

Life in Occupied Palestine

A Review Article

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Try to imagine daily life under these conditions:

You live in limbo in a country occupied by a repressive foreign army and a system of institutionalized and codified racism. You have no recognized nation, no right of citizenship and no power over your own daily life. You live in a constant state of fear. The occupier imposes economic strangulation and collective punishment by restricting free movement; enclosing population centers; closing borders; barring most of your people from working inside “its country”; imposing regular curfews, roadblocks, checkpoints, electric fences and separation walls and continues to build new settlements in your Occupied Territories (on your land in your country) violating the Geneva Conventions prohibiting an occupier from settling its population on conquered land.

The occupier denies your people their basic human rights including those under the Fourth Geneva Convention which governs the treatment of civilians in war and under occupation. There are 149 articles of this Convention. The occupier violates almost all of them and in so doing is committing war crimes according to international law. The UN Human Rights Commission determined it’s also committing “crimes against humanity” against your people. This concept comes from the 1945 Nuremberg Charter drafted by the U.S. to try Nazi war criminals. The international notion of a “crime against humanity” was established to define what Hitler did to the Jews. The UNHRC ruled this is what the occupier is doing to your people, and that this act is the historical and legal precursor to the international crime of genocide as defined by the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The occupier also sends its troops, tanks and heavy armor into neighborhoods at will to maraud and destroy. It also strikes at will from the air with sophisticated missile-firing attack helicopters and F-16s and deliberately inflicts eardrum shattering and terrifying sonic booms. And it gives its military/security forces the right to freely harass, arrest or kill extra-judicially any of your people – man, woman or child on any pretext with impunity. It bulldozes homes and the people in them if they don’t escape in time (usually in middle of the night and without warning or notice) as punishment or for lacking a permit to build on their own land, in their own country or for any other reason. It steals land relentlessly hoping it will have it all one day or at least all the parts it wants. It detains, imprisons and tortures thousands of your people for the real or perceived crime of fighting for their freedom against an oppressive occupier.

To enact vengeance and to provide security for its illegal settlers in your Occupied Territories, it restricts or prevents access to essential and emergency health care, education, employment, the right to move goods and services from producer/suppliers to

end users, and even enough food and water. It created a state of economic siege forcing up to nearly two-thirds of your people (according to the UN) below the poverty line of \$2.20 a day (and half of those two-thirds on \$1.60 a day or less) and over half the work force to be unemployed (the number varying with the intensity of the Israeli lockdown). It destroys your peoples' crops and orchards including more than 1 million olive trees. It imposes punitive taxes and provides few services or withholds them at will as collective punishment. You have no power to stop any of these abuses or receive any redress in the occupier's courts. How can you as a Muslim in a racist Jewish state.

DEMONIZATION OF MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN A TIME OF MANUFACTURED FEAR AND ANXIETY

It's always been open season in Israel and the West to demonize Muslims and Islam with language like "fundamentalist extremists", "crazed Arabs", "Jihadists" and "terrorists." The late renown and redoubtable Palestinian - American scholar, humanist and activist Edward Said explained in his most influential book - Orientalism - that as early as the 14th century Muslims and Islam were demonized with pronounced vitriol in Dante's most famous work - The Divine Comedy - and that his characterizations of Islam were common in much English literature that followed.

9/11 just gave it added impetus to become practically de regueur. The "extreme right" in Israel and the West used a heightened and hyped climate of fear to use an old and easy scapegoat to advance their extremist imperial agenda behind the easy cover of patriotism and protecting national security. It wasn't hard to portray Muslims and Islam as intolerant, inferior, violent and anti-western, especially Muslims of color or from Arab countries.

Former Israeli leaders were just as intolerant, referring to Palestinians in the most degrading terms, such as - Prime Ministers Menahim Begin calling them "cockroaches" and "beasts walking on two legs", Ehud Barak calling them "crocodiles", and Golda Maier saying "There was no such thing as Palestinians, they never existed." Even Israel's George Washington and first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, said after expelling the Palestinians from their homes and land by brute force in the 1948 war establishing the State of Israel: "We must do everything to insure they (the Palestinians) never do return." He also said at that time: "We have come and we have stolen their country." He expressed the same sentiment a decade earlier in a letter to his son when he wrote: "We will expel the Arabs and take their places.....with the force at our disposal." He thought they'd get away with it and that Palestinians would never come back when he added: "The old will die and the young will forget." He was right (so far) on the first point and dead wrong on the second.

MUSLIM WITCH-HUNTING IN ISRAEL AND THE WEST

The current war against Muslims and Islam is now raging in the West. Witness a Muslim cleric in London, Abu Hamza al Masri, being sentenced to 7 years in prison for daring to speak out against Muslim persecution and being convicted of inciting terrorism. The U.S. also seeks his extradition. Witness Mounir el Motassadeq's conviction in Germany of supposedly belonging to the al Queda cell that plotted the 9/11 attack. He insisted he had no involvement even though he knew some of the hijackers - to no avail. What chance could he have for "due process" in a country whose new Chancellor compares Islam with the "rise of fascism." Witness the many Western countries that now have draconian immigration laws principally aimed at people of color and Muslims behind the facade of a fraudulent "war on terror" and supposed border protection. And witness the current furor and backlash from the

“cartoons” published in Denmark and other countries portraying a blasphemous image of the Prophet Mohammed. Imagine the response in the West if a similar portrayal of Christ appeared in a Muslim publication.

