its implementation, and for the results of that war, which the Arabs call the Nakba (disaster). He points an accusing finger at the Arab regimes, the Arab League, and the educated circles in the Arab world, saying that they had all used the term "nakba" to direct popular consciousness toward a cultural tradition that neither accepts the other side nor recognizes its rights – thereby promoting bigotry, violence and extremism. He also claims that there have been attempts to rewrite Palestinian history, in order to deny any connection between it and the Jewish people.*

*'Alwan contends that the "Nakba mentality" among Arabs has boomeranged, giving rise to tyrannical rulers, extremist clerics, and religious zealots of every description. In his view, the Arab world will never shed the stigma of terrorism in the West unless it abandons this concept and all that it entails.*

*To boost his claim that the Jews have an historic right to Palestine, 'Alwan provides an overview of Jewish history in the land of Israel. He questions the validity of the Islamic traditions underpinning the Arab claim to Palestine, Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount, and presents evidence that religions that preceded Islam had conducted rituals on the Temple Mount.*

*As an example of the traditional Arab mentality that does not accept the other or recognize his rights, 'Alwan discusses the Arabs' abuse of the Kurds in Iraq and of the Christians in Egypt and Lebanon.*

*The following are excerpts from the article:*

### **The Nakba: A Great Lie**

*"When the Salafi mob in Gaza tied the hands and feet of a senior Palestinian official and hurled him, alive, from the 14th floor, I asked myself: What political or religious precepts must have been inculcated into the minds of these young people to make them treat a human life with such shocking cruelty?"*

*"Earlier, I had watched on TV as the bodies of two Israeli soldiers were thrown from the second floor [of a building] in a Palestinian city. Whether or not it was the same Salafi mob behind that incident, [one asks oneself]: What language, [or rather,] what historic linguistic distortion could have erased from the human heart [all] moral sensibilities when dealing with a living and helpless human being?"*

*"Arabs who are averse to such inhuman behavior must help me expose and eliminate the enormous lie that has for 60 years justified, extolled, and supported brutality. [Such behavior] is no longer limited to the expression of unconscious [impulses] by individuals, but constitutes a broad cultural phenomenon, which began in Lebanon, [spread to] Iraq and Palestine, and then [spread] – slowly but surely – to other Arab states as well.*

*"This enormous lie is what the Arabs called the Nakba – that is, the establishment of two states in Palestine: the state of Israel, which the Jews agreed to accept, and the state of Palestine, which the Arabs rejected.*

*"In our times, when science, with its accurate instruments, can predict climatic changes that will lead to drought or the movement of tectonic plates that causes earthquakes, it is inconceivable that a modern man can, without making a laughingstock of himself, attribute the destruction of cities ancient or modern to the wrath of Allah. Nevertheless, today, 80% of Arabs claim this to be the case. They are neither embarrassed nor afraid of being laughed at.*

*"This high percentage includes not only the illiterates who densely populate rural areas, villages, and small and large cities, but also students, teachers, lecturers, graduates of institutions of higher education, scientists, technology experts, physicians, graduates of religious universities such as Al-Azhar, historians, and politicians who have held or are currently holding public office.*

"It is those numerous educated elites who have forced the Arab mentality into a narrow, restrictive, and deficient cultural mold, spewing violence, terrorism, and zealotry, and prohibiting innovative thought... All this was done to instill a false sense of oppression in the hearts of the Arabs, and to destroy them with the infectious disease of despair and confusion.

"[This attitude] is rooted in the 1947 Arab League resolution stating that Palestine is a 'stolen' land and that none but a Muslim Arab is entitled to benefit from it as an autonomous [political entity], even if another's historic roots there predate those of the Muslims or the Arabs."

### **The Nakba Boomerang**

"[The upshot] of this confusion in [Arab] mentality is that the lie has boomeranged on the Arabs. [Thus] appeared [on the scene] Saddam Hussein, Hafez Al-Assad, Bashar Al-Assad, Osama bin Laden, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi, Hassan Nasrallah, Nabih Berri, Khaled Mash'al, Isma'il Haniya, and Mahmoud Al-Zahar, whose young [thugs] threw the senior Palestinian official from the 14th floor. Finally, from the foot of the eastern mountains bordering the Middle East came Ahmadinejad, who is committed to preparing the way for the anarchy and destruction that accompanies the advent of the long-awaited Mahdi, who will resolve the Palestinian problem.

"Today, owing to the ideological distortions that have afflicted the Arab popular consciousness since the so-called Nakba, and [also owing] to the lies that have accumulated around this notion, [the label of] 'terrorism' has become attached to Arabs, wherever they are.

"Despite the great political and cultural efforts by large and important Arab states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and some Gulf states to restore Arab ties with the rest of the world, and to curb the culture of terrorism in Arab societies, they have all failed. This is because these attempts to rectify [the situation], from both within and without [the Arab countries], both stemmed from and were a logical extension of the concept of the Nakba.

