

Palestine: Legacy of Conquest

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Having consistently destroyed organized Palestinian political and military resistance to Zionist colonial conquest, Israel must now contend with what is fast becoming a massive and generalized civil revolt.

The number of Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank Strip over the past several months of sustained protest approaches 100. After years of obfuscation and U.S. media silence on the plight of the Palestinian people, we now read daily descriptions of Israeli response to the ongoing protests that rivals and even surpasses state violence in South Africa: gunfire attacks on demonstrating youths, systematic night raids on Palestinian camps and villages, indiscriminate beatings, tear gas and rubber bullet attacks, deportations, censorship, overcrowded and inhumane prisons, mass jailings.

These are the official policies and “legitimate” tactics used by the “democratic” Zionist state against the indigenous population in the occupied territories, and in spite of the impression created by the sudden media attention in this country, they are not new policies or atypical tactics.

Israel’s response to its world-wide bad press and the timid U.S. criticism that it should implement more “humane” methods of riot control has been to beef up its military presence in the occupied lands as well as to adopt a few of the suggested modern crowd control methods (while continuing to use live ammunition in many demonstrations). Young people are also being beaten to death and shot with rubber bullets as the streets are filled with noxious gas that causes white welts on people’s skins (most of it made in Fredericksburg, PA). Several people have died from asphyxiation when the canisters were thrown into their homes: a five year old baby, an 82 year old woman; and there have been at least twenty cases of pregnant women who, after being gassed, have delivered dead babies.

A History of Blatant Aggression

It seems a strange occurrence to see top-line media mention of Palestinian suffering at the hands of the Israelis after years of conscious neglect. Since Israel’s foundation, there has been no critical media attention given to its most blatant acts of aggression, perpetrated with the intent of clearing the land of Arabs; for example, the 1948 massacre in the village of Deir Yassin, in which, under the command of future Israeli Prime Minister Menachim Begin, Zionist commandos killed 250 defenseless Palestinians (more than 100 of them women and children)

According to Noam Chomsky (in *The Fateful Triangle*, 1983), about 700,000 Palestinians fled or were forcibly expelled in the 1948 Israeli war of conquest of the U.N.-proposed Palestinian state. As Israeli wars continued (always posed as “self-defense”), thousands more Arab citizens of Israel were expelled from the Galilee region in 1956 during the Israeli attack on Egypt (a fact fairly recently revealed by former Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin who estimates that 3,000 to 5,000 Arabs were deported by the army into Syria at that time). Many of these people had previously been removed to make way for an Israeli water diversion project. Hundreds of thousands fled or were forcibly expelled from their homes throughout and after the 1967 war. Chomsky refers to a W.W. Harris estimate that of a pre-war population of about 1.4 million, approximately 430,000 left or were forced from their homes from June to December 1967.

During the 1967 war of conquest which left Israel in control of the West Bank and Gaze Strip, countless atrocities were committed by the Israeli army. Chomsky quotes New York Times cor-

respondent Kennett Love (whose stories were often censored or distorted in publication) who states that at least 275 Palestinians were killed upon Israeli capture of the Gaza Strip, and that 111 more Palestinians were killed in an Israeli massacre at the Rafah Refugee camp.

In the 1978 Israeli invasion of Lebanon 2,000 Palestinians and Lebanese were killed, and 250,000 became refugees. The number of Palestinians and Lebanese killed in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon varies from source to source, but Lebanese police estimated that between June and August of that year 19,085 Palestinians and Lebanese were killed (6,775 of them in Beirut, and 84% of them civilians).

On the tail of the Israeli invasion came the phalangist massacres at the Sabra and Chatila Palestinian refugee camps outside of Beirut, massacres allowed to take place by Israeli troops stationed outside of the camps, massacres facilitated by these troops who, under top Israeli orders, prevented people from escaping the camps and turned them back to certain death. Tabitha Petran (in *The Struggle Over Lebanon*, 1987) provides the staggering statistics that were made available by the respected Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk after a careful and detailed investigation: between 3,000 and 3,500 people were killed in the massacres, 700–800 of them Lebanese and the rest Palestinians.

Hundreds of Eyes for an Eye

Over the past twenty years there have been countless Israeli incursions into southern Lebanon, almost always with the pretext of retaliation for some PLO “terrorist” attack and always killing a much larger number of Palestinians and Lebanese than the number of Israelis killed in the PLO action.

There have of course been Israeli deaths as well, yet they are so disproportionate that one sees the Israeli understanding of the biblical dictum “an eye for an eye” as “hundreds of eyes for an eye.” Tabitha Petran states that “in the fifteen years following the June 1967 war, in which it [Israel] seized and retained an area three times larger than the Israeli state itself, the Israeli army killed at least 10,000 Palestinians and Lebanese, most of them civilians inside Lebanon. In the same period, according to Israeli sources, 282 Israelis were killed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).”

