

Britain and the Arab-Israel Conflict:  
Questioning the Motives Behind Continued Aid to 1967 Palestinian Refugees<sup>\*</sup>

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***Abstract***

British involvement in Middle East politics can be traced to long before the First World War when its economic and strategic interests appeared to be the main reason for the involvement. The emergence of the newly created Israeli state, following the Balfour Declaration, marked the beginning of the Palestinian refugee crisis. Between 1948 and 1956, historical liability and obligation forced the British to be involved in providing humanitarian aid to the Palestinian refugees. British involvement in the Suez Crisis later in 1956, was a tragedy for British influence in the Middle East. Many scholars concluded that the 1956 campaign marked “the end of British empire in the Middle East” and the beginning of the cold war, American-Soviet rivalry that left Britain marginalised. Even prominent Middle East scholars such as Michael Ben Oren, in his book *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of Modern Middle East*, did not give attention to the British role and involvement in the 1967 crisis. However, the British efforts to regain Arab trust whilst preserving its economic and strategic interests in the Middle East persuaded Britain to remain involved with the Palestinian refugee crisis. None of these scholars have tried to analyse the motives behind continued British involvement in humanitarian aid for Palestinian refugees – the crisis which lingers long after the end of the British Empire in the Middle East. This paper discusses this topic with a focus on refugees from the 1967 war and attempts to explain the reasons for continuation of British aid from an historical perspective. This research was based on historical document analysis and the extraction of archival sources from The National Archive (TNA) in London.

***Introduction***

In the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the plight of the Palestinian refugees worsened. The refugee population increased dramatically as a result of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights.<sup>1</sup> The war was another tragedy for the displaced

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<sup>1</sup>The Palestine refugee population has increased since 1948 after the establishment of Israel. Instantly, the Palestine refugees in Jordan increased from 400,000 to 900,000. For details refer to R. Patai, *The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* (New Heaven: Yale University, 1956), p. 45.

Palestinians but was also crucial to the British position as one of the key players in Middle East politics in the 1960's. Many Middle East researchers such as Keith Kyle have concluded that after the 1956 Suez War, the British role in Middle East politics was less important and its influence in the region had eroded.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, with the emergence of Washington and Kremlin influences in the region in the 1960's, the British role seemed irrelevant. However, UN Resolution 242 which ended the war, was tabled by the UK and it introduced a new debate about the British approach to and role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>3</sup> In fact, any action taken by the British during the war could be interpreted as a strategy to protect British interest in the Middle East region, especially in the Arab world.

This paper will discuss two important issues arising from the 1967 war. First, that the continued British contribution of humanitarian aids towards the Palestinian refugees proves that the British role in Middle East politics remains important. Secondly, the significance of the aid could be interpreted as a diplomatic strategy to preserve British influence in the region and portray a "trusted friendly" image to the Arabs. The argument is supported by the following Foreign Office document which states:

Lord Caradon has advised that, whatever is done towards finding a long term solution of the refugee problem in the Middle East, we should need to make a substantial increase in our contribution to UNRWA's normal budget in 1968. He argues that there could be no greater need on the humanitarian side and that *increased contribution would obviously also be politically very valuable*. We have made considerable progress in improving Anglo/Arab relations since they reached their nadir for this decade immediately after the June War.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kyle has stated that after the Suez campaign of 1956, the British influences eroded with the resignation of Sir Anthony Eden. See Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Taurist, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> See UN Security Council's Record, S/8247, 16 November 1967.

<sup>4</sup> FCO 17/196, letter from J.C. Moberly, Foreign Office to Mrs. S. Littler, H.M. Treasury, 14 November 1967.

***The 1967 Palestinian Refugees: A Brief Unsolved Tragic History***

The UNRWA definition of the post 1948 Palestinian refugee is:

...any person whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948 and who lost both his home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict<sup>5</sup>

The Refugees Working Group (RWG) came up with a similar definition in 1992 referring to 1948 refugees:

The Palestinian refugees are all those Palestinians (and their descendants) who were expelled or forced to leave their homes between November 1947 (partition plan) and January 1948 (Rhodes Armistice Agreement), from the territory controlled by Israel on that later date. This... coincides with the Israeli definition of Absentees, a category of Palestinians meant to be stripped of its most elementary human and civil rights: Any person was declared to be absentee if he was, on or after 29<sup>th</sup> November 1947 a citizen or subject of the Arab states; in any of these states for any length of time in any part of Palestine outside the Israel-occupied area, or in any place other than his habitual residence even if such place as well as his habitual abode were within Israel-occupied territory.”<sup>6</sup>

