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## **Israel didn't come into being because of the Shoah; Israel exists in spite of it**

### **An open letter to Mohammed Bakri about the relationship between the Holocaust and the Palestinian Nakba.**

By Yehuda Bauer | 16:09 24.05.12 |

Dear Mr. Bakri, I write to you because of something you said at the Nakba Day ceremony held at Tel Aviv University: that the Holocaust caused the Nakba [the "disaster"] because it caused the State of Israel to be established.

I acknowledge the need to commemorate the catastrophe the Arab population underwent in the territories where Israel was established, as a result of the Jewish people's War of Independence. I do not believe the Nakba is solely the concern of the Arab-Palestinian minority: it is also the concern of the Jewish majority, even though I feel it clear that the Jewish War of Independence was fully justified. The Palestinian disaster must be studied, and various interpretations should be considered, including of who is responsible - the Palestinian leadership that rejected the establishment of an Arab state alongside a Jewish state, the Jewish leadership's policies, or both, in whatever proportions.

Yet the claim – accepted by the Arab intelligentsia and even large sections of the Jewish intelligentsia – that the establishment of the State of Israel was a direct result of the Holocaust, is unfounded. The Zionist movement built the infrastructure for the establishment of a sovereign Jewish entity in the decades prior to 1947/8. It wanted to bring in masses of Jews from Eastern Europe, where Jews were persecuted for national and economic reasons, at a time when no other country would take them in.

The Holocaust destroyed the human reserve that the Zionist movement was counting on. Out of the 3.3 million Jews in Poland, a large portion wanted to immigrate to Israel. The Holocaust put an end to that.

If anything the Holocaust put an end to what seemed, at the time, to be the very real chance of establishing the Jewish state. That the state was established nonetheless demands explanation; in utter contrast to your statement, the historic equation is: more Shoah, less Israel.

The majority of Holocaust survivors in Europe were concentrated between 1945-1950 in refugee camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy. As long as the British controlled Palestine, they actively fought immigration attempts, organized by both survivors and Zionist emissaries to Israel. Emigrating to America was not an option because until the end of 1948,

in practice until 1950, America was closed to these Jews. As a result of the Holocaust, the survivors became overwhelmingly Zionist, and since other countries had denied them entry, as they did before the war, the Zionist solution seemed the only viable one.

There was a consensus, including among the international community, that these Jews could not remain in Europe, and there was heavy pressure on the political echelons to find some solution that would allow for the refugees' settlement in the Land of Israel. In this sense, the Holocaust did have some effect on developments, but not in the way you argue: the Holocaust didn't put pressure on anyone; Holocaust survivors did.

That is, if less Jews had survived – if Nazi Germany were to hold out for one more year, certainly a possibility – then there would have been less pressure, and it is doubtful that the State of Israel would have been established. And vice versa: if more Jews had survived, the establishment of the state would have been much easier. That is: more Shoah, less Zionism and less Israel; less Shoah, more Zionism and more Israel.

Your speech is probably based on the 'myth' that Israel was established because the 'world' felt guilty about the massacre of Jews during the war. That's not true. Archives from 1945-1948 are now open. Britain objected to the establishment of a Jewish state. So did the U.S. State Department, whose members objected to partition, instead proposing the establishment of an Anglo-American protectorate. This protectorate would continue enforcing the 1939 British White Paper policy [which sought to curtail Jewish immigration] and effectively intended to deliver the country into the hands of the Arabs a decade later.

The only superpower that changed its behavior as a result of the Holocaust was the Soviet Union. In a speech on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1947, its representative in the United Nations, Andrei Gromyko, supported the establishment of a Jewish state, and even mentioned Jewish suffering in World War Two. We know today that this was done out of political considerations; the Soviet desire to remove Britain from the Middle East, and doing so by supporting the Zionist movement which was in dispute with British authorities. The Soviets did not act out of guilt.

Ahead of the impending historic vote at the United Nations (November 1947), the Jewish Agency raised support in many countries on the basis of Zionism's achievements in the Land of Israel, and the dire need to resettle Holocaust survivors. The Holocaust in and of itself did not play any part in this process – apart from, as we mentioned, in the refugee camps. Only the representatives of Nicaragua and Guatemala made references to what we call today 'The Holocaust.' All the other countries decided how to vote on Palestine based on political-tactical considerations. No one, apart from representatives of the two aforementioned states, made any reference to the murder of Jews during the war, nor showed any sign of guilt. And why should they feel guilty? They didn't murder the Jews. But as we mentioned, it is not only you that is wrong on the Holocaust's role in the establishment of the state. Many Jews make the same mistake, some even from the fields of politics and security. But you are an intellectual, and more is expected of you.

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