The recent events in Gaza and the West Bank are unique in this long history of confrontation and bloodshed only in that the riots, demonstrations and acts of rebellion have continued for so long; they are unique in that this time the rioters seem to have the upper hand for, as has been repeated recently in the mainstream media, their interminably impoverished and imprisoned situation leaves them with little or nothing to lose. What is not at all new or unique is the severity of the inhumane retaliatory measures used against protesting residents of the occupied lands not only by the Israeli military and police but the religious settlers and their vigilante groups as well.

Settlers in the Gaza Strip are small in number, but highly organized, financially supported and well armed by the Israeli government. They, along with the army and the police, are guilty of innumerable acts of violence against Palestinians, many of which are documented in both the Hebrew and the Palestinian press, by Amnesty International, in publications of the Peace Now movement, and in other alternative publications within Israel, such as “The Other Israel” (put out by the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace). In spite of such documentation, very few if any of these atrocities have been mentioned over the years in the mainstream U.S. media.

It has, however, recently been acknowledged in the U.S. media that Jewish settlers are suddenly “taking the law into their own hands” which suggests that this is a new phenomenon brought about by the extenuating circumstances of the rioting. But the settlers in the occupied territories long ago adopted abusive treatment of Arabs as a matter of course; — d found religious justification for their actions in their own laws and sacred teachings. As early as 1891, Jewish writer Ahad Ha’am wrote upon visiting Palestine, that settlers “treat the Arabs with hostility and cruelty, deprive them of their rights, offend them without cause and even boast of these deeds; and nobody among us opposes this despicable inclination.” Chomsky (again in *The Fateful Triangle*, 1983) refers to articles in *Nekudah*, the journal of the West Bank settlers, which states openly that it is mistaken for Jews to adopt a “humanistic” attitude towards the Arabs, that, according to the Talmud, God regretted creating the Ishmaelites (from whom Arabs are supposedly descended). The journal states, according to Maimonades (a medieval Spanish-Hebrew philosopher), that conquered people must “serve their conquerors.” They must be “degraded and low “ and must not “raise their heads in Israel but be conquered beneath their [the conquerors’] hand with complete submission.” The journal emphasizes that there is no relationship whatsoever between the laws of Israel and “atheistic modern humanism.” Such facts have been cleverly hidden or twisted, and the abuse has been allowed to continue by a religious and political system which grants the abusers almost total immunity.

Rock-Throwing Youths From the Beginning

There have been rock-throwing youths from the very beginning. Settlers have, over the years, told countless stories of catching Arab boys that throw stones, of beating them up and then turning them over to the army or police for further abuse. An arm or a leg is sometimes broken in “retaliation” for the stone-throwing. Many have been shot by settlers who claim they were only shooting into the air. Chomsky mentions a common joke from the occupied lands, that “Arabs should stop flying and begin walking on the ground so they won’t be shot so often when settlers shoot into the air.)’

Young Arabs have always been the targets of Israeli retaliation because they are the ones who fight back, throw stones, burn tires, demonstrate and protest openly and defiantly. During a tour of Lebanon in 1977, an eyewitness, standing in a street in the West Bank, reported “watching Palestinian school girls in blue checkered pinafores build a roadblock to halt the soldiers who constantly patrol the troubled West Bank. The schoolgirls are eleven and twelve years old. It is common for children to participate in and even lead demonstrations, and they will be arrested and fined heavily if caught.” (Published in *Our Roots Are Still Alive*, Palestinian Book Project, 1981.)

Countless Palestinians have been moved forcibly out of their homes and into camps over the years, and those that refuse are attacked. The retaliatory measures used by the Israeli state and its settlers against Palestinian defiance has always been outlandishly disproportionate to the original “offense.” Such retaliation is used against people not only for acts of war, which the Israelis label “terrorism,” but for all acts of resistance.

According to *The Other Israel* (Nov Dec. 1987), the homes of people accused of “terrorist” activities, decreed as such by a military governor without a trial, are routinely demolished. In a recent incident reported in the above publication, after several Palestinian prisoners were shot

and killed “while trying to escape,” Israeli hard-liners insisted on demolishing the homes of their families while some officials feared that such measures would cause riots. The hardeners won, and “at the end of October the houses were destroyed, leaving the families homeless. Several days of widespread rioting did follow.” This incident is considered by many to be the spark for the present revolt.

