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**בשיתוף:**

קרן פרידריך אברט

*Senat 343 for political and social issues:*

## **The Demographic Balance in the 21st Century in the Territory of the former British Mandate**

### **Main Conclusion:**

- The number of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank is estimated at about 3 million.
- Fertility rates are starting to fall, but data is not yet substantial enough or sufficiently validated so as to indicate a long-term trend.
- In the long term, there is a certain demographic threat, although it is less immediate than that portrayed by the official demographic forecasts of the Israeli and Palestinian respective Central Bureaus of Statistics.
- Demography has become a weapon of the political dispute, based on a few unsubstantiated assumptions:
  - The available data leaves us in great uncertainty concerning the number of Palestinians living in the area and their rates of growth.
  - The assumption that demographic trends are deterministic and are relatively uninfluenced by political, economic and social processes.
  - The assumption that Israel's control over the territories is strongly dependent on the demographic situation.

All these assumptions are not borne out by reality.

According to the Palestinian population census, 3,761,000 Palestinians lived in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza at the end of 2007. According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, as of the end of 2008 5.4 million of Israel's residents are Jewish and 1.4 million are Arabs (the rest, 320,000, are non-Jewish immigrants).

Soffer's group believes that these figures indicate that close to half of the residents west of the Jordan are Arabs, threatening the Jewish majority in this area. This conclusion was assailed by the American-Israel Demographic Research Group, which stated that the number of Palestinians in the area is 1.3 million lower and that the demographic trends indicate a rapid decrease in fertility rates, promising a stable Jewish majority for a long period. Both alternatives are at the base of much public discussion concerning the feasibility of continued Israeli control over the territories.

The growth rate computed by the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau (CBS) shows that the Palestinian population grew by some 30% between the 1997 census and the 2007 census, while the Jewish population grew by only 17.5% in the corresponding period.

Prof. Soffer claims that the Palestinian census was accepted internationally, and therefore it is to be trusted as a reliable source (Soffer and Gambash, "The Tricky Million Person Gap," 2006, p.11). However, following the dispute on the matter, Soffer accepts a number of reservations:

- a. That 325,000 Palestinians who did not reside in the West Bank and Gaza at the time of the 1997 census were included in it (Dr. Shabana, of the Palestinian Census, *Haaretz*).
- b. That 264,000 Palestinians, residents of Jerusalem, were counted twice – in the Palestinian and the Israeli censuses.
- c. That the Palestinians' estimations, based on the 1997 census, forecast growth rates which were higher than those observed in practice. Della Pergola estimates this surplus at 236,000 people who should be deducted from future forecasts as well.
- d. That the fertility rates of Israeli Arabs have fallen in the 2000s more steeply than forecast by the CBS, although the trend is not yet clear.
- e. Soffer states that despite the lack of data, the Palestinian migration balance in the years Israel controlled the territories was probably positive.

The American-Israel Demographic Research Group (AIDRG), of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, examined the assumptions of the Palestinian census. The group claims that only 2.49 million Palestinians resided in the Territories in 2004. The disparity in figures came about for a number of reasons:

- a. The census includes 325,000 people who have a Palestinian ID card, but have been residing abroad for over a year, as opposed to international norms.
- b. The census includes 210,000 Palestinians residing in East Jerusalem, already included in the Israeli census.
- c. Data of the Palestinian Health Ministry indicates that the number of births was in fact lower than the forecast of the Palestinian census-takers by 238,000 people.
- d. An examination of the migration balance in the past years shows a negative balance for the Palestinians of 310,000 people.

e. AIDRG claims that since 1996 113,000 people were added to the population who were unaccounted for.

f. The disparity between the assumptions of the Palestinian CBS and the hospital data indicates a rapid decrease in the fertility rates of Palestinian women.

Yoram Ettinger, the leading protagonist for this position, asserts that there is a stable and long-term Jewish majority of 67% for 98.5% of the territory west of the Jordan river (**without Gaza**) and that therefore demography is a strategic asset, not a burden (internet site).

We believe that reasonable estimates can be given for about half of the disparity between the positions, about 1.3 million Palestinians. Both sides agree that:

- The 250,000-strong East Jerusalem population was counted twice.
- A certain number (50,000-100,000) of Palestinians who immigrated to Israel were counted twice.
- According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, the fertility rate of Muslim women fell beyond the forecasts of the Palestinian CBS. It is difficult to estimate the strength and scope of this new trend. It may have caused an artificial enlargement of the population by up to 200,000 people.
- The Palestinians did not include 325,000 people who resided abroad for more than a year at the time of the census, or their future offspring. This population is mobile, and may return if the political and economic situation in the territories allows.

Therefore, we estimate that some 3 million people lived in the Palestinian Territories in 2006, but there is a high degree of uncertainty in determining the figures, considering the fluctuations in migration and fertility trends and in view of the uncertainties of the Palestinian census. Only in the case of accelerated economic development together with an improving political situation, can we forecast a more rapid decrease in fertility rates than seen in the past period.

In our opinion, the main weaknesses of the reports are the hidden assumptions of both teams: a. the assumption that demographic processes are deterministic, and aren't influenced by political, economic and social trends. b. the assumption that Israel's ability to control the Territories in the long term is strongly influenced by the demographic balance. The experience of the Arab-Muslim world leads us to believe that the creation of suitable workplaces for women is essential for reducing fertility – a condition that does not presently exist. Moreover, Israel's control over the Territories is only slightly influenced by the demographic balance between the two societies.