However after the 1967 war, the definition was revised with clarification of two different categories. The “refugee” status remained for those expelled from their homeland between 1948 and 1967. A new category, “Displaced Person” (DP), exclusively referred to those who became refugees after the 1967 war. The United Nations Refugees Working Agency (UNRWA) clarified the status of the DP as follows:

- a. Persons who prior to June 1967 were residents of East Jerusalem, the West Bank area of Jordan, and the Gaza strip, who were not registered as refugees, with UNRWA and who as a result of the fighting in June 1967 and the subsequent occupation by Israeli forces, moved to Arab territories.
- b. Persons resident in East Jordan (other than UNRWA refugees) who have left their homes in the East Jordan valley, the Irbid area, the Dead Sea area etc., as a result of the continuing hostilities between Jews and Arabs across the ‘cease fire’ lines.
- c. Children of UNRWA registered refugees, born after the ‘freezing’ of the UNRWA registers, who received basic ration allowances from the Jordanian government.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>UN Documents, Consolidated Eligibility Instruction, Document rev. 7/83, January 1984.

<sup>6</sup>Refugee Working Group (RWG), Ottawa, Canada, 14 May 1992.

<sup>7</sup>FCO 17/108, a report on “Social Situation in Jordan, Britain and the New Displaced Persons,” 29 January 1970.

The failure of the international community and the UN to solve the refugee right to return unconditionally to their homeland since 1948 coincided with an increase in the number of refugees from 960,000 in 1950 to 1.28 millions in June 1964.<sup>8</sup> A statistic by Mr. Gussing, a special UN Envoy for the refugees disclosed that up until 15 September 1967 more than 350 thousand displaced persons (DPs) were registered with UNRWA.<sup>9</sup> In fact, within 10 days of the war, more than 125,000 Palestinians were expelled by the Israelis from their land, mainly East Jerusalem, Ramallah and Jericho, and became DPs, while after this date Israel continued to brutally expel an average of 500 Palestinians everyday from their land. The majority of these were from the districts of Hebron, Bethlehem, Nablus, Jenin and Qalkiliya.<sup>10</sup>

Statistics from the *Standing Conference of British Organizations for Aid to Refugees* (SCBOAR) revealed in 1968 that the number of refugees registered with UNRWA in the East Bank, Jordan increased dramatically from 332,000 in 1948 to 745,000 in 1968,<sup>11</sup> reflecting the influx of 413,000 displaced persons following the 1967 war. These statistics represent only a small part of the overall numbers of Palestinian refugees who went to other Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria. In the war of 1967, some reliable records estimated that around 200,000 Arabs were expelled from the West Bank while another 210,000 were expelled from The Gaza Strip.<sup>12</sup> This supports the UN's record which shows that there were a total of 416,000 displaced persons, excluding Syrians expelled from the Golan Heights and Egyptians from Sinai.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Quoted from the article by Abdul Rahim Omran, "A Medical View: Eighteen Years in Forced Exile," *Arab World*, July 1966. Enclosed in the file FCO 17/195, letter from C.H.D. Everett, Washington to C. Mc Lean, London, 23 February 1967.

<sup>9</sup>FCO 17/203, Sir Anthony Buzzard, "Israel and the Arab's: The Way Forward," a report for Advisory Sub-Committee of the International Department of British Council of Churches and the Conference of British Missionary Society, London 1968.

<sup>10</sup>FCO 17/124, a report, "The Refugees Problem in Jordan," enclosed in the letter from Mr. Tripp to Mr. Brown, 3 August 1967.

<sup>11</sup>FCO 17/126, letter from Miss D.A. Penford to Mr. Daly, 27 August 1968.

<sup>12</sup>See Halim Barakat and Peter Dodd, *Refugees: Uprootedness and Exile: A Sociology Study on June Refugees* (Beirut: Institute For Palestine Studies, 1968).

<sup>13</sup>Security Council Resolution 237, 14 June 1967 and General Assembly Resolution 2252 (ES-V), 4 July 1967.

