

Why war in Palestine will continue



By Ejaz Haider

Journalist

PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE

"Where did you come from?"

"From Poland."

"When?"

"1948."

"When exactly?"

"March 1, 1948."

A heavy silence prevailed. All of them began to look around at things they had no need to look at. Said broke the silence, saying calmly: "Naturally we didn't come to tell you to get out of here. That would take a war..."

"I mean your presence here, in this house, our house, Safiyya's and my house, is another matter. We only came to take a look at things, our things. Maybe you can understand that."

She said quickly: "I understand, but..."

Then he lost his composure. "Yes, but! This terrible, deadly, enduring 'but'..."

Returning to Haifa by Ghassan Kanafani

"Your Majesty, the image given of me in the Arab press is that I am very hard. It's not true. I have lived my life dreaming of a nation and a state, so I can understand the Palestinians. If you are angry over what we are doing to face the Palestinian uprising, it is not that we do not understand. We understand their dreams very well, but unfortunately here we have a conflict between two dreams... we agree to the Palestinians having a dream, but they should understand that it is impossible."

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to the King of Morocco — quoted by Mohamed Heikal in *Illusions of Triumph: An Arab View of the [Persia] Gulf War*

"The obstinate fact is this: the Israelis don't understand any language but force," he said. "This is history — without force, they will give you nothing."

Veteran PLO fighter Mahmoud Ajrami in the *Financial Times*, May 24, 2021

"Talk to whom? That's the kind of conversation between the sword and the neck."

Ghassan Kanafani responding to a question about why Palestinians don't just talk to Israelis

Now that some of the euphoria has lifted, it is possible to re-examine the Israeli-PLO agreement with the required common sense. What emerges from such scrutiny is a deal that is more flawed and, for most of the Palestinian people, more unfavourably weighted than many had first supposed. The fashion-show vulgarities of the White House ceremony... only temporarily obscure the truly astonishing proportions of the Palestinian capitulation.

Edward Said, 'The Morning After', *London Review of Books*, October 21, 1993

The proximate

The latest iteration of Palestinian armed resistance against Israel's colonial-apartheid state began on October 7, 2023, with an attack on Israelis by Hamas and Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighters on land occupied by Israel. The many battles, kinetic and non-kinetic, in this long war have entered the seventh month.

Israel's response has been brutal and genocidal. The Israeli targeting strategy — bombing homes, tall buildings, hospitals, bakeries, prayer places, people moving to safer zones or collecting aid packages, aid workers, civil defence personnel, paramedics, journalists — and a very high tolerance threshold for civilian casualties have already been discussed at length by several international media outlets, including Israeli publications such as +972 and Local Call. That account, in granular detail, cannot be bettered and is widely available to readers and viewers around the world.

At the time of writing this, the talks to obtain a ceasefire have stalled. There were and are many proposals on the table, but Hamas and Israel are sticking to their positions: Hamas wants a permanent ceasefire and complete Israeli withdrawal; Israel wants a temporary ceasefire, return of Israeli captives and the freedom to continue its war to "destroy" Hamas' fighting capability, a euphemism for exterminating and expelling Gazans and occupying Gaza to make way for illegal Israeli settlements.

Then, on April 1, Israel attacked Iran's consulate building in Damascus, killing seven Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps officers, including two generals. That action, illegal under relevant provisions of international law, threw the region in a tizzy. Iran promised a response and delivered one on the night of April 13 with an unprecedented attack on Israel from Iranian soil, using direct attack munitions and land-attack cruise and ballistic missiles.

The recent military conflict between Iran and Israel only diverts attention from the real crux of the problem — the brutal Israeli occupation of Palestine and its ongoing genocidal actions in Gaza. Ejaz Haider explains why it is important to look at the wider picture of Zionism's plans in the region and the place of Palestinian resistance to it.

The attack generated fears around the world about a likely Israeli response, resulting in vertical and horizontal escalation across the region. The Israeli war cabinet meetings, at the time of writing, had agreed on a response but have remained divided over when and how.

During this episode, news about ongoing violence in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) was pushed to the sidelines. That violence continues unabated, though with a spike in attacks on the Palestinians in the OPTs by illegal Israeli settlers, who are always protected by Israeli security forces.

But this is just the immediate or proximate, if you will. This war did not begin on October 7. It has a much longer trajectory. Consider:

The longer context

Look again at the quotes above. They are there for a reason. Juxtapose what Kanafani, Ajrami

and Said are saying with what Shamir said to the King of Morocco: Palestinians have a dream but that dream is impossible. What dream is that, especially since Resolution 181 of the United Nations passed on November 29, 1947 and the war that followed it?

That dream, shattered multiple times through subsequent wars in 1967 and 1973, is to have a Palestinian state, where Palestinians can exercise the right to return, a state which is not just an administrative authority but a sovereign state. It is this dream that Shamir told the King is impossible.

For most of the world, Oslo I (1993) and Oslo II (1995) were to take care of this problem. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) had been recognised as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Authority was to govern the affairs of its people and all would be well. There would be talks about a final settlement after five years of Oslo II.

That was not to be. As Said and many others at the time — and many since — pointed out, the Oslo Agreements effectively ended Palestinians' right to resist. They also entrapped the Palestinians into perennial subjugation by a settler-colonial state.

Why and how? The agreements didn't address Israeli violence or incursions into Palestinian towns and camps, Israeli illegal settlements, Palestinian refugees' right to return and Israel's control of land, sea and air.

As Said wrote in the LRB article: "In his September 13 press conference, [Yitzhak] Rabin was straightforward about Israel's continuing control over sovereignty; in addition, he said, Israel would hold the River Jordan, the boundaries with Egypt and Jordan, the sea, the land between Gaza and Jericho, Jerusalem, the settlements and the roads. There is little in the document to suggest that Israel will give up its violence against Palestinians."

This is also clear from Rabin's speech to the Knesset on October 5, 1995, where he presented the Oslo II Agreement: "We would like this [Palestinian Municipal Authority (PA)] to be an entity which is less than a state and which will independently run the lives of the Palestinians under its authority."

He then went on to explain how the arrangement would work: "The first stage of this redeployment of [Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)] will be carried out in three areas...: Area A — or the 'brown' area... will include the municipal areas of the six cities — Jenin, Nablus,

Tulkarm, Qalqilya, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. Responsibility for civilian security in this area will be transferred to the Palestinian Authority. "Area B — or the 'yellow' area includes almost all of the 450 towns and villages in which the Palestinians of the West Bank live. In this area, there will be a separation of responsibilities. The Palestinians will be responsible for managing their own lives, and Israel will have overall responsibility for the security of Israelis and the war against the terrorist threat. That is, IDF forces and the security services will be able to enter any place in Area B at any time.

"The third area, Area C, or the 'white' area is everywhere that is not included in the areas that have been mentioned until now. In this area are the Jewish settlements, all IDF installations, and the border areas with Jordan. This area will remain under IDF control.

"Areas A and B constitute less than 30 percent of the area of the West Bank. Area C, which is under our control, constitutes more than 70 percent of the area of the West Bank."

Thirty days after this speech, on November 4, 1995, Rabin was assassinated. He is widely known as someone who wanted peace. That might be true, but not even he believed in allowing an independent, sovereign Palestinian state. The quotes from his speech make the situation clear.

They should also make clear