These images in print are just another part of the propaganda war on Islam used to justify the real thing in Iraq and Afghanistan and maybe soon in Iran and Syria. Call this episode “cartoon war.” It’s a glaring example of how the Western corporate media promote their governments’ racist campaign to degrade Muslims, portray them as inferior, label them terrorists, hope to stir up violence to prove it, give cover to Israeli oppression, and sell wars.

Israel as well has a long history of demonizing Muslims. They likely wrote the modern book on it. And they use it to justify “removing” anyone considered a threat to their authority and dominance. Recent examples include regular targeted assassinations (and willingness to commit them in other countries including the U.S.) and the fraudulent conviction on trumped up charges of Marwan Barghouti, the Palestinian leader who was imprisoned for life by the Israelis for the crime of being an influential freedom fighter. Barghouti, however, is still alive. Most often Israel prefers a sentence of elimination or targeted assassination. It’s much simpler when they can say “case closed” forever. Israel does it all the time with impunity and no condemnation by the world community of nations for these continued cold-blooded murders.

Influential Muslims or even some of their key supporters or defenders seen as a threat to the West don’t fare much better outside Israel. It’s never been easy for them, but since 9/11 the gloves have come off and the persecution has become fearsome and relentless. In the U.S., the number of those harassed, detained, imprisoned or deported runs into the thousands. No one outside the government knows exactly how many have been affected.

Three recent headline-making cases in the U.S. illustrate what’s so worrisome and disturbing. The most recent just concluded is the case of Dr. Rafil Dhafir, a Muslim American of Iraqi descent and practicing oncologist until his license was revoked. In a U.S. style “kangaroo court” type trial he was convicted of violating the Iraqi Sanctions Regulations (the IEEPA) because he used his own funds and what he was able to get from donors to bring desperately needed humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies, to Iraqi people unable to get them because of the U.S./UN imposed punitive sanctions. He did it through his Help the Needy charity. For his saintly work he was charged and unbelievably convicted of such claimed offenses as violating the sanctions, tax fraud, money laundering, and mail and wire fraud – a total of 60 counts and found guilty on 59 of them. The verdict – 22 years in prison. Everyone should visit Katherine Hughes’ website – dhafirtrial.net – for her account of the trial and outcome in her “must read” article “Crime of Compassion.” Katherine suspended her personal life to sit through the entire 17 week trial, became an advocate for justice for Dr. Dhafir and wrote and spoke out about it. What happened to Dr. Dhafir, a blessed, giving man, is a threat to us all. Katherine explained that the verdict sends a clear message to the Muslim community and everyone else – “If we can get Rafil Dhafir, we can get anyone.”

A second instance thankfully had a better outcome, at least for now. It’s the terrorism conspiracy case brought against Florida Professor Sami Al-Arian in which a jury exonerated him on the 8 most serious of 17 total counts against him and deadlocked on the other 9. The Justice Department trumped up the charges alleging Professor Al-Arian’s legitimate organizations that included the Islamic Committee for Palestine, World Islam Studies Enterprise, and Islamic Academy of Florida were fronts for Palestinian Islamic Jihad, an

organization on the U.S so-called “terrorist” list. The real intent of the trial was to silence an important voice supporting justice for the beleaguered and oppressed Palestinian people. It’s not known whether the persecution of Professor Al-Arian has ended as the Justice Department witch-hunters don’t quit easily. It’s quite likely they’ll return new charges and put an innocent man through more misery and expense until they find a way either to convict, bankrupt or break him.

The third case is one I’ve followed since inception and have given my financial support to its victim. It’s the case of Lynne Stewart, a New York City criminal defense attorney with a long career of defending “unpopular” clients because she believes, as we all should, that they, like anyone else charged, are entitled to the right of “due process” and “their day in court.” Lynne was asked by former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark to serve as a member of the court-appointed defense team for Sheik Abdel Rahman, convicted and now serving a life sentence in connection with the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Lynne was convicted in a gross miscarriage of justice for violating special administrative prison rules and providing material support to terrorists. In fact, she was convicted in the Justice Department’s assault on the Bill of Rights. The baseless charges brought against her stemmed from communications she had with and about her client, which she had every right to do to conduct a proper defense, but which were twisted and distorted in her indictment. She was convicted of defrauding the government, conspiracy, providing material support to terrorists and making false statements. She was also disbarred and now faces a long prison term – at her age, a life sentence unless it’s overturned in an upcoming appeal.

The lesson from these 3 cases is clear. Challenge state authority, in these cases in the U.S, even in the pursuit of bringing humanitarian aid to the desperately needy, speaking up publicly on their behalf, or aiding them in their pursuit of justice, and you risk being the victim of ruthless and relentless police state type persecution to put you in prison for a long time. Even if they fail to do it, they can break you financially and ruin your life. That’s how the system works. Understand it and be prepared.

HOW THE ISRAELIS CONTROL THE PALESTINIAN POLITICAL PROCESS

Until the election of Hamas in January, 2006, Israel coopted the ruling corrupted Fatah party. It managed to control (rig) the electoral process (when they allowed it) to insure its preferred candidates won who then would serve their Israeli bosses as a quisling or proxy government to hold in check or even oppress their own people while ignoring their needs. It hid all this behind the facade of a democratic process that prevented any candidate from running for a leadership position who might put the needs of the Palestinian people ahead of those of Israelis. It’s made daily life almost impossible and created overwhelming hardships and human misery. And it concealed it all with the help and complicity of the world community of nations (principally those in the so-called “Quartet” – the US, EU, UN and Russia) and the duplicitous facade of a sham “peace process” that never was and never will be as things now stand. After repeated failures, there’s always a new incarnation – the current one is called the “Road Map” (to nowhere).