Recent reports also speak of the overcrowded and inhumane conditions of Israeli prisons, but again, these conditions are not new. Numerous extensive reports exist on the torture of Arab prisoners, but little or nothing on this issue has been made widely available in the U.S. Chomsky speaks of one “unusually careful study” by the London Sunday Times Insight Team in 1977. After a thorough investigation, the team found “evidence of torture so widespread and systematic that ‘it appeared to be sanctioned at some level as deliberate policy,’ perhaps ‘to persuade Arabs in occupied territories that it is least painful to behave passively.’” This study was offered to both the New York Times and the Washington Post but was rejected.

When Amnesty International suggested that the surprisingly high number of confessions by Arab prisoners might be an indication of inhumane treatment in Israeli jails, the Israeli Supreme Court Justice claimed that it takes very little time for Arabs to confess after they are arrested, and that it is “part of their nature” to do so. Chomsky conjectures that this “genetic defect” of Arabs must be contagious because there have since been an unusually high number of Jewish prisoners who are also confessing to crimes they did not commit after being forced to submit to Israeli police interrogation. Treatment of Arab political prisoners is particularly shocking. Chomsky states that in 1983 at least “200,000 security prisoners and detainees have passed through Israeli jails, almost 20% of the population.”

A “Public Relations Problem”

Suddenly there are reports in the daily press and televised incidents of Israeli soldiers beating and shooting Palestinian demonstrators. Soldiers claim that they have been ordered by their superiors to “club Arabs at random, not just rioters.” {Free Press/AP, 1-28-88} A CBS television crew was kicked and hit by soldiers because they were filming other soldiers beating up a Palestinian youth. A New York Times article (1-28-88) describes an Israeli phrase book which teaches soldiers phrases in Arabic such as “hands up,” “liar—go stand by the wall,” and “I’m warning you, I don’t want to see you again tonight. Get out of here quick.” There are reports of complaints by Israeli soldiers that they resent having to function as police instead of military personnel.

The tendency again is to assume that all these tactics, all this mistreatment has been brought about by the recent rioting, that the Israeli government and military have been put into an awkward and embarrassing predicament because of these immediate, difficult circumstances. In an interview with national news media, Morris B. Abram, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, called it “a real PR problem,” and went on to defend Israel’s “right and responsibility to protect the security of its people and the integrity of its institutions.” Certainly it is a public relations problem for Israel because the repressive tactics of its occupying army and its settler vigilantes are getting press in this country when they never did before.

For example, in 1982 the pressure of the Israeli Peace Now movement forced an investigation into the mistreatment of Arab townspeople at the hands of Israeli soldiers. According to Chomsky, the investigation led to a military trial which produced irrefutable evidence of methodical

brutality against local townspeople in the spring of 1982. In his testimony, the deputy military governor of Hebron, Major David Mofaz, stated that “Israeli soldiers .were given orders to harass and beat up Palestinian residents.” Mofaz was certain these orders came from the top, from the Chief of Staff, and was himself “person-ally ordered to beat up Arabs by the West Bank military commander.” He stated further that “the army had orders to harass the West Bank population, not just those involved in anti-Israeli demonstrations.” The trial also heard evidence that then Defense Minister (now Minister of Trade), Ariel Sharon had not only encouraged Israeli soldiers to beat up school children but that, in giving instructions to the soldiers in the West Bank for dealing with the Arab protectors, he had told them to “cut off their testicles.” Sharon reportedly stated in these sessions that “the only good Arab is a dead Arab.”

The defense claimed that the orders for the brutal treatment of residents were given by Chief of Staff Eitan, who, when called to testify, acknowledged ordering most of these punishments (expulsions, detentions, the creation of exile camps that lacked the required conditions of regular prisons, retaliation against those who resisted the demands of the soldiers), but he insisted that such measures were necessary for the maintenance of order.

Chomsky, referring to reports from the trials published in the Hebrew press, states that “apart from beatings, Arab detainees’ and civilians’ charges included forcing people to crawl on all fours and bark like dogs, laud Begin and border guards... slap one another (children were ordered to slap their parents) ...Major Mofaz ordered soldiers to write numbers on arms of prisoners on the Day of the Holocaust, but the military accepted his defense that this order was only given in jest (though it was carried out).”

In the outcome of the trial, four soldiers were sentenced to several months in prison, but Eitan’s orders were ruled to be legal. Major Mofaz’s lawyers claimed that he, along with other accused officers, “were merely following the orders and guidelines laid down by their superiors.”