"This proves that the Arabs have no hope of extricating themselves from the cultural and political challenge of terrorism unless they come up with [new] and different [fundamental] premises, and with an outlook completely free of the fetters of the religious ritual that they have devised in modern times and called the Nakba.

"Although Palestinian senior officials, leaders, educated circles, and public figures, whose patriotism is beyond doubt, have come to terms with the existence of the State of Israel, the aforementioned 80% of Arabs... do not accept this view, and consider it religious apostasy. Leaders of the [Arab] states in the region, and party leaders, inflame sentiment, entrancing them with the drumbeat of extremism.

"With the strident chorus of its secretaries, the Arab League ensures that every car crash in Gaza or the West Bank is interpreted as an Israeli conspiracy against the Arab future. This is because the Arab League... was established as a pan-Arab entity whose main function was to write reports and studies rife with distortions of fact so as to quell the conscience of any Arab who dared think independently and expunge [the concept of] the Nakba from his consciousness. [It has done] this instead of devising creative strategies for cultural and economic development, so as to improve the deteriorating standard of living in the Arab societies."

### **The Nakba is Rooted in a Culture that Does Not Recognize the Right of the Other**

"Why did the partition resolution, which gave a state in Palestine to the Jews and one to the Arabs next to it, become the Nakba – [the star] that rises and sets daily over the Arab lands without emitting even the tiniest ray of light to illuminate the path for their peoples?

"Did the Jews have any less right to Palestine than the Arabs? What historic criteria can be used to determine the precedence of one [nation's] right over that of the other?

"Refusing to recognize the right of the other so as to usurp his rights was a governing principle of the Islamic conquests from the time of 'Omar bin Al-Khattab; during that historical period it was the norm. [But] at the turn of the [20th] century, this principle was abandoned and prohibited, because it sparked wars and [violent] conflict. The international community passed laws restricting the principle of non-acceptance of the other, in the founding principles of the League of Nations in 1919. Subsequently, with the U.N.'s establishment, these laws were developed [further], with appendices and commentary, to adapt them to the current historical era and to express the commonly accepted values of national sovereignty and peoples' right to self-determination.

"But because of their sentimental yearning for the past and zealous adherence to [old] criteria, the Arabs purged their hearts of any inclination to adjust to the spirit of the age. They thus became captives of the principle of non-acceptance of the other and of denying the other [the right] to live, [among] other rights.

"As a result, damage was done to the rights and interests of non-Arab nations and ethnic groups in the Arab lands – among them the Kurds, the Copts, and the Jews. [Thus,] the Arabs still treat the numerous minorities that came under their dominion 1,400 years ago in accordance with the laws from the era of Arab conquest.

"Despite the consequences of denying the other the right to exist, not to mention other rights – that is, [despite] the oppression, conflicts, wars, and instability [resulting from this]... the Arabs have steadfastly clung to their clearly chauvinist position. All problems in the region arising from minorities' increasing awareness of their rights have been dealt with by the Arabs in accordance with [the principle of non-acceptance]... [even] after the emergence of international institutions giving these rights legal validity, in keeping with the mentality and rationale of our time."

### **Refusing to Accept the Other: The Kurds in Iraq; the Christians in Egypt and Lebanon**

## **The Kurds**

"The denial of the Kurds' national rights by the Iraqi government, and the Arab League's support for it, has brought on wars lasting 50 years – that is, three-quarters of the life span of the state that arose in Iraq...

"After fabricating arguments to justify the [1921] combining of the Basra region with the Baghdad region in order to establish a new state in Iraq, British colonialist interests demanded that a large area historically populated by Kurds be added to the new state. [This was done] to satisfy the aspirations of King Faisal bin Al-Hussein [bin Ali Al-Hashemi], who had been proposed as head of state in return for protecting British interests in the region.

"In his persistent refusal to grant the Kurds their rights, from 1988 through 1989 Saddam Hussein murdered approximately 180,000 Kurds, in an organized [genocidal] campaign he called 'Al-Anfal.' He then used mustard gas against one [Kurdish] city (Halabja), killing its residents (5,000 people). The Arab conscience silently acquiesced to this human slaughterhouse, while Arab League secretary-general (Shadhli Al-Qalibi) called the international press coverage of these events 'a colonialist conspiracy against the Arabs and the Iraqi regime.'

"Syrian Kurds are considered second-class citizens, and are banned from using their language or [practicing] their culture in public."

## **The Christians in Egypt and Lebanon**

"The ethnic oppression of the Kurds [in Iraq] was echoed by sectarian extremism against the Copts [in Egypt]. In both cases, the Arabs used the principle of denying the existence of the other so as to strip him of his rights.