Instead of being given any rights and humane treatment, Palestinians are portrayed as terrorists, militants and gunmen preying on the Israeli people. What they are, in fact, are victims and freedom-fighters. And no amount of Israeli concocted myth and deceit will ever change that or justify the egregious and endless crimes they commit against a near-defenseless civilian population. It matches a powerful Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) equipped with the most sophisticated high tech weapons including nuclear ones against a lightly

armed civilian population unable to defend itself. It unleashes that force at will brutally on the slightest pretext and has made life unbearable for a population some human rights observers call the most oppressed and longest suffering people on earth. There's no dispute that the Palestinians are the largest and longest suffering refugee population in the world with nearly 4 million of them registered as refugees by UNRWA - the UN Relief and Work Agency responsible for them.

The web site If Americans Knew publishes and keeps current what it says "every American needs to know about Israel/Palestine." It calls the conflict "one of the world's major sources of instability" and one Americans are directly connected to and imperiled by. The current statistics on its site cover the period between September 29, 2000 and February 2, 2006. They're listed below:

-Number of Israeli children killed - 123 Number of Palestinian children killed - 707

-Total number of Israelis killed - 1084 Total number of Palestinians killed - 3790

-Number of Israelis injured - 7,633 Number of Palestinians injured - 29,395

-To the above totals add that in the 2 weeks up to February 10, 2006, Israeli security forces killed 15 more Palestinians and injured dozens more including 12 children. And more Palestinians are killed and injured nearly every day, including women, children and the elderly.

-Daily U.S. aid to Israel in dollars - \$15,139,178 Daily U.S. aid to Palestinian NGOs in dollars - \$232,290

-Number of UN resolutions targeting Israel - 65 Number of UN resolutions targeting the Palestinians - 0

-Number of Israelis held prisoner by the Palestinians - 0 Number of Palestinians held prisoner by the Israelis - 9,184

-Number of Israeli homes demolished by the Palestinians - 0 Number of Palestinian homes demolished by the Israelis - 4,170

-The current Israeli unemployment rate is - 8.9% The current estimated Palestinian unemployment rate - estimates vary and range up to 67% and at times even higher.

-Number of new Israeli settlements (for Jews only) built between March 2001 and July 11, 2003 on stolen Palestinian land - 60+ No Palestinian settlement has ever been built on stolen Israeli land (even though it's land Israel stole from the Palestinians)

How did it get this way, and how can the Palestinians change it?

THE MYTH OF "WE WERE HERE FIRST" AND GOD PROMISED THE LAND (ISRAEL/PALESTINE) TO THE JEWS

Orwell explained that "those who control the present control the past, and those who control the past control the future." He meant they control the public mind by directing the flow of information including writing the history - the past as they want us to believe it. The notion Israelis want all Jews and everyone else to believe is that what is now the State of Israel was

once a barren land first occupied only when the Jews arrived. Baloney. The truth is evinced by a wealth of historical and archeological evidence that civilization flourished on that land at least 1,000 years before the Jews arrived and maybe much longer. The one preceding the arrival of Jews was a Canaanite civilization that became completely Arabized after Arab invaders first came in the 7th century A.D. That transformed society became the ancestral heritage of the Palestinian people by the end of the 7th century, although the term Palestine originated with the Philistines and was used by the Roman Empire. From that early time until the State of Israel was created in 1948, the land was called Palestine, and its people, a huge Arab majority, were called Palestinians.

The origin of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes back to the late 19th century and the founding of Zionism. The proximate cause for its founding was virulent anti-semitism, especially in czarist Russia, and the belief by some Jews that only in a Jewish state would Jews be safe from persecution. The early Zionists were willing to consider any location but finally agreed on Palestine because of its biblical connection. They early on created the myth of calling Palestine “a land without people for a people without a land”, and they just came to reclaim their ancestral home. They ignored the fact that the so-called “empty land” had a flourishing population of Palestinian Arabs and few Jews. But their real plan was to completely dispossess the indigenous Arab population and create a wholly Jewish state for Jews alone. They were aided by the duplicitous British after WW I who made Palestine part of their empire and in their 1917 Balfour declaration gave its support for a Jewish homeland there while at the same time promising the Arabs the land would become independent.

Once the Palestinian Arabs caught on to the Zionists’ real intentions, they understood the threat to their own existence and strongly opposed further Jewish immigration. Had it not been for the political and military support from the British colonial ruler, the Zionist goal for a Jewish state never would have been realized. With that support, immigration continued, the real threat of dispossession grew, and therein lay the root of the intractable conflict that continues to this day with no sign of resolution.

CREATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

On May 14, 1948 the State of Israel was born on the ruins of Palestine and its people, and on the day the British mandate over Palestine expired. Earlier on November 29, 1947 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish state. It voted to partition Palestine into 2 independent states, one for Jews and the other for the majority Arab population. At that time the Jews comprised one third of the population and owned 6% of the land. But the partition plan gave them 55% of it and created added pressure that led to the 1948 war the Palestinian people didn’t want.

War began on May 15 when the armies from 7 Arab countries (including Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon) crossed into Israel and began hostilities. Despite the Israeli myth that they were outgunned and outnumbered, in fact, they had a superior force in manpower and military strength for most of the war (but not the beginning). They also had a great tactical advantage especially against Arab armies that were uncoordinated, didn’t use what they had effectively, and were not fully committed to fighting on territory outside of their own.

Hostilities ended in 1949 when Israel signed separate armistice agreements with its 4 major warring countries. The agreements allowed Israel to establish its own borders which included 78% of British mandatory Palestine, 50% more than the UN partition plan allotted.