Additionally, the total number of refugees registered with UNRWA up to 30 June 1978 was 1,755,932, distributed in UNRWA operation fields as below:

Country	Number of Refugees
Lebanon	211,000
Syria	198,000
East Jordan	682,561
West Bank	310,268
Gaza	354,103
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,755,932</b>

*Sources:* United Nations Document: Supplement No. 13 (A/33/133), UNRWA Report, 1977-1978. p. 1

The living conditions of the Palestinian refugees at the camps after the war was very grim. In the Jordan Valley for example, in December 1967, the six camps (Wahadna, Maadi, Damiya, Karamah, Shunnah and Ghor Nimrin) were overcrowded due to the influx of 60,000 new refugees. At Ghor Nimrin 14,500 new refugees arrived with an additional 300 refugees who crossed the bridges at Allenby, Sharat and Damiya during the war. This was due to Israel's brutal campaign to expel them from their land such as the village of An-Nusseirat who were exiled to Um Sharat in early December 1967.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, a camp at Karamah with a capacity of 23,000 became overcrowded. According to the statistics revealed by the Jordanian government, the camps themselves were not just over populated with DPs, but an additional 33,000 displaced persons settled in the area around the perimeter of each camp.<sup>15</sup> Conditions at the over-populated camps worsened when, after the war, Israel refused to allow the refugees to return to their villages unconditionally. For example, up to August 1967 170,000 DPs had applied, via the International Red Cross, to return to their villages. However, only 14,027 people were allowed by the Israelis to return and only under very strict conditions. These were mainly old people, women and children. On the West Bank during the first 6 months of 1968, out of 30,817 DPs who were expelled by the Israelis, only 1,847 were allowed to return home.<sup>16</sup>

Living conditions for these refugees in the camps were very unhealthy and unhygienic. They also suffered malnutrition. A report

<sup>14</sup> FCO 17/196, letter from J.C. Moberly to Mrs. S, litter, 14 November 1967.

<sup>15</sup> FCO 17/126, Refugees Statistic 1968.

<sup>16</sup> FCO17/124, a report by Secretaries of The Supreme Ministerial Committee For Relief, May 1968.

from the *Standing Conference of British Organization for Aid to Refugees* (SCBOAR), in August 1968, disclosed that the quality of food intake among 60,000 refugees was unhealthy. Cases of malnutrition amongst refugees increased while aid agencies were unable to take effective action due to the lack of funds.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the malnutrition problem created an outbreak of diseases among refugees such as *hypoproteinemia*, *scurvy*, *beri-beri*, *cheilosis*, *tuberculosis* and *arikoflavinosis*.<sup>18</sup> Life expectancy also decreased to an average age of 35 years.

FCO reports from 1967 show that it was feared that the bad conditions would also cause psychological trauma leading to deterioration of moral standards. The files enclose a statement from the *Young Mens' Christian Association* (YMCA), dated 1950, that states:

The condition of the refugee physically is fair for the Near East, as most receive food, clothing, shelter and medical care. But the moral standards of these people after 20 months of poverty and what is more, inactivity is very low.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the grim condition of the refugees, these camps were also exposed to regular attack by the Israeli forces. According to the report by the British Red Cross Representative, several refugee camps under the supervision of UNRWA were attacked by the Israelis forces, especially the UNRWA's camps at Rafah and Gaza, in June 1967.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The Tragedy of the 1967 Refugees and British Humanitarian Aid***

After the 1967 war, the British continuously contributed humanitarian aid directly to the refugees and to the shelter countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria. The aid, especially financial assistance, also came from British Non Government Organizations (NGO) with strong support from the government. The priority of the aid was focused on assisting the new refugees to become independent under the "self supporting program" in their new settlements, in the neighbouring Arab

<sup>17</sup> FCO 17/126, Refugees' Statistics. Report by SCBOAR, 1968.

<sup>18</sup> FCO 17/195, Medical View. A Report by Abdul Rahim Omar, enclosed in a letter from C.D.H. Everett Washington to C. McLean, London, 23 February 1967.

