

PALESTINE

A STRUGGLE AGAINST ZIONISM AND IMPERIALISM



Published by Speak Out Now

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Introduction



The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has erupted in massive and horrifying bloodshed. In response to the attack by Hamas on October 7, Israel has responded with a brutal war against Palestinians living in Gaza, and an escalation of violence towards Palestinians living in the West Bank. For many people, this is a wakeup call – watching families driven from their homes, children buried under the rubble, and an intense media campaign on the part of journalists and politicians in Europe and the United States to justify this violence. How did this happen? Where did this conflict come from? How can it be stopped? To consider these questions, we need to examine the history of the conflict.

Palestine is a small region, about the size of the state of Maryland. It is the site from which three major religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all emerged. However, it would be a mistake to look for the roots of the conflict in the religious history of the region. Believers from all three religions had a long history together in Palestine, well before what we know as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict began. That is not the problem. The Palestinian-

Israeli conflict began in the 20th century, and the driving forces of the conflict are modern ones, no different than the forces that have shaped the conflicts we see elsewhere in the world – the manipulation of people by imperialism, capitalist exploitation imposed by international corporations, and violence and racist dehumanization of people by politicians and governments to achieve these ends. Ultimately, the violence waged by Israel against the Palestinian people, and the horrifying bloodshed we see in the news, is rooted in capitalist exploitation and the imperialist system whose biggest power and

chief architect today is the United States government.



For those of us located in the United States, the heart of the empire, we are better placed than anyone else to struggle against imperialism and aid the Palestinian people. But this requires an understanding of the depth of the problem, and an understanding that real change requires a conscious struggle against capitalism and imperialism, without which there can be no solution to the plight of the Palestinian people or an end to the violence that continues to consume the Middle East. This pamphlet intends to begin to address the need for such understanding.

Palestine – A Contested Territory

Before the 20th century, Palestine was a territory incorporated into and ruled by various Middle East and Mediterranean empires for thousands of years. Palestine was always a valuable territory. It was a fertile farming region, renowned for its oranges, olives, olive oil, and soap. Palestine is also the coastal gateway to the Arabian peninsula, valuable for international trade and strategic reasons. In addition, Palestine is the site of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, holy sites for all three major monotheistic religions.

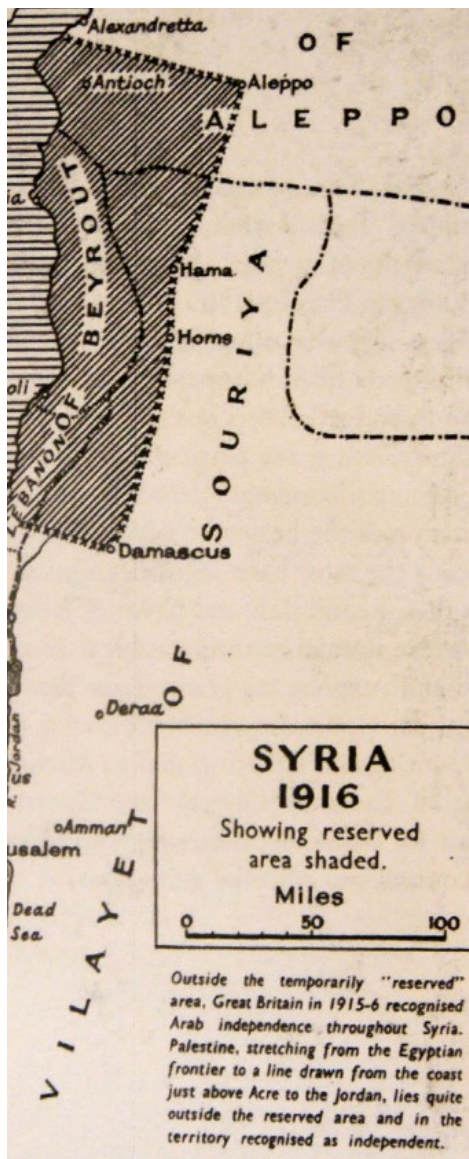


From the 13th until the 20th century, Palestine had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire, which had been one of the world's biggest military and economic powers at its high point in the 16th century. With the rise of capitalism and imperialism in Europe, however, it fell under foreign domination. By 1908, the British were beginning to exploit the oil resources of the Persian Gulf, and they saw control of the region as a vital necessity for maintaining their empire.

World War I and Britain's Double Dealing

Since the mid-19th century, the European powers, primarily Britain, had ensnared the Middle East empires in a financial and political net. The Ottoman Empire and the neighboring Qajar Empire of Persia had been forced into loan agreements they could never pay back, and British bankers dictated budgets and demanded trade agreements that benefited European capitalists. World War I provided an opportunity for the European powers to extend their control. The Ottoman Empire had thrown its support in the war to Germany and Austria, hoping that those countries could win and loosen Britain's domination of the Ottoman Empire. The British and French responded by invading the Arabian Peninsula, and exploiting divisions within the Middle East, a strategy that they had used in other regions such as Southeast Asia, India, and Africa.

The Ottoman Empire was a Turkish-centered empire, and Arabs had always been a subject population with fewer rights and opportunities than the Turkish rulers. In the last years of the 19th century and into the 20th century, fearing an Arab uprising, the Ottomans had imposed harsh, discriminatory policies against Arab language, culture, and identity.



This map from British correspondent, Joseph Jeffries, shows that Palestine was in the area promised to Husayn by McMahon.

The British saw an opportunity they could exploit by supporting Arab grievances against the Ottomans. Britain's military commander in Egypt, Colonel Henry McMahon, initiated correspondence with Sherif Husayn, the governor of Mecca and one of the most important local elites of the Arabian peninsula. McMahon promised that Husayn would get control of an "Arab Kingdom," composed of the territory that is today Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine, after a British victory – if Husayn launched a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. With the help of British intelligence agent T.E. Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia, Husayn's sons Faysal and Abdullah rallied their forces and launched the Arab revolt in 1916 in coordination with the British military.