The cease-fire lines agreed to became known as the “Green Line.” Gaza was occupied by Egypt, and the West Bank by Jordan. For the victorious Israelis, this was their moment of triumph in their War of Liberation, but for the defeated and forcibly displaced Palestinians, it became known as “al Nakba” – “The Catastrophe.” An unknown number of Palestinians were killed in the war, but 700,000 became refugees. Many of them had fled during the fighting out of fear, but many others were attacked and “ethnically cleansed” (a term not yet in the vocabulary).

The Israeli belligerents committed documented atrocities during the fighting. One of the most extreme was at Deir Yassin (the symbolic beginning of nearly 6 decades of conflict), weeks before Israel became a state in 1948, where Zionist gangs (including the Irgun, headed by future Prime Minister Menachem Begin) massacred about 120 defenseless Palestinian civilians including women, children and the elderly. Sadly, it was just the beginning.

THE ISRAELIS TAKE IT ALL AND THE CREATION OF THE “OCCUPIED TERRITORIES”

In June, 1967 Israel launched a preemptive war of aggression against Egypt, Jordan and Syria (the so-called 6 day war) seizing the rest of Palestine not until then part of Israel – the West Bank including Arab East Jerusalem from Jordan, Gaza and the Sinai from Egypt and for good measure the Golan Heights from Syria. Israel falsely claimed they took defensive action, but it was clear the Arab states didn’t want war. Israel took advantage of tensions at the time, that could have been resolved diplomatically, to achieve what they wanted since establishing the state of Israel in 1948 – to seize what they called “Judea” and “Summaria” (land west and southwest of the Jordan River) – the remaining part of biblical Israel/Palestine they didn’t have but wanted. They took it and more.

Israel’s dramatic victory in 1967 had a big impact on the Johnson administration that was mired in the growing quagmire of Vietnam at the time. It became clear how important a strategic ally Israel was and in the vital region of the Middle East. From that time until today, Israel along with Turkey (and Iran until 1979 when the Shah was deposed) became our “cops on the beat” to help guard and protect the vital resources of the region. It was at that time that U.S. aid to Israel began to increase dramatically as well as full U.S. support overall for even the most controversial Israeli policies. For many years now Israel has been the leading recipient of U.S. foreign aid and now receives about \$3 billion annually as well as about \$3 billion more in loan guarantees and grants, the latest U.S. military technology and weapons and additional help in various ways when Israeli leaders request it. In total since 1949, U.S. economic and military aid to Israel is approaching \$150 billion. This aid has let Israel be able to build the most powerful military force in the region, fund and solidify its occupation through the building of settlements in occupied Palestine, construct its separation or “apartheid” wall, and create virtual open air prisons in the West Bank and Gaza.

The wall around Jerusalem alone will give Israel full control of that city and effectively strangle what’s left of the West Bank economy. And the theft of thousands of dunums of Palestinian agricultural land and the Western Aquifer (50% of the West Bank’s water supply) makes things that much worse. In addition, the so-called Gaza withdrawal was a hoax and shameless act with the small Israeli settler population there being resettled and the IDF just being redeployed to new positions but still in control of Palestinian life as it was before.

After the 1967 war, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 242 as its

proposal to end the state of belligerency between the warring states. The Resolution stressed “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war” and called for the “withdrawal of the Israeli armed forces from territory occupied in the recent conflict” and the right of each country “to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries.” It was an attempt to achieve “land for peace.” But it failed as Israel interpreted the ruling its own way and never withdrew as was called for. And the Palestinians objected because it didn’t acknowledge their right to self-determination.

Earlier in 1948 the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 194 that affirmed the right of refugees to return to their homes as codified in Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There it’s stated that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” It also states in Article 15 that “everyone has the right to a nationality.” Various other Geneva Conventions also affirm this right in their articles and provisions, thus clearly establishing in international law the absolute and universal “right of return.”

Resolution 194 specifically applied the right of return to the Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war expelling them. In it, Paragraph 11 states “that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so.....and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property.....” Israel is bound by this Resolution even though it’s from the General Assembly, as its admittance to the UN as a member state, through Resolution 273, was conditioned on its acceptance and implementing of Resolution 194 - which to this day it’s never done and refuses to do. Until this most fundamental of human rights issues is resolved, it’s hard to imagine any settlement of the current and intractable conflict.

PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP - FROM THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION ORGANIZATION (PLO) TO HAMAS

The PLO was founded in 1964, and Yasser Arafat became its leader in 1969. Early on it was militantly opposed to Israel’s right to exist and that Palestine was the national state for the Palestinians alone. But by the mid-seventies the PLO’s views softened to accept the international consensus favoring a 2 state solution. That new conciliatory position led in 1978 to the Camp David Accords and a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. It’s U.S. broker wanted a more stable Middle East with its vitally important oil reserves, Israel wanted peace but on its terms, and Egypt was convinced to along with promises of considerable U.S. financial aid and the return of the Sinai. The Palestinians, one of the Camp David participants, were left out in the cold. The Accords did nothing, in fact, to help their just pursuit of an independent Palestinian state, and it implicitly renounced the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland.

The predictable result was festering anger in the Occupied Territories that was fueled by extreme Israeli daily repression including the theft of Palestinian land for the building of large numbers of settlements for Jews only. It exploded in what became the first Intifada in 1987, the central demand of which was a free and independent Palestinian state. The term itself is the Arabic word for an uprising or rebellion and literally means “shaking off.” It pitted young Palestinians armed mostly with rocks and their will not to take it any more against the Israeli IDF with its heavy weapons, its willingness to use them, and its history of extreme violence and brutality against all Arab foes. The result was predictable. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed until the uprising subsided in 1992, and things went back to square one.