A License to Kill

The historical irony here is uncanny and has been pointed out by Jews and Palestinians alike. The Jewish Holocaust becomes the justification for the Zionist oppression of another people; the oppressed become the oppressors, the victims the victimizers. As Fredy Perlman writes in his essay, *Anti-Semitism and the Beirut Pogrom* (1982), “it’s as if the experience of being a victim gave exemption from human solidarity, as if it gave special powers, as if it gave a license to kill.” And Zionists, with the massacres against the Jews still in living memory, commit in turn a new wave of atrocities against the Palestinians, using the same defense that Nazi war criminals used in the Nuremberg trials— that they were only following orders.

One wonders where the Palestinian rage for so many years of humiliation will focus itself in years to come if this terrible cycle continues. Who will be the victims of these victims? Who will be the target of their revenge? Although many voices in the Palestinian nationalist movement have, from the beginning, insisted on a clearly anti-Zionist position which rejects racist attitudes against Jews and other groups, the present reality is that many Palestinians are finding strength and solace in the growing Islamic fundamentalist movement which, like Zionism, mixes religious purity and fanaticism with a kind of racial and nationalistic superiority.

Of course, Israel is itself a theocratic fundamentalist state whose deliberate acts of terror against the indigenous Palestinian population have engendered a similar mentality among cer-

tain Moslem sects. The Israeli state is based on a racist pretext and on a religious and political rigidity which demands the passive obeisance of its conquered Arab peoples. The Islamic fundamentalist response should come as no surprise. What should surprise some, however, especially traditional apologists for the Zionist state, is that over the years Israel has purposefully encouraged and colluded with certain right-wing Islamic sects in an effort to destroy the secular influence of the PLO. With a conscious belief in the effectiveness of the tactic of divide and conquer, Israel has made links and conspired with fundamentalist Islamic groups as well as with right-wing Christian phalangists both in Palestine and in Lebanon.

Correspondingly, while the Israeli state becomes faced with the prospect of political compromise in an attempt to regain its control over an impossible situation as well as to appease its U.S. supporters and its own peace activists, reactionary Jewish fundamentalism continues to thrive. The American Rabbi Meir Kahane's Kach party and the mystical messianic movement Gush Emunin (which was the guiding force behind the West Bank settlement drive) have created their own cast of Khomeinism— one that has often spearheaded official Israeli policy through its violent actions, and articulates the true desires and intentions of the Israeli state when its politicians are forced (in order to avoid "public relations problems") to maintain a facade of relative moderation.

The U.S. is intricately intertwined in these extreme right-wing movements in Israel. As a recent article in the Nation (1/16/88) explains, many of the members of these two groups are American Jewish immigrants. The racist Kahane, who presently has a seat in the Israeli Knesset, raises money for his party in the U.S. and has a following among American Jewish youths.

A recent New York Times carried Kahane's quarter page advertisement entitled "No Jewish Guilt" (2/21/88) which rails against American Jews who are giving in to feelings of guilt over the recent events in the occupied territories. He calls for the removal of all Arabs from these lands, as always denying the very existence of the Palestinian people, and telling Jews, "let us not fear the world, Far better a Jewish state that survives and is hated by the world, than an Aushwitz that brings us its love and sympathy." So again the Holocaust provides justification for untold horrors, and the cycle of revenge continues.

Armageddon is Well Located

Kahane's version of security is a pathetic illusion as the violent history of this settler state attests. Such a nation, "hated by the world," creates more and more enemies and multiplies the threats to its existence. We should not expect the present unrest to abate in the near future for this cycle of conflict and oppression has been turning for over twenty years now. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to envision a resolution of the Arab/ Israeli dispute taking place within Israel/ Palestine, the eye of the storm, especially when one considers the deep-seated intransigence of the Israeli state and its long history of violent and repressive policies which have served to foment and disseminate Arab and particularly Palestinian outrage and resentment. As Chomsky says, "Armageddon is well located."

Israel appears to have no intention of ever rescinding its hold on the occupied territories. The original pretext for encroaching into these areas was, officially and publicly, military security, which is the same pretext used again and again for its incursions into southern Lebanon (occasionally sardonically referred to as the "North Bank"). Settlement of these areas (i.e., displacement of the indigenous inhabitants, destruction of their homes and livelihood) was, by some Orwellian

logic, meant to neutralize the hostility of the Arabs, when in reality their forced expropriation was part of an organized, long-range plan of Israeli colonial expansion and conquest.