"The Copts, who [initially] assimilated Arabs into their society, but who have over time themselves assimilated into Arab society, discover time and again that this assimilated state is but a surface shell, which quickly cracks whenever they demand equality... As a result, Egypt, as a state, is gripped by constant social tensions that keep rising to the surface and threatening to undermine its stability...

"Sectarian extremism in Egypt took the form of an organized party with the 1928 emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood, with the aim of splitting Egyptian society into two mutually hostile and conflicting parts. This was in line with the Arab religious and political principle of denying legitimacy to all non-Muslims or non-Arabs, [a principle practiced] since the Muslim armies reached Egypt in 639 [CE]...

"In Lebanon, the presence of armed Palestinian militias – which was in accordance with the decision of the Arab states – encouraged the formation of Lebanese militias, both Sunni and Shi'ite. Chanting slogans proclaiming Palestinian liberation, they frightened Christians by appearing armed in streets swarming with Lebanese [citizens] and tourists.

"This eventually led to a confrontation with Christian militias, which had also armed themselves out of fear of the pan-Arab slogans and fear for the [preservation of] the rights of the Christian sects.

"Lebanon was engulfed by an ugly 15-year civil war, that ended only after Syria, which had played an ignominious role as instigator [of the hostilities], attained full protectorate status over Lebanese affairs and the Lebanese people – [and this] took on the nature of colonialist hegemony...

"After the Lebanese were liberated from this [Syrian] control, in 2005 the clouds of civil war – albeit of a different kind – reappeared on the Lebanese horizon. The Arab League is making no effort to prevent the eruption [of this civil war] for two main reasons. First, the Syrian regime still supports ethnic tension, in order to regain control of Lebanon; and second, the current majority government, which opposes the renewed Syrian influence, is predominantly Christian...

"We had hoped that the Arab national conscience would recover from the illness afflicting it since the time of the Nakba, and that it would adopt [views] which, if not ahead of their time, would at least be appropriate to our time. But a group of journalists, writers, and several Arab historians guided by the principle of non-acceptance of the other has twisted the facts and concocted a false and gloomy history of the region – thereby trampling these dreams to the ground."

## **Jews Have a Rich and Ancient History in Palestine**

"The Arabs see the Palestinian problem as exceedingly complicated, while it actually appears so only to them – [that is], from the point of view of the Arabs' emotional attitudes and their national and religious philosophy. The Arabs have amassed false claims regarding their exclusive right to the Palestinian land, [and] these are based on phony arguments and on several axioms taken from written and oral sources – most of which they [themselves] created after the Islamic, and which they forbade anyone, Arab or foreigner, from questioning.

"When the Arabs agreed to U.N. arbitration... to resolve the Palestinian problem, it transpired that their axioms clearly contradicted reliable historical documents [that] this new international organization [had in its possession]. As a result, they wasted decades stubbornly defending the validity of their documents, which do not correspond to the officially accepted version of the region's history – which is based on concrete and solid evidence [such as] archaeological findings in the land of Palestine, the holy books of the three monotheistic religions, accounts by Roman, Greek, and Jewish historians... and modern historical research..."

## **Jewish and Christian Ritual Sites in Jerusalem Predate Muslim Sites**

"[A look at] the story of Al-Aqsa is now in order – a site considered holy by Muslim Arabs, who call it 'Al-Haram al-

Qudsi al-Sharif [The Noble Sanctuary] and [believe that] it was set aside for them by Allah since the time of Adam.

"[This site] contains several places of worship, including the Dome of the Rock, built by the [Umayyad Caliph] 'Abd Al-Malik bin Marwan in the seventh century CE – that is, 72 years after the Muslim conquests. This religious public gathering place was erected over a prominent [foundation] stone at the peak of 'Mount Moriah.' [Mount Moriah] contains three ancient Jewish public worship sites, as well as [some] Christian sites... The octagonal structure of the Dome of the Rock Mosque was constructed on the site of an ancient Byzantine church, adjoining Solomon's Temple, destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

"Since the majority of Muslims claim that the Temple Mount is an Islamic site to which no one else is entitled, they do not acknowledge the presence of Jewish and Christian places of worship predating the Dome of the Rock within its walls...

"The Arabs take great pride in their tolerance of and benign treatment of the Jews and Christians who lived under the Muslim rule since the Muslim conquests. This account is part of the distortions underpinning the edifice of the Arabs' religious and national culture. [Arab] writers and historians keep eulogizing this epoch... while the truth is the opposite of what they claim. [Indeed,] the Pact of 'Omar [compelled] the Jews and the Christians to choose between either abandoning their religion and embracing Islam, or paying the [poll] tax in return for being permitted to reside... and receive protection of life and property in their homeland. [The Pact of 'Omar] allowed them to practice their religion, build new houses of worship, and repair the old ones [only] with the permission of a Muslim ruler, and subject to numerous conditions.