<sup>19</sup> YMCA, unpublished report by Frase E. Smith, on the provision of YMCA clubs for the Young Men among the refugees, Beirut, 26 January 1950, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> See the report by British Red Cross in the *Daily Star*, Beirut, 1968. Also see the reports by *Sunday Times*, 16 November 1967; *The Guardian*, 14 June 1967 and *The Times*, 6 June 1967. Also *Israel Imperial News*, March 1968, published in London by the Israel Socialist Party, Matzpen.

countries.<sup>21</sup> From 1948 to 1967, the British Government emerged as the second highest financial contributor to the UNRWA (after America) and also to the NGOs such as Red Cross International. For example, up until 1967 UNRWA received more than USD 100 million from the British Government for their operations in the refugee camps.<sup>22</sup> While for the 1968 financial year, the British government announced that USD 5 million would be donated of which 55 percent would be spent on the development of education, training schemes, infrastructure and health care services.<sup>23</sup> During the war, the British agreed to contribute an additional USD 500,000 to the UNRWA for emergency relief. This excluded other humanitarian aid such as tents and medicine which was brought directly from the British military base in Cyprus.<sup>24</sup>

Other than direct contributions to the UN relief agency, the British also assisted their Arab allies who faced the flood of Palestinian refugees immediately after the war. One of the biggest recipients of British aid was Jordan. Since the 1967 war, huge numbers of refugees were exiled to Jordan. The Jordanian government was unable to absorb the new refugees after the major infrastructure of the kingdom was badly destroyed by Israelis during the war. Thus, the British cabinet agreed to release financial assistance of £500,000 to Jordan immediately after the war to rebuild their basic infrastructures.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the British cabinet also approved delivery of humanitarian stuff such as blankets and tents, worth more than £20 million for the refugees through the Jordanian Government in 1967.<sup>26</sup> A special committee called *The British Relief Fund for Jordan* was set up to administer and monitor all this aid.

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<sup>21</sup>Most of the British Government's financial aid was given directly to UNRWA for permanent local settlement and major immigration effort programme. For details, see files FCO 17/203, letter from Prince Saddrudin Agha Khan to Lord Caradon, 1 December 1967.

<sup>22</sup>See FCO 17/195, record from House of Lords debate, statement by Lord Byers Motion, 28 June 1968.

<sup>23</sup>FCO 17/195, Ministry of State's discussion, 18 July 1967.

<sup>24</sup>To see the complete list of contributors and their contribution during the war, especially from Britain, refer to FO 1016/780, FCO 17/126 and FCO 17/201. Record of assistance for refugees, UN 1967.

<sup>25</sup>FCO 17/283, letter from Mr. C.R.A. Rae, Minister of Overseas Development to Mr. A.B. Urwick, British Embassy, Washington, 7 July 1967.

<sup>26</sup>FO 1016/780, Foreign Office news conference, 22 June 1967.

The committee comprised representatives from the British NGOs, Jordanian Government officers and Foreign Office representatives.<sup>27</sup>

The British Government also gave great support to Britain's NGOs and volunteer organisations to assist the Palestinian refugees. In early 1962, with the full support of the British Government, the UNRWA's liaison group, *Standing Conference of British Organizations for Aid to Refugees* (SCBOFR), was formed. The main objective of this group was to be the main body for monitoring and coordinating all the British NGOs' assistance to the refugees with a close co-operation with UNRWA. This included a project to raise a fund of more than £34,000 yearly to facilitate the education and vocational activities of the refugees through the establishment of The UNRWA Vocational Training Centre. For example, SCBOFR successfully raised more than £35,000 in 1962 and £38,500 in 1963 which was given to support the UNRWA operation. In 1966, SCBOFR launched the *European Campaign for World Refugees 1966* which collected more than £38,500 for the UNRWA. SCBOFR also contributed physical humanitarian aid such as tents for the refugees. During the June 1967 war, they contributed tents to the UNRWA camps at East Jordan which were occupied by more than 10,000 refugees. The cost of providing the tents was covered from the humanitarian campaign run by SCBOFR members through *The Anglo-Arab Association* who collected more than £77,000. At the same time its other members, like *Disasters Emergency Committee*, collected more than £10,000 (through a campaign on television) and an appeal by *The Times*, on 15 June 1967, collected more than £12,500.<sup>28</sup>

The British Government gave great support to the British NGOs to assist the Palestinian refugees in the 1967 war through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Ministry of Overseas Development. Up to June 1967, most of these NGOs worked closely with the Government to raise a donation for the victims of the war. *Oxfam*, for example, collected shirts and foodstuff valued at more than £9,000 and 10 huge tents worth £3000 each, which were delivered from Greece to the Palestinians. *Christian Aid* raised a donation of £3000 and the *United Nation Association*, through *Council for the Education in World*

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<sup>27</sup> Among them were Mr. Adam (the British Ambassador at Amman), Legal Advisor in Jordan Embassy, Ahmed Bey Khalil, Mr. J.H. Fleming from Murdoch MacDonal Co., Major D. Cooper from Save the Children Fund and Mr. Herdman, First Secretary of the British Embassy in Amman. See FCO 17/201, the British Relief Fund for Jordan, 1967.