At about the same time, in 1917, the British Lord Balfour made a declaration in favor of a "National Home" for the Jewish people, to be located in Palestine. Balfour was himself an anti-Semitic politician, and one of his appeals to the British public was that this would be a place that Jews could be sent, or encouraged to go to, so that Britain could be rid of them. Balfour also saw the utility of cooperating with Zionism, a Jewish-nationalist movement based in Eastern Europe, which aimed to establish a majority-Jewish state somewhere in the world. For the Zionists, Palestine presented itself as an opportunity to fulfill their goal if a deal could be struck with British imperialism.

Anti-Semitism in Europe and the Roots of Zionism

Jewish people in Europe were historically a brutally oppressed minority. Jews were scapegoated and discriminated against and, with the rise of capitalism, governments and elites in Germany, Eastern Europe, and Russia, as well as the rest of Europe and the United States, stoked anti-Semitism to redirect people's anger away from the horrors of capitalism. Much like other oppressed peoples in the 19th century, Jewish people looked for solutions in politics.

Many Jewish workers turned to socialist ideas, seeking to remedy their specific oppression as Jews by unifying with other workers in a movement to fight exploitation, win equal rights, and ultimately transform society. Many in the middle class and among the wealthy looked towards integration into their societies through democratic reforms and assimilation. At the same time, a small movement of middle class intellectuals, the Zionist movement, had a different ideology – nationalism.

Nationalism is generally a belief and attitude of identification with one's own nation based on shared culture, language, and/or history, and a promotion of its interests, often at the expense of other nations. It has often been an important part of the ideology of oppressed people in their struggles against colonialism and imperialism. But it can also be a particularly effective ideology for capitalists of a given nation and their politicians to promote "false consciousness" and, therefore, support among the

working class and other oppressed groups within their nation. In many regions of the world in the 19th and 20th centuries, nationalist movements of oppressed peoples rose to challenge foreign domination and imperialism. Poor and working people rallied to the nationalist flags to throw off foreign domination, and to win social, economic, and political rights. But such nationalist movements had their limits, generally being controlled by elites whose horizons were always limited to a state of their own that they could dominate in the name of “their people.” But to achieve those ends, they mobilized mass struggles and even revolutions that confronted imperialism, and in doing so often raised questions about the nature of the capitalist system itself, which lays at the foundation of imperialism and colonialism.

The Zionist movement was different in some ways. According to the Zionists, their oppression as minorities in Europe was a natural phenomenon caused by living under “other people’s” states. The rising tide of anti-Semitism was proof of this. For the Zionists, the only solution would be for the Jewish minorities around the world to move somewhere where they could constitute a majority and build a new state. Their nationalist strategy was not to confront and struggle against oppression and imperialism, but to make a bargain with it and use it for their own ends, to create a state and a society based on a Jewish national identity. To achieve this, the Zionists looked for an alliance with an imperialist power that could deliver what they wanted, particularly the British Empire.

The Zionist movement was not religious. At its foundation and during its first decades, Zionists saw things pragmatically and politically above all – seeking a territory, any territory, on which they could form a state and encourage Jewish migration there. Some potential territories considered by the early Zionist movement were Uganda, under British control, or one of the less-populated states of the USA. The choice of Palestine, which only later became a viable possibility thanks to British imperialism, conveniently lined up with Jewish religious history, but religion and the fulfillment of religious prophecy or destiny was never the primary motivation of the Zionist movement.

The Betrayal of Sherif Husayn and the Mandate System

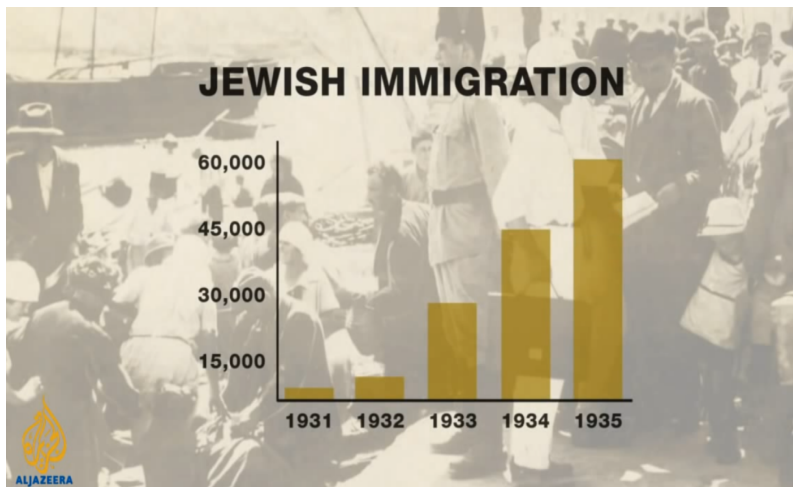
At the end of World War I, the victorious powers, primarily the British and the French, divided the Middle East among them. Through the mechanism of the League of Nations, a forerunner to the United Nations, the Middle East was divided into “mandates.” Officially, the mandate system put these territories under the control of European states until the people were considered “mature” enough to govern themselves. This condescending, racist language was really just an excuse for imperialism. The British took control of the mandates of Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine, while the French were assigned Lebanon and Syria.