CREATION OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

The Middle East exploded again when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August, 1990 leading to the Gulf war in 1991. When it ended the U.S. and Soviet Union jointly sponsored the watershed Madrid peace conference at which Israel negotiated face-to-face with Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians for the first time. The conference was the catalyst leading to the Oslo Accords and their so-called Declaration of Principles. From Oslo Israel got what it wanted – a fig leaf to hide their ongoing colonization of the Occupied Territories. The Palestinians were again betrayed – by their leaders they hoped would help them. Instead they were sold out and got nothing back for recognizing Israel's right to exist as well as renouncing armed struggle, especially what they wanted most – an independent Palestinian state and the right of their refugees to return to their homeland. Israel was able to establish a new Palestinian Authority (PA) to be their enforcers – to control a restive indigenous population. Yasser Arafat and other PLO leaders who had been in exile in Tunis, got to come back, take control of their people, and be rewarded with the perks the Israelis allowed them for being their hard-nosed policemen – to do their dirty work. All the tough and most important issues were put off for future resolution – an independent state, the right of return, status of Jerusalem, settlements in the Occupied Territories and established borders.

Oslo I led to Oslo II in 1995 that made things even worse by dividing the West Bank into 3 zones – Areas A, B, and C plus a fourth area of Israeli occupied East Jerusalem. A complicated system of control was established, and in Area C, under Israeli control, Israel built its settlements on the most valuable land with its water resources. It connected them with many special by-pass roads built on stolen Palestinian land and for use only by Israelis. By 2000, 59% of the West Bank was in Area C. In Gaza, a small Israeli settler population occupied about one third of the land and over 1 million Palestinians had the rest.

So-called “permanent status” talks began in July, 2000 at Camp David at which President Clinton hosted Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat. It resulted in one more betrayal of the Palestinian people, although at the time, the major western media portrayed Barak as having made a generous offer that Arafat turned down choosing conflict and violence instead. Barak insisted Arafat sign a “final agreement” and declare an “end of conflict” giving up any legal basis for demanding additional land in the West Bank and Gaza.

In fact, there never was an Israeli offer in writing (no documentation, no maps). All Barak offered the Palestinians was from a May, 2000 West Bank map dividing the area into 4 intolerable and isolated cantons or “Bantustans”, with no direct links to each other or to Jordan and surrounded by expanding Israeli settlements and continued occupation. In addition, about 40 more Israeli settlements were inside these cantons with their surrounding roads for settler use only that further divided and isolated the Palestinians into smaller enclaves. As duplicitous as Arafat was, he could never accept this as a final settlement. To have done so would have given up any hope for a real Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capitol and the right of refugees to return to their homeland. Arafat had already sold out his people at Camp David in 1978 and in Oslo I and II but kept up the false hope that things could change. Had he ever agreed to Barak's demands (a one-sided deal giving the Palestinians essentially nothing), he'd have been run out of the Occupied Territories on a rail if he were even able to get out alive. For his part, it's clear Barak's intention at Camp David was to take all, give little or nothing, ignore any hope for reconciliation or resolution of the most intractable issues and continue the conflict. He certainly succeeded. And if he needed more help he got it when Ariel Sharon succeeded him as Prime Minister in February, 2001 and refused to negotiate at all with the Palestinians.

In a fair and just world, a man like Ariel Sharon would never have achieved public prominence, let alone become Prime Minister. This is a man who as a teenager became a militant Zionist and made a career out of extreme hostility and brutality against the Palestinians and other Arabs. He was a ruthless military commander who served as Israeli Defense Minister during the 1982 Lebanon war that killed nearly 18,000 mostly civilian Lebanese and less than 700 Israelis. During the conflict he was held “personally responsible” for what noted British journalist Robert Fisk called “one of the most shocking war crimes of the 20th century.” Sharon was in command of the IDF that sent a proxy Lebanese Phalange militia into the Sabra and Shatila camps where they massacred as many as 3,000 or more men, women and children along with any PLO fighters that may have been there. The ICRC reported counting 2,750 bodies. Many Palestinians claim the number was as high as 3,500.

THE SECOND INTIFADA, ELECTION OF ARIEL SHARON, AND END OF THE ARAFAT ERA

Before Sharon even became Prime Minister, the conflict resumed. It was sparked by then member of the Israeli Knesset Sharon making a provocative visit to the holy Al Aqsa Mosque site in September, 2000 accompanied by a large security force. It ignited the second Intifada that had been building because of continued Israeli oppression with no sign of it ending. It just needed a spark to set it off, and Ariel Sharon was willing to oblige. As always before, the Israelis used brute and lethal force that included bombing, shelling and sniper killings against mostly young, rock-throwing Palestinians or any other Palestinian man, woman or child in a targeted area. There were also extra-judicial assassinations of targeted Hamas and other Palestinian leaders Israel wanted to eliminate. Israeli forces also attacked medical personnel and ambulances, including those of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). By March, 2002 Amnesty International reported over 1000 Palestinians killed including more than 200 children.

Palestinians retaliated with suicide bombings, Arafat was blamed for not preventing them, and the result was the Israelis isolating him in his Ramallah compound and after another suicide bombing provocation attacking and destroying a large part of it. Israeli forces also invaded and attacked all the Palestinian West Bank cities causing great damage and an unknown number of civilian casualties and deaths. The most infamous assault was against Jenin in April, 2002 where the IDF invaded this city of 35,000 (including the Jenin refugee camp), cut it off from any outside help, destroyed hundreds of buildings (many with people inside buried under the rubble), cut off power and availability of food and water from the outside, refused to allow outside help to enter the city (including medical aid) and murdered an unknown number of Palestinian men, women and children. By any standard, the Jenin assault alone was a grievous war crime and crime against humanity, one that has gone unpunished, and now has been put down “the memory hole” and forgotten – except by its survivors who’ll never forget or likely forgive it.