<sup>28</sup> FCO 17/195 UNRWA Liaison Group, June 1967.

*Citizenship*, successfully raised more than £9000 for the refugees. The total value of humanitarian aid from the British NGOs up to 6 June 1967, including tents, food stuff, shirts and medicine was more than £143,743.<sup>29</sup> Aggressive campaigns in June 1967, especially in London, by *Middle East Campaign* and *Save the Children Fund* successfully raised a total of £164,300 to assist the Palestinian refugees of the 1967 war.<sup>30</sup>

***The British Aid to the 1967 Palestine Refugees: Humanitarian or Politically Motived?***

It is undeniable that the British continued to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinian refugees after the 1967 war. However, in certain aspects of the assistance there was a debate and curiosity over Britain's motives. The war itself gave a great impact on the British image in the Middle East. For example, the British proposal for Resolution 242 generated a general assumption that Britain was either neutral or in favour of Israel.<sup>31</sup> After the war, in order to rebuild the image of a "trusted friend" of the Arabs, Britain had to formulate and moderate its reaction and policy to be seen favourably by the Arabs. This included paying attention to Palestinian refugee issues. The assistance on the refugees had to be based on the vital consideration of protecting British interest in the Arab world.<sup>32</sup> Thus, one of the key strategies to preserve the British influence with the Arabs after the war was to preserve the close relationship with its traditional Arab ally, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In the 1967 war, Jordan joined the UAR and the Arabs against Israel. Hence after the war, Jordan was not just facing the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid. Fund raised for the UNRWA, June 1967.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. British Red Cross Society, 24 October 1967.

<sup>31</sup>Among the issues was the resolution tabled by the British, which did not clearly indicate the status of East Jerusalem which was occupied by Israel. Another was the issue of Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories unconditionally. This issue has been discussed by me previously. See Muhamad Hasrul Zakariah, "Bridge and Barrier of Historical Interpretation: An Analysis of The British Policy and Reaction in the Six Days Arab-Israel War, 1967," in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Muslims and the West: Bridge and Barriers* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University, 2006), Vol. 5, pp. 165-194. Also in Muhamad Hasrul Zakariah, *The Six Days Arab-Israel War, 1967: British Policy and Reaction* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Bangi, the National University of Malaysia, 2006).

<sup>32</sup>Among the vital interests for the British at that time were oil and strategic and political interests.

destruction of her basic infrastructures but at the same time experiencing political instability.

Having lost the war, the image of King Hussein deteriorated. There was dissatisfaction amongst the people and in the army particularly with his failure to equip the army with new technology of weapons compared with Israel. Hussein's image as the "Protector of the Muslim's Holy City" (Baitul Maqdis) was also destroyed after the occupation of East Jerusalem by Israel in the war. Worse was the flooding of Jordan with Palestinian refugees to the extent that they formed the majority of population in Jordan. These refugees, through the Palestinian *fedayeen*, were a great threat to Hussein's leadership. As stated in FCO papers: "Fedayeen, the whole movement is a cancer in the body of Jordan."<sup>33</sup> Clearly, the hatred among *fedayeen* against King Hussein and his ancestors increased after the war. The report by the British Council in Jerusalem describes:

The King Hussein's grandfather is blamed for causing the refugee problem by calling on the Arabs of Jaffa, Haifa and elsewhere to forsake their homes and for giving up Ramlah and Lydda without a fight. King Hussein himself is blamed for having given preference to the East Bank over the West Bank during the period they were united under his rule; for giving the West Bank into the hands of Israel by his ill-fated attack on the later in 1967. And now for trying to liquidate the *fedayeen*, the only people who can be said to represent the West Bank personally... perhaps because of the Israeli presence, there has been little public demonstration of this anti Hussein feeling.<sup>34</sup>

The *fedayeen* operation base was at the refugee camps in Jordan. The members of these organisations were the Palestinian refugees and they received huge support from Palestinian sympathisers, including Jordanians. It was very important for the British to handle the refugee issues wisely in order to restore Jordanian support to the king whilst at the same time liquidating the threat from the *fedayeen*.<sup>35</sup> For the British,

<sup>33</sup>FCO 17/1062, letter from J.F.S. Phillips to J.P. Trips, FCO, 21 August 1970.