The British had no loyalty whatsoever to the Arabs or the agreement they had made. Sherif Husayn’s sons Abdullah and Faysal led the Arab revolt from 1916-1918, undercutting and harassing the Ottoman imperial forces from inside the empire and winning control of the Arabian Peninsula for the British. In 1919, the Arab forces seized Damascus and declared the foundation of the Arab Kingdom, as had been promised by the British. However, by that time, Syria and Lebanon had been declared part of the French Mandate, and the Arab Kingdom was forcibly disbanded by French artillery as the British stepped aside.

The British found the Zionist movement useful for their goals. Its leaders were given administrative positions and authority within the Palestine Mandate, and the right to govern these colonies independently. Meanwhile, the Arab population, the Palestinians, were subjected to the new colonial administration. The Zionists had a major advantage in realizing their goals. They were organized, had a political leadership with extensive experience, and had alliances with British imperialism. The Palestinians lacked anything like the political leadership or alliances of the Zionist movement.

Fascism and Jewish Immigration

Under the mandate, Jewish immigration to Palestine steadily increased. One of the main factors contributing to this increase was the rise of anti-Semitism and fascism in Eastern Europe and Germany. Until the 1920s, the biggest political parties and movements in Eastern Europe had been socialist workers' parties. After the workers' revolution of 1917 in Russia, workers in Eastern Europe and Germany had attempted similar revolutions. These revolutions failed to take power, and one of the main tools of right-wing reaction that opposed them was anti-Semitism, directed at the revolutionary left, many of whose leaders were of Jewish descent. Government repression was combined with racist mob violence, or pogroms. After the rise of Hitler in Germany in 1933, the steady flow of Jewish immigrants to Palestine became a flood. For many Jewish people who wouldn't have considered it a decade before, Zionist immigration in the 1920s, and especially in the 1930s, became an escape route from the horrors of fascism.



Among the Arab population of Palestine, resentment towards the British Mandate and Zionist immigration grew as well. The Zionist movement relied on land purchases to construct its colonies. Money, gathered among the Jewish diaspora or invested by wealthy Jewish businessmen, was used to purchase land. Then Palestinian farmers, whose families had lived on and farmed the land for centuries, were kicked off by mandate police to make

room for Jewish migrants. These displacements, combined with the privileged position in the mandate administration given to Zionists, generated a rising consciousness among Palestinians that the mandate was facilitating Jewish colonization at their expense.

The British Balancing Act

In 1928, a clash broke out between Jewish and Muslim worshippers at the Western (Wailing) Wall, a Jewish holy site next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock, important Muslim holy sites. This incident set in motion a pattern that continues today – clashes over symbolic holy sites, but underneath we see that the real conflict is over control of the land and the political issues at stake.

Palestinian anger at the British and Zionists grew, and in 1936-1939, Palestinians organized an uprising against the British Mandate. This revolt was brutally crushed by the British military with the

help of Zionist militias. The Zionist movement had not only built colonies with the help of the British, they had used their positions in the mandate government to access and accumulate weapons and build their own armed forces and the Irgun, the forerunner of the Israel Defense Force (IDF). The Irgun was mobilized to help put down the Palestinian revolt. The surrounding Arab regimes, led by British- and French-appointed governments, stood aside or gave tacit support to the British in repressing the rebellion. The leaders of the revolt were either executed or sent into exile, once again depriving Palestinians of a political leadership.

The 1936-1939 rebellion failed in its aims, but it had important consequences. The rebellion marked the birth of a Palestinian national movement. For the first time, all Arabs in Palestine had acted together, in their own name, as Palestinians. The British also feared the consequences of continued Zionist immigration. The British government issued the 1939 White Paper (a policy document), which limited Zionist immigration and promised independence for Palestine within ten years. The British hoped to maintain a balance of opposing forces in Palestine by slowing the Zionist colonization to pacify the Palestinians and avoid another uprising.

The Communist Party of Palestine

The Jewish immigrants and refugees from Eastern Europe were not all Zionists. Some communists and revolutionary socialists found themselves in Palestine, fleeing persecution in Europe. These revolutionaries, true to their ideals, made it their goal to connect with Arab workers and farmers, and in this they had some success. The Communist Party was founded in 1919, and organized primarily in the urban sectors, in the transportation and postal services where Jewish and Arab workers worked side by side. It was a bi-national party composed of Arab and Jewish activists. During the clashes between Zionists and the predominantly Muslim Palestinian population, the Communists opposed the religion-based fighting and instead proposed joint worker-peasant actions against both the Zionist elite and the British. For some Palestinians, the Communist Party offered a means of political organization, a perspective to understand and resist imperialism, and a way to relate to the complicated phenomenon of the Zionist colonization.

The Communist Party was hampered in its activities by two enormous pressures. First, the Zionist colonization was intolerable for many Jewish communists who could not stand to be complicit in a colonial project, dependent on British imperialism, which was displacing the native population. Many of them left Palestine. Those who remained were often those who were less critical of Zionism or even somewhat supportive of it. Second, the policy of the Russian-led Communist International changed as Stalin came to power at the head of a bureaucratic dictatorship. The failed attempts by workers to make revolutions beyond Russia had left the Soviet Union isolated, poverty-stricken, and under attack by the imperialist powers. These factors combined to foster the emergence of a reactionary bureaucracy. Stalin and the bureaucracy transformed the Communist parties of the world from instruments of class struggle and revolution, into bargaining chips and pawns in Russian foreign policy. The Communist Party of Palestine was urged to support and collaborate with Zionism because Stalin and his co-thinkers believed the Zionists could be useful allies. Later, as Arab people rose up in the name of Arab nationalism and as new states emerged in the Middle East, the Russian bureaucracy pushed the Communist Party to support Arab nationalism uncritically. Therefore, the Communist Party of

Palestine split in two, one part predominantly Arab and the other predominantly Jewish, and would never present much more than a mild critical opposition to Arab nationalism and Zionism, respectively.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention the Communist Party because its existence shows that there were many individuals ready to seek a different path than nationalism, even among the Jewish colonists. Stalinism forced the Communist Party into nationalist channels, limiting its possibilities, but the Communist parties still managed to play an important role in Israel and among the Palestinians. While the Communist Party of Israel has never directly challenged the State of Israel, it continues to be the most consistent defender of Palestinian rights and a platform for Palestinian political representation within Israel. The Communist Party of Palestine, today known as the People's Party, has never challenged the Palestinian nationalist parties for leadership, and has generally supported their strategy that has brought Palestinians to a tragic impasse. But the party has never abandoned the perspective of grassroots organizing in favor of a focus on an elitist military or terrorist strategy.