"In subsequent historical periods, the Muslims imposed [additional restrictions] on the members of [these] two religions: They forbade them to raise their voices during prayer; [they forced them] to conduct their prayers and religious ceremonies in closed areas so as not [to disturb] passersby; they forbade them to carry weapons, ride saddled horses, or build houses taller than those of the Muslims. [Christians and Jews] were required to show respect for the Muslims, e.g. by giving up their seat to a Muslim if he wanted it. They were banned from holding government posts or from working in 'sensitive' public places.

"The Koranic verses cursing the Jews and casting doubt on [the veracity of] their Holy Book [the Torah] promulgated a desire among Arabs to set themselves above the Jews who lived in their midst, humiliating and persecuting them even without pretext. In time, this treatment made large numbers of Jews abandon their cities and their land and emigrate... while those who stayed [in Palestine] until the 19th century remained marginalized, living among the Arabs like criminals in a foreign land...

"The Arabs claim that the 'Wailing Wall' has been their property since the Prophet Muhammad tied his horse Al-Buraq to one of its supports when Allah transported him by night from the Holy Mosque in Mecca to pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem... Although this night-journey story seems dubious, Arab historiography after the advent of Islam contains such oddities as giving a horse the prerogative of making a wall weighing more than 2,000 tons into Muslim property. This is only one of thousands of examples of tales concocted by zealots, with which they swept away the Arab imagination.

"...When the U.N. resolution on the partition of Palestine was issued on November 29, 1947... the Arabs refused to recognize it. They thereby rejected the state set out by the resolution as the right of the Palestinians and the Arabs, with the aim of establishing legal and historical equity. The Arabs called this resolution the Nakba, while their new states, formed several years before the State of Israel, launched the first war against Israel, in which regular military operations were combined with local attacks by gangs comprising Palestinians and Arabs from Arab regions near and far. [That war] ended in [the Arabs'] defeat. Persisting in their error, the Arabs established refugee camps for the Palestinians who had fled during and after the war...

"Chairman Mahmoud 'Abbas... was the first Palestinian leader to acknowledge that the Christian church in Gaza plundered by Hamas gangs had stood there 'before [we] came to Gaza.' By this he meant 'we the Palestinians' – particularly the current Gaza residents, [the descendants of] Bedouins from the Sinai and the Arabian Peninsula and of others, of unknown origin. [These people were] attracted by the wealth of the new Islamic state that extended from Persia to Southern Ethiopia, and came after the Muslim conquests and set themselves up over the local population – Christians, Jews, Phoenicians, Byzantines, and the remnants of the Sumerians...

### **Arabs Must Recognize the Jews' Right to Palestine**

"In order to prevent more bloodshed among the innocent [population]... and in order to keep the deteriorating situation in Lebanon, Iraq, Gaza, and the West Bank from making [these regions into] a quagmire that will spread to engulf all Arab states and societies, the Arabs must reassess the question of the Nakba and come up with a new, courageous vision for the region and for the future of its residents.

"[This vision] must involve public recognition of the Jews' legitimate right to their state – which is based on historical fact – instead of [recognition] of the writings filled with anger and demagoguery produced and formed into an ideology by the confused [Arab] consciousness – a consciousness built upon lies, myths, and distortions stemming from the principle of non-acceptance of the other.

"The most important factor in strengthening such a new vision is [the adoption of] a principle [requiring] official condemnation of all individuals, groups, companies, religious and political parties, and totalitarian regimes that built their glory and hollow leaderships upon the notion of the Nakba, and which are always ready to absorb other false claims and fabrications.

"This must be done, so that a modern Arab face is turned to the world – [a face reflecting] ethical values that will not allow any Arab, under any pretext, to oppress his son or his brother who differs from him in religion, ethnicity, or ideology."

## Endnotes:

[1] [www.ahewar.org](http://www.ahewar.org) (formerly [www.rezgar.com](http://www.rezgar.com)), December 7, 2007.

[2] 'Aref 'Alwan is the first Arab author to publish his novels on the Internet. His doing so was the subject of his January 20, 2005 interview in the London daily Al-Sharq Al-Awsat.



Please recycle

The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) is an independent, non-profit organization providing translations of the Middle East media and original analysis and research on developments in the region. Copies of articles and documents cited, as well as background information, are available on request. MEMRI holds copyrights on all translations. Materials may only be used with proper attribution.

The Middle East Media Research Institute  
P.O. Box 27837, Washington, DC 20038-7837  
Phone: [202] 955-9070 Fax: [202] 955-9077 E-Mail: [memri@memri.org](mailto:memri@memri.org)  
Search previous MEMRI publications at our website: [www.memri.org](http://www.memri.org)