<sup>34</sup>FO 17/1361, "West Bank Situation: Political Affairs," report by G.W. Woodrow, Acting British Council General, Jerusalem to R.M. Evans, 5 October 1970.

<sup>35</sup>*Fedayeen* are the Palestinian resistance group formed prior to 1948 against the Israeli imperialism. This movement comprised a few groups of Palestine fighters. Among them are The Palestine Liberation Organisation, The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and General Front for Supporting the Revolution. Most of these groups get support from UAR and Syria through Arab Nationalist Movements. They operate mainly in the refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, UAR and Jordan. For details, refer to

any regime change in Amman to a radical Arab leadership after the war would jeopardise British influence and its position in the moderate Arab population and in the Middle East in general. The British stand on the importance of preserving King Hussein's leadership even before the war was similar to Israel's, as concluded in FCO analysis:

From Israel's point of view the function of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been that of a *buffer* between her and more hostile Arab world... one of Israel's fundamental objectives is to preserve this buffer in one form or another."<sup>36</sup>

Even though Britain realised that the threat of *fedayeen* was very dangerous to its ally in Jordan, it admitted that it was not possible to assist the king directly against his opponents. As stated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Brown, to the Prime Minister: "There is no way in which we (UK) can intervene directly in Jordan to help King Hussein."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, any direct assistance from London after the war to liquidate the *fedayeen* threat would be interpreted as the king associating himself with the UK, the US and Israel against his Arab brothers. This could mobilise greater opposition towards the leadership of the palace.

Instead of giving direct assistance to King Hussein, the British decided to use other ways to stabilise Jordanian politics and restore the power of the palace against the *fedayeen* after the war. Since the *fedayeen* movements deeply influenced the majority of the Palestinian refugees in the camps, the best way was for London to "assist" directly the refugees at the camps located in Jordan. The main objective was to reduce the support of the refugees towards *fedayeen* by mobilising their economic activities for a better living condition. And this is one of the major reasons why Britain gave a very high priority on humanitarian aid to the Palestinian refugees. The Foreign Office's document justified this argument:

There is a risk that representations from us might prejudice the position of King Hussein. The only effective way in which King Hussein could be helped from outside (UK) would be if the "new" refugee problem could be made less acute since it is out of frustration and disappointment of the "new" refugees that the *fedayeen* have been able to develop their support in Jordan.<sup>38</sup>

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"The Philosophy and Aspiration of Fedayeen," enclosed in notes from Mr. Adam to Mr. Steward, 29 October 1968.

<sup>36</sup>FO 371/170182, "Jordan Important to Israel," enclosed in the letter from A.G. Maitland to G.F. Hiller, Foreign Office, 1963.

<sup>37</sup>FCO 17/221, letter from George Brown to Prime Minister of Britain, 26 February 1968.

<sup>38</sup>FCO 17/221, letter from A.R. More to Sir D. Allen, 28 February 1968.

However, despite the “humanitarian” aid from Britain, London believed that its motives could be achieved effectively only with the help of Tel Aviv.

The only measure which could be taken quickly to help the “new refugees” would be if the Israelis could be persuaded to have them back on the West Bank – the survival of the Hashemite regime is in their interest.<sup>39</sup>

Fortunately, the idea of assisting the refugees to help King Hussein, as initiated by London, was welcomed and shared by the Israelis. The Israeli Public Welfare Minister, Shimon Peres then launched a trust to help the Palestinian refugees, called “Trust Fund for the Economic Development and Rehabilitation of Refugees,” in 1970, with a starting capital of £2.5 millions. The objective of this fund clearly stated:

To raise standard of living in the occupied territories among refugees. Example of project in vocational training center which providing the skills necessary for the industrialization of the occupied territories, which in turn would lead to greater employment opportunities there. In the center, each can provide employment for 300 people.<sup>40</sup>