On November 11, 2004 an era ended when Yasser Arafat died in a French hospital. Before being allowed to leave his Ramallah compound for medical treatment in France, the Israelis had held him a virtual prisoner for 3 years. A new election was held in January, 2005 and Mahmoud Abbas was elected President succeeding Arafat. Abbas was Israel’s preferred candidate. He had a proven record of deference to Israeli policy post-Oslo and, like Arafat until his fall from grace after September, 2000, was considered a Palestinian leader likely to knuckle under to Israeli authority and serve as its obedient proxy to keep the Palestinians in line, or at least try. The man Palestinians preferred to succeed Arafat and considered by

many of them as the Nelson Mandela of Palestine, Marwan Barghouti, was not allowed to run. In June, 2004 he was convicted in a Tel Aviv kangaroo court as a “terrorist” and sentenced to 5 life terms plus 40 years. Barghouti was a longtime activist and freedom fighter who denounced the Israeli occupation and oppression and fought to end it. The Israelis considered him a threat because had he been allowed to run he most likely would have become the elected Palestinian leader and one who couldn’t be bought off.

But it can be argued that any election held under occupation, with the occupying power controlling the process (who can and can’t run, who can vote and who can’t, who’s allowed to run an effective campaign to reach the voters and who can’t and more) is fraudulent on its face. The Palestinian people aren’t free, they live in an occupied country under the oppressive heel of an Israeli occupier, and their daily lives are affected by what that occupying power will or won’t let them do. Under these conditions, elections are just a smokescreen to divert public attention from the ongoing daily oppression trying to make them believe they have a democratic process which they don’t – not as long as the Israelis hold all the trump cards and especially if the people they elect go along with them.

THE PALESTINIANS SPURN FATAH AND ELECT HAMAS - CALL IT THE THIRD INTIFADA (THROUGH THE BALLOT BOX)

On January 25, 2006, elections were held for seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). When it was over the earth had moved, and the consensus view had not prevailed. Fatah and its old PLO structure long headed by Yasser Arafat until his death, was out and Hamas was in and in big. Fed up with its leadership that had institutionalized corruption and surrendered to the Israelis at Camp David and in the Oslo agreements, the Palestinians shocked the Israelis and Washington by defeating the ruling Fatah party and its quisling leader Mahmoud Abbas (who is still President). Hamas won 76 seats to Fatah’s 43 out of a total of 132 total representatives. While he was alive, the larger than life figure of Yasser Arafat allowed Fatah to hold on to its leadership. But with Arafat gone, Fatah was doomed. It was just a matter of when, and even Israel’s iron control over the election process to reelect it and its U.S secret funding couldn’t stop it.

Unlike Fatah that fielded a slate of unsavory and corrupted candidates, Hamas chose people untainted either by corruption or subservience to the Israelis. Hamas has always been in the wings since it was formed in the 1980s during the first Intifada to counter Israeli oppression. The Arabic word Hamas means courage and bravery. It’s also an abbreviation of the Arabic words meaning Islamic Resistance Movement. Hamas had built an effective resistance and social movement against the Israeli occupation. They provided essential services the Israelis and Fatah did not or not enough of that included health care and education in the Occupied Territories. Its kindergartens and schools offered free meals for children, education centers for women, and youth and sports clubs. It ran medical clinics offering subsidized treatment for the sick, and extended financial and technical help to those whose homes had been destroyed and for refugees in the camps. Israel calls that “terrorism.”

Hamas is a heterogeneous democratic movement with skilled and dedicated leaders, headed by Ismail Hania. It’s an independent movement of Muslim and Christian Palestinians united against their oppressive Israeli occupiers. They have nothing to do with so-called terrorism or religious fundamentalism although Israeli and Western propaganda paint them with those labels. They’re very moderate in their religious views, much more so than the religious zealot coalition Likud partners in the Israeli Knesset or the extreme fundamentalist Christians that greatly influence Bush administration policy. Unlike Palestinian leadership

under Hamas, both the U.S. and Israel are moving ever closer to becoming hard line religious fundamentalist states.

Hamas has always called for peace with Israel and is willing to negotiate a settlement now based on the principle of a "hudnah" or temporary truce. It's founder (who the Israelis murdered in cold blood), Sheikh Ahmed Yassin said: "If the Zionist entity completely evacuates....all the Jewish settlements and military bases....on the Gaza Strip, we can start a new phase of calmness in order to discuss the issues of Jerusalem, the West Bank, the prisoners and the refugees...Hamas was willing to stop its operations if the Zionists ended its occupation of Palestinian territories and stopped killing Palestinian women, children and innocent civilians." Israel ignored him, obviously preferring continued violence they mostly instigated.

Early signs from Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's government so far show little change from that policy and clear signs they'll likely turn up the heat including an economic squeeze on an already desperate and impoverished population with help at least from the US, EU and UN. The Sharon/Olmert Kadima party openly shows its intentions by calling for "fixing the borders of Israel unilaterally" - meaning unilateral annexation of (the Occupied) territory. They also say they'll never negotiate with Hamas as their charter calls for the destruction of Israel. This is just a replay of the 70s and 80s when the PLO charter had the same language and Israeli leaders wouldn't talk to them. Eventually that changed and accords were struck, although only one-sided ones favoring Israel.