The War, British Withdrawal, and the 1947 UN Partition Plan

During World War II, Palestine, along with India, Iran, and many countries in Africa and Asia, became an essential staging ground for the imperialist war effort. Troops, equipment, and supplies flowed through Palestinian ports as the British army waged war. Some Palestinian political figures, such as the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al-Husseini, supported a German victory and even visited the Nazi regime to lend their support. However, Palestinian support for Germany was limited. Many Palestinians, influenced by the Communist Party, opposed fascism on principle and a few had fought fascism in Spain as part of the Communist-organized International Brigades.

With World War II, the wave of anti-Semitism in Europe, launched by the fascist movements and governments in Europe and especially the Nazi regime, reached its bloody conclusion in the genocidal Holocaust. From 1941 to 1945, the German regime murdered six million Jewish people and twelve million people total in its concentration and forced labor camps. U.S. and European officials refused to accept more than the smallest number of them as refugees. For example, in 1939, of the 300,000 refugees from Germany, mostly German Jews, who applied for asylum in the U.S., only 20,000 were accepted. Later, the European countries and the U.S. would claim that their support for the State of Israel was necessary to support the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. In fact, however, on balance, during the Holocaust these countries did little to help the refugees.

For most Jewish refugees escaping from fascism, Palestine with its poor economy and instability was not an attractive option, and many sought refuge where they could in other European countries like Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, and countries throughout Latin America. During World War II, only 18,000 Jewish refugees chose to flee to Palestine. Nevertheless, the horrors of the Holocaust gave an extra ideological support to Zionism, seemingly proving the point that Jewish people could not be safe, except in a specifically Jewish state. Since then, the Holocaust has been used as a justification for the colonization of Palestine, the crimes done to one people justifying their crimes against another.

The British emerged victorious from the war, alongside the other allied countries, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States. However, the British economy was shattered, its military forces were exhausted, and politically, the population in Britain was opposed to maintaining a costly overseas empire. In addition, many people in the colonies saw the end of the war as an opportunity to push for

independence. After World War II, the British prepared to surrender control of many of their former territories, among them Palestine.



The British chose to use the newly formed United Nations as a mechanism to facilitate their withdrawal. In 1947, the United Nations recommended a partition plan that would divide Palestine into two countries, one for the Zionist colonists and the other for the Arab Palestinians. This plan was unacceptable to both parties, for different reasons.

As of 1946, there were 1,269,000 Arabs living in Palestine and 608,000 Jews. The Zionist colonies controlled just seven percent of the total land of Palestine, mostly acquired by land purchases. The proposed Jewish state based on the 1947 plan would have amounted to 56 percent of the land, a handover of 49 percent of Palestine to the Zionists, for free. The remaining 43 percent would constitute a Palestinian state.

For the Palestinians, this plan meant handing over more than half of the territory in which they had lived for over a thousand years. Even the Palestinian elites selected by the British and UN agents to represent Palestine, and the leaders of the Arab states controlled and manipulated by the French and British, could not imagine forcing this solution on the Palestinian population. They objected to the partition plan, both because it would betray the Palestinians and because it was political suicide for these elites to do so in front of the populations they governed. The Palestinian representatives and the leaders of the Arab states refused, and declared the UN plan to be an international betrayal of the Palestinians and of the Arab people as a whole.

Officially, the Zionist representatives to the UN accepted the partition plan. However, at the same time, while the partition was being debated in the UN, the Zionist military forces were surveying Palestinian villages, identifying Palestinian political leaders and influential personalities, and preparing to enact their own plan for the military seizure and ethnic cleansing of much more than half of Palestine.

Fighting between Palestinians and Zionist militias began just days after the UN adopted the 1947 partition plan. Zionist military forces immediately began expelling Palestinians from villages and pushing Palestinians to flee into exile. Palestinian resistance was fragmented and disorganized, no match for the well-trained and ideologically-committed Zionist militias. By April, 1948, Zionist military forces had seized all of the territory allotted by the partition plan and began an offensive to seize more land.

1948 – The Israeli “War of Independence” and the Palestinian Nakba

On May 14, 1948, Zionist leader David Ben Gurion proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel on the basis of the 1947 UN partition plan. The following day, the British withdrew their forces from Palestine. The newly formed State of Israel faced a regional backlash. The neighboring Arab states, Syria,

Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq all declared war against Israel and launched an invasion. Lebanon declared war but did not invade. Officially these states took action to “save” the Palestinians. In fact they were only worried to save face in front of their own populations, and the Arab states’ leaders had their own designs on the land of Palestine. While the war raged, and while soldiers died, the leaders of the Arab states were jockeying for power and even conducted secret communications with Israel about how to divide Palestine after the war ended.

