The Conflict in Palestine: Illusions of Peace and the Need for Effective Resistance

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Peaceful co-existence is possible among Muslims, Christians and Jews. Such an existence was a reality before Zionism was introduced.  Palestine, in particular, and its surrounding Middle Eastern Arab countries, in general, was always the home for an inclusive and tolerant multi-ethnic and multi-cultural community. Such a peaceful co-existence, however, is impossible with a colonial settlement embedded with racist ideological foundations.  Accordingly, all peace efforts and initiatives to resolve the conflict have failed for a simple reason: Zionism is in denial of Palestinian reality and rights.  Exclusivity of the Jewish State is irreconcilable with a peaceful co-existence with the native people of Palestine.  The illusive “peace process” was used to buy time during which more lands were stolen, more settlements were built on these stolen lands, and more war crimes were committed to push the Palestinians into despair and surrender to the Zionist diktat. Until Israeli Jews decide to come to terms with the Palestinian reality and admit the crime committed against the Palestinian people and correct the wrong done, Palestinians are left with no other alternative but to continue with their resistance to the racist  
colonial project.

Implementation of the Zionist project in Palestine started even before the 1st Zionist Congress was held in 1897.  The first wave of Jewish colonial settlers began to arrive in Palestine as of 1882.  These early birds were sponsored by the precursor of the ZO, Hovevi Zion, which was founded by Leo Pinsker and others including Ahad Ha’am.

Efforts of these early settlers to buy lands and expel the Arab fellahin (peasants) earning their living from working on these lands provoked immediate reaction from the fellahin.

The first signs of Palestinian resistance were a direct and spontaneous reaction to the behavior of the pioneer colonial settlers.  Their efforts to dispossess and displace the Arab fellahin were provocative and led to violent confrontations. (For details of Palestinian resistance at this early stage of the conflict, see: Rashid Khalidi, “Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness”, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997)

Palestinian resistance at this stage was limited.  It took wider and national dimensions during the British Mandate.  Appeals, demonstrations of protest and strikes were a characteristic feature of life in Palestine during the British Mandate.  Some of these protests turned violent as in 1920, 1921, and 1929 and during the rebellion, which broke out in 1936 and lasted until 1939 when it was brutally crushed by the British.  Commissions of Inquiry were appointed following each of the violent riots with a “Statement of Policy” being issued following the appointment of each Commission.  (Sami Hadawi. “Bitter Harvest: A Modern History of Palestine”, New York: Olive Branch Press, 1989, p. 51)

In February 1939, Britain convened a round-table conference in London to discuss a peaceful resolution to the conflict.  No agreement was reached. After a period of abortive efforts, the British government finally decided, in February 1947, to refer the task of finding a solution to the General Assembly of the UN.

On 29 November 1947, the UN issued resolution # 181 dividing Palestine into two states: one for the Arabs and the other for the colonial settlers.

Following the declaration of Israel and Al-Nakba of 1948, Palestinian resistance developed to adapt to the new developments.  The Arab Higher Committee (AHC), which was formed in 1936 to assume overall Palestinian leadership of the revolution and to coordinate the activities of the various nationalist parties during the 1936 rebellion, became ineffective.

In September 1948, the AHC announced the establishment of an all-Palestine government in Gaza.  A Palestinian National Council sponsored by the all-Palestine Government met in Gaza and elected the Mufti, Hajj Amin Husayni, head of the AHC, as its president and named a cabinet.  On October 1, 1948, the all-Palestine government issued a Palestinian “Declaration of Independence”. The government later moved to Cairo and proved to be a complete failure. It was as helpless and powerless as the Palestinian people were.  It reflected the loss, weightlessness, and aimlessness of the Palestinian people and was unable to do anything at the time.

After a period hopelessness, a number of Palestinian movements, advocating armed struggle to free Palestine, began to appear.  These movements included, among others: Fatah, which was established in January 1959; the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which was established in 1967; the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), which seceded from the PFLP in 1969; Hamas (The Islamic Resistance Movement), which was founded in 1988; and Jihad al-Islami (Islamic Jihad), which broke away from the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the 1980’s.

In January 1964, Egypt proposed an independent Palestinian entity in the form of a Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).  Ahmad al Shukairy, who was part of the AHC during the British Mandate in Palestine, was appointed to do the job.  Under his chairmanship, Shukairy held a meeting in Jerusalem in May 1964, which was attended by 422 Palestinian national figures.  The meeting laid down the structure of the Palestine National Council (PNC), the PLO Executive Committee, the National Fund and the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) as well as approving a Palestinian National Covenant and Basic Law. The PLO became an umbrella organization for the various Palestinian movements and was recognized by the UN General Assembly on 14 October 1974 (resolution # 3210) and gained the status of an observer.

As the militant groups grew stronger, and as a consequence of the devastating results of the 1967 war, Shukairy resigned as chairman of the PLO on 24 December 1967 and Fatah took over.  Yasser Arafat became the chairman of the PLO.  He accompanied Gamal Abdul Nasser in a visit to the USSR on August 1968 and was introduced to the USSR leadership as a leader of  
a National Liberation Movement.

The Palestinians, so far, have failed to stop the creation of an exclusive Jewish state.  However, this does not mean success for the Zionist establishment.  Their dream of an Exclusive Jewish State in all of Palestine, with unspecified parts from the neighbouring countries, ethnically cleansed from its indigenous population began to evaporate following their expansion in 1967.  Their failure to replicate an exodus similar to what happened in 1948 resuscitated the demographic nightmare for Israel.

Sharon came to power with an agenda of ending the Intifada and completing the job that was not finished in 1948 and 1967.  (See: Interview with Sharon: Sharon is Sharon, By Ari Shavit, published in Ha’aretz on 12 April 2001) The war against Iraq gave Sharon a cover to press on with his agenda with more oppressive measures, brutality and war crimes.

While Sharon is going on with his all-out war against the Palestinians, the Palestinian leadership is still obsessed with a resumption of the “peace process” that would keep them in power. Unfortunately, this is playing into Sharon’s hands and providing him with a life savor.  The latest developments in Gaza are a testimony to the bankruptcy of the current Palestinian leadership and the need for a new strategy in the struggle for liberation.