One other note on the Hamas victory and overall PLC election. Of the 132 Palestinians who won seats, 15 of them are in prisons - 14 held by the Israelis and 1 by the Palestinians; 11 are from Hamas, 3 with Fatah and 1 with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (the PFLP).

ISRAEL'S REAL INTENTIONS

All Israeli governments only made a pretense of wanting peace and being willing to negotiate with the Palestinians. Behind the facade of a fake "peace process" under various names and plans like the current "Road Map", Israeli governments have really wanted a continued state of conflict intending to wear down the Palestinians until they either accepted defeat or gave up and emigrated to other Arab countries. Israel also needs cover to absolve itself from its crimes of aggression, land theft and endless oppression. They've done it by portraying their Palestinian victims as transgressors and themselves as the aggrieved and up to now have gotten most of the community of nations to go along with them, especially the so-called "Quartet."

But how long can this sham go on, especially as below the surface the most extremist Zionists want all the land of "Eretz Israel", the biblical Jewish homeland many Jews believe God gave to the 12 tribes of Israel. It includes much more than present day Israel and the Occupied Territories - Lebanon, most of Syria, part of Egypt and a large portion on Jordan. The people and leaders of those countries might have other ideas which down the road may well set off another major conflict.

Unlike other countries, Israel has no fixed borders - deliberately. It's to give itself lots of wiggle room to establish them one day where they choose. And their intent is to include within them the ancient lands of "Judea" and "Summaria", the West Bank biblical parts of Israel the Palestinians claim as their homeland. Israel has kept up the pretence of being

willing to allow the Palestinians an independent state. But by continued encroachment through expanding settlements and building new ones in the Occupied Territories and the construction of the “separation” wall, it’s real plans are to seize at least all the most valuable Palestinian land there for its own use.

THE SETTLEMENTS AND “SEPARATION” OR “APARTHEID” WALL

Last August and September Israel evacuated its 8,500 settlers and 21 settlements from Gaza in its so-called Gaza Withdrawal Plan. It was touted as Ariel Sharon’s show of good faith in his pursuit of peace. The plan also called for evacuating 4 small settlements on the West Bank. Despite all the hype and well-publicized anguish of the Gaza Jewish residents, the Sharon plan was just another Israeli subterfuge. The Gaza settlers were withdrawn, but only to be resettled elsewhere in Israel proper or on the West Bank, which is also Palestinian land. During the withdrawal period, the West Bank settler population grew by nearly another 16,000. Furthermore, the IDF did not withdraw. It was merely redeployed away from the settlements they were guarding to new positions on the border. Gaza continues to be sealed off, and the IDF is prepared to reenter it any time and on any pretext with as much control over Palestinian life as before.

Under these conditions it’s no exaggeration to describe Gaza and its 1.4 million residents as living in the world’s largest open air prison. In essence, nothing has changed except the Palestinians got more land in Gaza to use and an agreement was made with Egypt to allow Palestinians free entry and exit between Gaza and Egypt (as long as Israel and/or Egypt don’t annul the agreement). Israel, however got rid of its Gaza headache – the expense and trouble of having to guard a small settler population in an area without valuable resources (except its access to the sea) and that has no historical places sacred to the Israelis. It also hoped to divert attention away from its continued settler expansion in the West Bank that goes on unabated.

Currently about 250,000 Israeli settlers live in the occupied West Bank (and about the same number of Palestinians) on about 200 settlements and over 70 non-contiguous outposts. About another 200,000 live in Jerusalem. In addition, thousands of new settlers arrive each year. While 4 small West Bank settlements are scheduled to be evacuated, new larger ones are planned as construction for Israeli settlers continues unabated.

Central to the Israeli plan is its intent to annex and control all of Jerusalem including Arab East Jerusalem. It plans to do it by cutting the West Bank in half with its “separation” wall separating about 200,000 Arab Jerusalemites from the 100,000 remaining Arab population in Jerusalem on the other side of the wall or who live in satellite areas of the city. The idea is to force out of the city and surrounding areas as many Palestinians as possible (ethnically cleanse the area) to Judaize the city and prevent the eastern part from ever becoming the capitol of an independent Palestinian state. Once the wall is completed it will destroy the economic, social and political viability of Palestinian life in and around the city and negate any possibility of a two-state solution. But that’s the whole idea, and so far Israel is getting away with it.

The “separation” or “apartheid” wall is key to Israel’s plans. It’s being built on the pretext of needed security protection from Palestinian “terrorist” attacks. But that’s just another Israeli deception and ploy to add to all the others through the years. In fact, the intent of the wall is to achieve a “land grab” to facilitate settlement expansion, prevent the possibility of a two-state solution, help solve Israel’s so-called “demographic problem” (as a faster growing

Palestinian population is making them a majority in an otherwise “Jewish state”), and also destroy Palestinian society – its political, economic and social viability. There’s an ugly word for that which takes in all other Israeli crimes over nearly 6 decades against the Palestinian people – it’s called genocide. It’s also called state terrorism which is far more destructive than a hoard of suicide bombers.