The poorly trained and equipped Arab armies were no match for the disciplined and politically motivated Zionist military. The Soviet Union had declared its support for the new State of Israel and helped it to secure a massive arms shipment from Czechoslovakia. By 1949 the war ended with a series of armistice agreements between Israel and the Arab states. What was once Palestine was now divided into three parts. The new State of Israel controlled 77 percent of former Palestine including the coast, and the most potentially profitable agricultural land. The state of Jordan controlled East Jerusalem and the olive-growing hills of central Palestine, known as the West Bank of the Jordan River. Egypt took control of the coast around Gaza City in the south of Palestine known as the Gaza Strip. In the end, there was no Palestinian state run by Palestinians themselves, and their territory and population had been cut into three and divided between Israel and the Arab states.



Palestinian refugees exiled from a village near Haifa, 1948.

There is no doubt that the Zionists and the newly formed State of Israel engaged in an explicit policy of ethnic cleansing. The Zionist military forces engaged in a psychological terror campaign. Massacres were carried out by Zionist forces in many villages, the most famous of which being Dayr Yasin where 125 villagers were killed in cold blood. At least 700,000 and perhaps as many as a million Palestinians were expelled from Palestine and forced into exile. For Palestinians, this forced migration and exile came to be known as the “Nakba,” the Arabic word for catastrophe.

The majority of Palestinian exiles ended up in Jordan where the British-installed monarchy granted Palestinians Jordanian citizenship and used the population transfer to establish a workforce and create a basis for economic development on the East Bank of the Jordan River. Others found themselves in Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. At the same time, 100,000 Palestinians remained in their homes and became second-class citizens, considered internal enemies in the newly-formed State of Israel.

Palestine and the Arab Nation – the Rise of Arab Nationalism

The establishment of the State of Israel and the defeat of the Arab armies in 1948 had political repercussions throughout the Middle East. In Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, military officers who had witnessed their governments’ inefficiency and double dealing began to question the order imposed on the Middle East by Britain and France via the mandate system. A new political phenomenon, Arab

nationalism, emerged to challenge imperialism in the Middle East and the colonization of Palestine by Zionism.

In 1952, Egyptian military officers calling themselves the “Free Officers,” led by future Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, launched a successful military coup to overthrow the monarchy. This model would be followed by officers in Syria in 1954 and Iraq in 1958. These military coups installed new states, based on the military, without any real democratic structure. However, these regimes were wildly popular and supported by the poor and working population. They confiscated the land of the ultra-rich and traditional elites, those who had collaborated with imperialism. They also directly seized the assets of imperialism. In Egypt, Nasser’s regime took control of the Suez Canal from its British and French owners, putting this essential artery, through which seven percent of international trade flowed, under Egyptian control. In Iraq, the regime of General Qassem oversaw the seizure of oil fields that the British had exploited since 1927. In Syria, the nationalist regime divided big landholdings and took control of its small oil sector. These regimes used much of the wealth for economic development, and created social programs and subsidies that benefited the poor majority of the population.

The supporters of the new Arab states were pushed forward by a national revolt sweeping the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa – Arab nationalism. The nationalist regimes rode a wave of revolt by the population seeking to overthrow the regimes that were complicit with imperialism, that had allowed ethnic cleansing and exile of the Palestinian Arabs. What’s more, they wanted to undo the mandate system and unify the Arab world, including Palestine, in a state or confederation of states representing all of the Arab people. For the Palestinians, Arab nationalism generated a great hope that the Arab people would unify, and that the new Arab nationalist leaders would lead a successful struggle against Israel and help the Palestinians return to their lands. They looked to the Arab states, primarily Egypt, for leadership and a strategy to struggle for their right to return, ideally as part of a new unified Arab Middle East.

Arab Nationalism, Israel, and the Cold War

The Arab nationalist regimes were born, already set on a collision course with the new State of Israel, and with the United States, which was emerging as the new, dominant imperialist force in the Middle East after British withdrawal. The Arab people wanted control of their region’s resources and to challenge Israel for its colonialist crimes against the Palestinians. New tensions emerged as the Arab nationalist regimes sought technical and financial support from one of the only international powers at least nominally opposed to imperialism, the Soviet Union. As the Arab nationalist regimes turned towards the USSR, Israel became a useful tool for imperialism to challenge, control, and ultimately crush Arab nationalism.

The imperialist powers, led by the United States, bitterly opposed the Arab nationalist regimes. After seizing power in 1952, the Egyptian regime led by Nasser was denied loans for the development of hydroelectric dams by the U.S. Nasser’s Egypt turned to the Soviet Union, which was more than willing to provide aid and win a powerful ally in the Middle East. Tensions grew even more intense when, in 1956, Egypt seized control of the Suez Canal. The canal, constructed by French and British capitalists with the aid of their governments in 1869, is a vital artery for international trade. To this day,

seven percent of global trade, and as much as ten percent of petroleum products, travel through the Suez Canal to the world market.



Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt, addressing a huge crowd in Cairo, after he was elected the first president of the United Arab Republic, 1958.

With the support of the French and British, Israel launched an invasion of Egypt in 1956. While Nasser's regime enjoyed widespread support, it was militarily no match for Israel. With Israeli tanks at the gates of Cairo, it seemed that Nasser's regime would be overthrown. Then, the Soviet Union announced that if the war continued, the West could expect a Soviet nuclear strike in its major cities such as Paris and London. France, Britain, and Israel, under pressure from the United States, backed off and accepted defeat.

The 1956 Suez Crisis ended in victory for Egypt, and Arab nationalism received a powerful wave of support. But, the Arab nationalist regimes were unable to rise to the demands of the Arab masses for unification and concerted action. Even though the Arab nationalists rode the wave of popular revolt, their regimes were rooted in the military and created new elites with vested interests. The Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi governments paid lip-service to the idea of unification, forming a loose confederation, the United Arab Republic. In fact, they were much more concerned with consolidating their own power and competing with one another for resources and influence. The impulse of the masses of Arabic-speaking people to unify was undermined by the class interests of the new elites who were never going to deliver on the unity they promised.

