Dealing with Refugees

A comparison of refugees after World War II in Europe and Palestine

**Executive Summary**

This paper is about refugee populations after the Second World War in Europe and Palestine, with an eye to the current Syrian refugee crisis.

While in Europe after the Second World War within fifteen years after the end of the war refugee camps were closed and refugees resettled or locally integrated, the number of Palestinian refugees has been constantly growing since 1949, with descendants of refugees not being naturalized in the countries of refuge but rather inheriting refugee status, being registered as refugees by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) which is responsible exclusively for Palestinians. The paper proposes that this difference in outcome, reduction of the refugees in Europe after World War II down to zero, and continual growth of the number of refugees from Palestine, cannot be traced back to a lack of resources on the side of UNRWA. Rather, the disparity flows from a difference in attitude. UNHCR aims to settle refugees and lead them to self-sustainment in a new environment, while UNRWA embraces the policy of insisting upon the Palestinians’ return to the birthplace of their grandparents and for this goal keeps refugees and their descendants dependent and in a refugee status.

For this aspect the paper calls into comparison the Germans expelled from Eastern Europe after the Second World War, who also for some time called for a right of return. Contrary to Palestinian policy, however, German politics gave up upon this claim, favoring a relaxation and normalization of the relations with Eastern Europe.

The paper wants to show that there are alternatives to the UNRWA policy of leaving an entire population group in the status of refugees and calls for great care and effort to enable both the Palestinians as well as the newly uprooted Syrians to build themselves a new life and not remain a destabilizing factor in the region.