The wall is being built on Palestinian land, and its construction is destroying Palestinian villages, homes, orchards and crop land, and the lives of the people affected. Israel’s Supreme Court ruled that the state has the “authority in principle” to erect the wall on occupied Palestinian land. But the World Court in the Hague disagrees. It ruled that its construction is “contrary to international law”, in part because it “destroyed and confiscated” property, it greatly restricts Palestinian movement, and it “severely impedes the exercise by the Palestinian people of (the) right to self-determination.” The Court ruled 14 – 1 that construction must end at once, the existing portion already built must be taken down, and affected Palestinians must be compensated for their losses. The Court cited the binding international law codified in the Hague Regulations of 1907 (dealing with the laws of war and war crimes) and the Fourth Geneva Convention (that relates to the protection of civilians in time of war) in their ruling. They ruled that Israel was required to comply with the international humanitarian law in the Regulation and Article 49 of the Convention. The UN General Assembly also passed a resolution by 150 – 6 calling on Israel to adhere to the World Court decision. Only Israel, the US, Australia and 3 Pacific island states most people never heard of voted against the resolution. Israel ignored the World Court verdict and UN resolution. The world community of nations remained silent, especially the “Quartet.”

THE ONE-SIDED WESTERN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL AND GREAT COVER-UP OF ANY SERIOUS CRITICISM

No subject is more sensitive in the West, especially in the U.S., than criticism of Israel. It’s the metaphorical “third rail.” Touch it and pay dearly – severe denunciation, labeled an anti-semitic or self-hating Jew, even ostracism. As mentioned earlier, the Israeli quick and decisive victory in their 1967 war convinced the U.S. of its value as a strategic partner. From that time forward, Israel got strong U.S. political and financial support and could do no wrong. It was aided by prominent Jews and Jewish supporters in government and business and its powerful AIPAC lobby.

Today AIPAC is part of an unholy alliance of itself, the equally powerful right wing Christian fundamentalists and dominant neoconservatives running the Republican party and the country. That triumvirate has a fourth unofficial member, the most powerful of all in that “fearsome foursome” – the dominant corporate media. It controls the message the public and world hears, and that message supports all things good for business and profits which includes full support for Israel. They help promote and maintain the manufactured myths, and you can read where they stand posted on their collective board room walls – “no criticism of Israel allowed.” Any public official or independent voice daring to violate this binding rule will be metaphorically skinned (or eaten) alive. Those in Congress will face likely defeat at the polls, and those in the mainstream media can expect relentless and intense condemnation and possible job loss. Even most in the so-called progressive community and its media tread lightly around this very touchy subject – a little criticism is OK, just don’t go too far or be too tough.

Eminent Middle East scholar and expert Professor Norman Finkelstein is an exception. He’s courageously stood apart from the mainstream one-sided and hypocritical view as a

longtime critic of Israeli policy. In 2 of his important books (The Holocaust Industry and Beyond Chutzpah) he explains how Israel and its influential supporters, underwriters and promoters (flacks) help build sympathy and support and deflect public criticism. He shows how they've done it by resurrecting the myth (at opportune times) of a virulent and pervasive "new anti-semitism" and by copyrighting Hitler's genocide against the Jews, rebranding it as "The Holocaust", claiming it was a unique event in history only affecting the Jews under the Nazis, and creating a supporting myth of "unique Jewish suffering." With no resonant message to counteract this propaganda, it's easy to understand why the public accepts it.

CAN JUSTICE FOR THE PALESTINIANS EVER BE ACHIEVED - OF COURSE, BUT IT WON'T BE EASY

It won't happen unless the world public knows the truth about Israeli imperialism, racism (religious, not racial) and criminality and forces its leaders (principally from the "Quartet") to combat it - no more baloney, halfway measures, or finessing; no more peace plans; no more scam of good Jews and bad Arabs; no more Muslim demonizing, anti-Muslim polemics or inflammatory Judeo-Christian superiority and Muslim inferiority, no more acceptance of the racist notion of the Jews as "the chosen people" and all Arabs as "Untermenschen" (or subhumans). The only way forward to resolution is to destroy the myth of Israeli good intentions and Palestinian intransigence and militancy and demand the oversized and overused Israeli boot be removed from the Palestinian face.

Some feeble efforts toward establishing peace in the Middle East between Israel and its Arab neighbors and the Palestinians have been ongoing, on and off, at least since the 1970s. A key beginning was Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's diplomacy after the 1973 Yom Kipper War. While other Arab states continued their state of war with Israel, Sadat made his unprecedented visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 to negotiate and address the Israeli Knesset. It led to the Camp David Accords in 1978. All the other efforts in the continued reincarnations of the so-called "peace process" followed that were discussed earlier - but to what end.

Israeli has peace, sometimes uneasy, with its Arab neighbors but none with the Palestinians. With them it's always back to "square one" because the Israelis don't want peace with their Arab denizens and never did. They want all the land of Israel including the Occupied Territories, ethnically cleansed, except for possibly a handful of isolated and surrounded cantons on tiny fractions of isolated, undesirable land Israel for now can do without - open air prisons locked down tight. Should this happen, the bottom line for the Palestinians will be no Palestinian state or any hope of ever getting one, no coherent territory, no capital in Jerusalem, no right of return, no economy, no real polity, no sovereignty - nothing but the right to continued Israeli oppression and serfdom if Israel chooses to use them as cheap labor.

If real justice is ever to be achieved, 6 decades of Israeli Zionist oppression must be fully exposed and condemned for what it's been and still is - crimes as grievous as everything the Nazis did to the Jews except for the mass production death camps. The Zionists have their own type death camps - slow motion genocide behind the false facade of conciliation. The fraud, abuse and manufactured myths must end along with the often reconfigured "peace process" with catchy new names and be replaced with forceful action - boycotts, sanctions with teeth, isolation and prosecution of Israelis guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Full Palestinian rights must be restored beginning with the return of their

stolen land and the right of their refugee population to return to their homeland or be compensated for their loss if they choose not to. The Palestinian people and its leaders should accept nothing less. And the world community of nations, especially the "Quartet", must stand with them to be sure they finally get it.

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