Ironically, Tel Aviv refused any possibility of return of all the refugees to their land unconditionally, withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories or pay compensation to the DPs, as demanded by the UN. Indeed, Israel decided that “The Arab refugees should be settled along the East Bank of Jordan within the framework of a regional development.”<sup>41</sup> Tel Aviv’s stand towards the refugees’ rights has a similarity with the British policy. Thus, this kind of stand and policy created curiosity and debate over London’s humanitarian assistance to the refugees. For instance, Britain never demanded that the Israeli regime repatriate or compensate the Palestinian refugees who lost their lands in the war, as required by the 1948, UN 194 (III) resolution.<sup>42</sup> The inconsistency of the British reaction created a debate on the real motive of its humanitarian policy and attitude towards the refugee problem in 1967. One of the examples was in the case of 170,000 refugees who were expelled from the West Bank in the 1967 war. Only 15,000 of these refugees of mainly old men, women and children were allowed by

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<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>FCO 17/106, letter from N.J. Mendel to Christopher Makins, 22 July 1970.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.* Letter from N.J. Mendel to Christopher Makins, 20 February 1970.

<sup>42</sup>See the resolution in *The Middle East Conflict: Notes and Documents (1915-1967)*, International Association of Democratic Lawyers, Brussels.

the Israelis to return to their villages. At the beginning, the British supported the demands of the UN and the international community for the right of these DPs to return to their villages unconditionally. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sir George Thomson, stated in July 1967:

Since the movement of the refugees first began in the wake of the recent hostilities, we have expressed to the Israel government in the strongest terms first our concern that they should avoid actions which would encourage an exodus from occupied territories and later our view that they (Israel) should do all in their power to facilitate the refugee return. We have made a point in our recent dealings with the Israeli government of expressing to them our disappointment and concern at what has appeared to be their bureaucratic obstruction of the return of the refugees and have pointed out to them that there is no surer way of losing world sympathy for Israel than to be obstructive in this issue. We have had their assurance that they will work to establish humane conditions for the refugees to return.<sup>43</sup>

Thomson's statement clearly indicated British support for the international community's demand for Israel to facilitate return of the refugees unconditionally after the war. However, Israel was willing to allow only 15,000 out of 170,000 DPs to return. Ironically, the decision made by Israel was then supported by the British as Thomson later stated:

It would however be unrealistic to expect all those who have fled (Palestinian refugees) to return and so we must accept that a proportion of the new arrivals on the East Bank will be likely to stay there.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly, the humanitarian aid from Britain to the refugees was not solely based on "humanitarian consciousness." At least, in the motive of preserving King Hussein's political power after the war and its unclear attitude towards the right of the refugees to return home or to receive compensation, London's generosity could be questioned. Britain's action has to be seen in the context of "image purification" as a key strategy to preserve London's interest in the Arab World, after its image was tarnished in the 1967 war. However, the fact was that this "camouflage" of political interest with a humanitarian generosity would not produce long-term benefit for peace and stability in the Middle East.

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<sup>43</sup>FCO 17/214, letter from Sir George Thomson to the Rt. Hon Anthony Nutting, July 1967.

<sup>44</sup> FCO 19/196, letter from Sgt. H.J. Arbuthnolt (on behalf of George Thomson) to Dame May Curwen, Chairman, SCBOAR. The National Council of Social Service, 18 July 1967.

### ***Conclusion***

After the Suez War of 1956, Middle East observers presumed that British influences in the region's politics would deteriorate. The resignation of Sir Anthony Eden, following Suez, marked the end of the British "empire" in the Middle East after decades of influence and control. Prior to the 1967 war, as the Cold War intensified, America and the Soviet Union emerged as the dominant world powers competing in the region. Hence, the British role in Middle East politics became less significant. However, due to the competition between the superpowers via their proxies in the Middle East, London then appeared as the neutral power and the best negotiator in the conflict. Resolution 242, tabled by London, was a significant symbol of the British role and influence using a different form of diplomatic strategy during the conflict.

The general assumption that British influence in the Middle East conflict in 1967 was less important could no longer be accepted. Britain's vital role in the conflict is also demonstrated through her continued aid contribution to the Palestinian refugees. London was the second largest contributor to the UNRWA's fund. The sincerity of its humanitarian donation was however questioned and led to a political debate. Finally, this paper justifies that the "End of the British Empire" in the Middle East did not end Britain's political and economic agenda in the Middle East conflict, and these hidden agendas are reflected in its continued aid to the refugees of 1967 Middle East humanitarian tragedy.