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Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief

Asaf Romirowsky, Alexander H. Joffe

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Religion, Politics, and the Origins of Palestine Refugee Relief Asaf Romirowsky, Alexander H. Joffe This book examines the leading role of the Quaker American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in the United Nations relief program for Palestine Arab refugees in 1948-1950 in the Gaza Strip. It situates the operation within the context of the AFSC's attempts to exercise new influence on the separate issues of pacifism and disarmament at a time marked by US efforts to construct a Cold War security regime in the Middle East and British efforts to retain influence and bases in Arab countries. Using archival data, oral histories, diplomatic documents, and biographical and autobiographical accounts, the authors provide a detailed look at internal decision-making in an early non-governmental organization where beliefs regarding the requirement to provide refugees with skills for self-reliance clashed with intractable political and cultural realities and the realization that only full repatriation or resettlement elsewhere would solve the problem (a lesson that UNRWA and the international community learned only decades later). Faced with impossible solutions, the Quakers withdrew. The story of AFSC involvement in Gaza shows that refugee relief is always political and that humanitarianism can prolong the problems it seeks to solve.

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