The 1967 War and the PLO

The Palestinians were deeply inspired by and invested a great deal of hope in Arab nationalism. If Nasser could defeat Israel in 1956 during the Suez Crisis, perhaps Egypt would be able to ultimately defeat Israel, liberate Palestine, and return the refugees to their lands. But Palestinians did not simply sit back and wait to be liberated. Inspired by Arab nationalism, Palestinians organized themselves. In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established in connection with the Arab nationalist

regimes. The PLO was established as a coalition of Palestinian nationalist parties led by Yasser Arafat's Fatah party.



Yasser Arafat in Damascus, 1970.

PLO forces, organized in the refugee camps in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, were a challenge to the Arab regimes. While the new elites of Arab nationalism were consolidating their power, the Palestinian refugees, enjoying great sympathy with poor and working people in the host countries, demanded that the Arab nationalists take action to support Palestine and live up to their stated goals of liberating the Arab people. PLO guerrilla attacks against Israel led to constant border conflicts.

The situation was primed to explode. Israeli troops clashed with Palestinian guerrillas and with military forces on the borders of Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. The Arab regimes felt a growing pressure from their populations to confront Israel and do something for the Palestinians. In 1967, Egypt closed the Suez Canal to Israeli trade. Israel reacted with overwhelming military force, in what came to be called the 1967 or Six Day War.

The Arab states were, once again, no match for the Israeli military. The Arab states' military efforts were again hampered by the disunity and self-interest of the ruling elites who ran them, and this time the Soviet Union was not ready to threaten nuclear war. The Arab states, especially Egypt, were crushed. This defeat delivered a terrible blow to the Arab nationalist idea, along with the confidence that Palestinians and other Arab people put in the Arab nationalist regimes.

The 1967 war had another consequence. In the name of securing its borders, Israel began its military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank of the Jordan River. In addition, Israel annexed the Golan Heights on its Northeast border with Syria. This began the military occupation which generations of Palestinians have suffered ever since. This occupation, carried out in the name of military and security objectives, is actually just an extension of the colonization prepared by the Zionist movement and launched in 1948 with the birth of the State of Israel. The occupation has proved to be just a means of furthering the colonization, ethnic cleansing, and genocidal replacement of the Palestinian people.

The U.S. and the “Special Relationship” with Israel

The U.S. had replaced Britain as the primary imperialist power in the region and was deeply troubled by the Soviet-aligned Arab nationalist states that had come to power in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s. U.S. oil interests had grown immensely through alliances with oil-producing states, including Iran and others in the Persian Gulf. More broadly, around the world, nationalist regimes and revolutionary movements were challenging imperialism. The Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF) was in the midst of its decades-long war against French and U.S. imperialism. The people of

China and Cuba had waged successful revolutions for national independence whose reverberations were felt around the world.

Israel's ability to deliver a defeat to Egypt, the leading nationalist regime in the Middle East, was recognized by U.S. politicians for its utility to U.S. interests. After the 1967 war, U.S. military aid to Israel more than tripled from seven million dollars to 25 million dollars per year. While the numbers were initially quite small, they have only grown since 1967. Today, Israel receives an annual \$3.8 billion in military aid or 16 percent of its military budget from the U.S.. The Israeli state, due to its colonial-settler nature, is set in permanent conflict with the Arab majority of the Middle East. Just as the British used the Zionist movement to control Palestine, the U.S. empire funds Israel, knowing Israel will act as a reliable "cop on the beat," as one U.S official described it.

The Failure of Arab Nationalism and the Rise of the PLO

The 1967 war marked a turning point in Palestinian politics. The defeat of Egypt and Arab nationalism more broadly in 1967 led the Palestinians to take action in their own name, and with their own strategy. The PLO, originally established as a support for Arab nationalism and the Egyptian regime, was taken over by a new generation of Palestinian leaders and organizations, and became an independent coalition of Palestinian political parties taking action on their own initiative.

The PLO was an umbrella coalition, with the predominant party being Fatah (Arabic for "the opening") led by Yasser Arafat. The leaders of Fatah were inspired by the Arab nationalist movement and were some of its first supporters in Palestine. While they were frustrated by the defeat of 1967, they had not given up hope of Arab unity in the struggle against Israel and imperialism. Their perspective was the "strategy of entanglement," to wage guerrilla attacks on Israel's borders, to frustrate any attempt to normalize Arab relations with Israel, and to instigate a new regional war that might bring Soviet pressure to bear and liberate Palestine in the process.

Ironically, while the PLO took Palestinian matters into its own hands, its perspective, led by Fatah, was still to rely on the Arab states whose ruling classes, despite lip-service to Arab nationalism, had consistently failed to unify and confront Israel. This meant that, while Palestinians made up significant refugee communities in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, the PLO discouraged making any criticism or challenge to the ruling regimes in those states.

Fatah was the ruling party in the PLO and its policy predominated. Other parties that made up the PLO, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, took on a more left-wing position. They talked about capitalism and the need for socialism, and were more critical of the Arab states than Fatah was, but ultimately the PLO was controlled by Fatah, and followed Fatah's policy. The Palestine Communist Party maintained support for the PLO, but was neither a part of it until 1987, nor a participant in the guerrilla struggle of the PLO.

In 1967, the United Nations passed resolution 242. This resolution called for a withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories and peace between Israel and the Arab states. Resolution 242 says nothing about Palestinians' political rights or national rights. It only calls for a "just settlement" to the "refugee problem."

The PLO rejected UN resolution 242 because it gave no promises or guarantees to the Palestinians, and implied that while the 1967 conquest of Palestinian land by Israel was unjust, the 1948 conquest of Palestinian land by Israel was an established fact. The PLO instead proposed a single, democratic state within the former mandate borders of Palestine.