But in a very short time, the fury of Israeli settlement and domination has created a threatening and explosive situation of “inter-dependence,” one that is presently at least as foreboding for the state of Israel as it is for the occupants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, many of whom could not be much more impoverished or imprisoned. The West Bank is economically bound both - to Jordan and to Israel, but more and more to Israel which depends on the West Bank for the sale of 25% of its exports. According to Yusuf A. Sayigh (*Journal of Palestine Studies*, Summer, 1986) 90% of West Bank and Gaza imports come from Israel; they are the second largest importer of Israeli goods (the U.S. being first) because of Israeli policies which deliberately curtail the development of Palestinian business, making it virtually impossible for Arab importers to buy from other countries. The controlled economies of these areas are thus termed “captive markets” for Israeli goods. West Bank and Gaza businesses receive no protection from Israeli imports, no government credit or investments, but they do have to pay taxes to the state of Israel which realizes a net profit of 30% on them. Palestinians in large numbers from the occupied territories have quickly filled the ranks of Israel’s cheap labor force: this phenomenon of migrant labor has dangerously increased the racial tension between them and many oriental Jews who despise the Arabs for usurping their jobs by agreeing to work for pitifully low slave wages, as much as 75% less than Israelis in similar jobs. Some 50,000 Palestinians are trucked into Israel each day from Gaza, returning at night to their . villages and camps in true South African bantustan style. The West Bank and Gaza are an economic boon for Israel yet, by the same token, Arab businessmen and laborers potentially hold Israel’s economic destiny in their hands.

An even darker, more ominous side of the region’s economic reality is its unmitigated dependence on the business of war. As a U.S. client/garrison state, Israel is inherently bound to this world power’s permanent war economy. For years it has turned a profit by supplying weapons to repressive dictatorships that formerly did business with the U.S. (Guatemala, South Africa). It then comes as no surprise that Israel has employed, for so many years, similar repressive practices domestically or that it is utterly dependent on its own weapons industry both in a material sense—to control the population in the occupied territories—and in an economic sense for the maintenance of the financial base of its major institutions. The increasingly unstable Israeli state has become totally politically and economically dependent, for its very existence and survival, on its expansionist program and the material demands of its repressive policies.

Such an entity can only speak the characteristic language of power and domination, attempting always to negate the genuine strength of its opposition in a maze of absurd logic. Thus Israeli spokesmen denied and continue to deny the widespread and spontaneous element of the riots, attributing them instead to the organized spark of outside agitators.

Israeli government officials continue to insist, and openly, that force is the only way to quell the outraged protests and continuing disturbances spurred on by Palestinian youths; force (i.e., abuse, violent repression) is, in their words, the only language the Arabs understand. In the next breath they demand to speak only with “legitimate” Palestinian community “leaders” when they themselves know that no such leadership has been allowed to exist in the occupied territories, that these people have been consistently killed, imprisoned or deported and their bases of influence methodically destroyed.

Palestinian Destiny Forced into a Nationalist Solution

The state of Israel is once again faced with the prospect of negotiating with the PLO which has had no controlling handle whatsoever on the progress or operation of the present uprising.

And Palestinians, even those who may be distrustful of the machinations of state power and want only to remain on their lands and maintain their communities, are forced into a nationalist solution; they are forced to put their destiny into the hands of the PLO because, as a political entity capable of articulating a state compromise in the language of power, it has become the only organized body formidable enough to challenge the Zionist state. One wonders then if a “democratic” Palestinian state will be modeled after the “democratic” Zionist state of Israel. Certainly, if ever given any degree of self-determination, the US and Israel will control its destiny.

It is, of course, the US that will ultimately “aid” in this process and certainly with its own economic gain or survival in mind. Israel receives \$4 billion in aid yearly from the US which thus finances the majority of Israel’s defense budget. The US is intricately tied and seriously implicated not only in the recent events in the occupied territories but in the already long history of that government’s repressive policies used against the Palestinians. Because of these ties, these crucial implications, it has been to the immediate advantage of both governments to keep the American public both confused and ignorant about the daily reality of the Palestinian people for so long. But Palestinian outrage is now so overwhelming and so widespread that the media censors cannot contain it. And, too, the weakened economic base of the US market has allowed some sacred cows to at least be openly challenged, however weakly.

So the plight of the Palestinians has finally, after so many years of humiliation and degradation, received a modicum of attention in this county. One would think that public outrage here would match that in Israel, where massive demonstrations have taken place. There are some letters written to the editors of newspapers, journalistic debate over the ethical or tactical mistakes of Israeli policy (debate which never questions the legitimacy of the Zionist state), and a few small demonstrations; but at this juncture, all the criticism seems to be allowed for, and it escapes through the steam vents needed for the machine to endure a particularly trying period and keep functioning with all its moving parts in place. The longstanding mix-treatment and torture of Palestinians, the historical sacrifice imposed on them for the survival of a Zionist state, demands the impassioned indignation of us all if this horrible cycle of state-sanctioned racism is ever to end.

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