Black September and the Lebanese Civil War



Fatah guerrilla fighters at a rally in Beirut, Lebanon, 1979.

While the PLO was careful not to criticize the Arab states, the flourishing of PLO organizations and activities in the refugee camps, and the attacks on Israel, were felt as a threat by neighboring Arab states. In 1970, Jordan sent its military into the Palestinian camps. Thousands were killed, and the PLO, its organizations, and its infrastructure were severely weakened. The PLO left Jordan and re-established itself in the refugee camps in Southern Lebanon where the PLO resumed its activities.

The PLO faced more difficulties in Lebanon. Lebanon was (and still is) a deeply unequal society divided between the rich and poor on the one hand, and then divided into religious communities, each led by traditional elites, jockeying for power within the system. The structure of government set up by the French in Lebanon during the mandate period was designed to play one group off of the other, and to put the Catholic population, the Maronite Christians, on top with half of the seats in the government and the presidency guaranteed. This was set up, based on a population census from 1926 in which Christians were found to be a slim majority. By 1975, Christians and Muslims from the Sunni and the Shia sects each made up roughly a third of the population, and the communal power imbalance had become a constant source of tension.

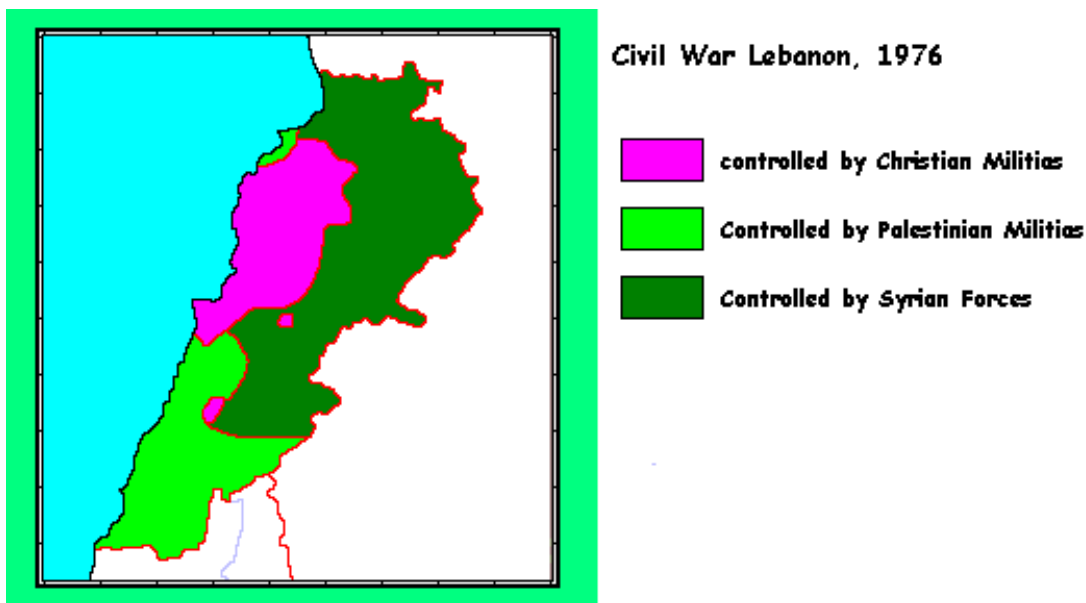
Not only were the divisions political, but the Christian politicians who dominated Lebanon openly identified with fascism and organized fascist militias to support them. Likewise, the Sunni Arab politicians organized their constituents into militias. The Shia population was much poorer and overwhelmingly rural, located in the South. There was no particular Shia party, but many Shia were active with left-wing organizations, either the official Communist Party, or other left-wing parties, and these also organized militias. With each political force armed, and a situation of economic inequality mixed with communal and religious tensions, the situation was explosive.

The move of the PLO bases to Southern Lebanon made it the site of ongoing Israeli attacks. The PLO presence in the country was adding fuel to the fire. Sympathy for the Palestinians on the part of the poor and oppressed mixed with hatred at the inequalities of Lebanese society, and led many Lebanese to side with the Palestinians. In addition, the traditional leaders of the Muslim community aimed to take advantage of the situation and shift the balance of power away from the Christians. The Lebanese Civil War erupted in 1975 when Christian militias from the ruling party attacked PLO forces in the camps. At first, the war was an expression of class anger and sympathy for the Palestinians, but it quickly became a battle of communal parties and their militias as violence engulfed the population.

Israel, Syria, and the Maronite Christians Unite to Crush the PLO

The Lebanese Civil War raised fear among the heads of governments throughout the Middle East, including Israel. The Palestinian struggle in Lebanon had inflamed class anger among the poor and working class, and generated huge sympathies among poor and working people elsewhere. If, in Lebanon, the Palestinians and poor Lebanese came together and consolidated a new power, against the old traditional elites and their imperialist allies, then perhaps they could rally the poor and working class of the region against all of their oppressive governments. The Arab states feared that such a revolt would sweep them out of power. The Israeli government feared that such a revolt would produce a unity from below in the Arab world, and it would then face a concerted struggle of the Arab people on behalf of the Palestinians.

In 1976, the Syrian government sent an occupying army, ironically called the Palestine Liberation Army, to help the Maronite Christians and their militias suppress the PLO and allied left-wing, poor, and working class Lebanese organizations. The Syrian military began an occupation of Lebanon that lasted until 2005.



At first, Israel lent support to the Maronite Christians in the form of direct military assistance and training. This was not enough to defeat the PLO. In 1982, Israel invaded Southern Lebanon, beginning a military occupation that would last until 2000. The justification for the invasion was an assassination attempt on an Israeli ambassador by a small Palestinian group, unaffiliated with the PLO. During the invasion, Israeli military forces stood by while Christian militias carried out massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, killing more than 3,000 people in cold blood. The commander of the Israeli invasion, Ariel Sharon, directly responsible for Sabra and Shatila, would later serve as Prime Minister of Israel.

While the Palestinian forces were effectively crushed in 1982, the Lebanese Civil War would drag on until 1990 as clashes continued among Christian fascist militias, the newly born Hezbollah, and the Sunni Muslims. In 1983, a U.N. force composed of French, British, U.S. and Italian troops occupied Lebanon to stabilize the situation and return things to the status quo.

The Consequences of the Lebanese Civil War

For the PLO, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was a massive defeat. Its organizations and structures in the refugee camps were broken, and the PLO leadership fled into exile in Tunis. Without a political and military base in the camps, it seemed that the PLO was politically finished. The defeat of the PLO in Lebanon, and Jordan before that, was a damning failure of the PLO's policy led by Yasser Arafat's Fatah. The PLO "strategy of entanglement" had not drawn the Arab states into the Palestinian struggle; it had in fact pushed them to act against the Palestinians. The policy of noninterference, of not addressing or organizing the poor and working people of the host countries, or challenging the Arab governments, disarmed the Palestinians of the best ally they had – the solidarity of the poor and working people of the Arab countries. The so-called Arab nationalists of Syria, the Christian fascist militias, and the Israeli state had all united to smash the potential spread of a revolution from below. By turning its back on this possibility, the PLO had paved the road to its own defeat.

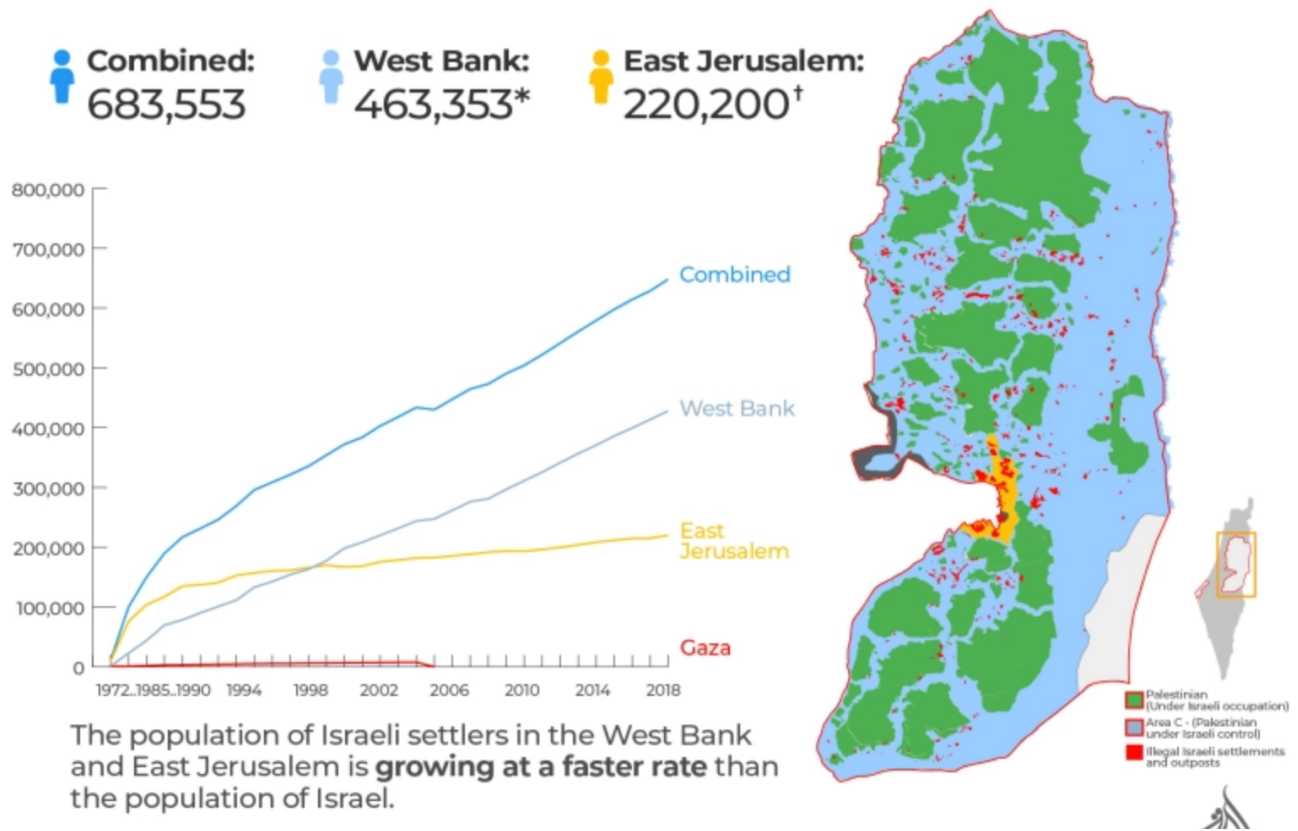
The Israeli invasion of Southern Lebanon had other consequences as well. The poor, rural, Shia population of the South was treated to the same indiscriminate violence as the Palestinians by the Israeli military. Some Shia Lebanese were drawn to the politics demonstrated by some of their co-religionists in Iran, who had played a leading role in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. With the help of agents of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, sent by the Islamic Republic, the party Hezbollah was founded. Hezbollah was formed to militarily challenge the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, and today it has grown to become one of the biggest political parties in Lebanon, with its own well-organized and experienced army. Hezbollah was born in conflict with Israel, and has been in conflict, sometimes all-out war, with Israel ever since. Hezbollah also has deep ties to the Islamic Republic of Iran, a state in conflict with Israel and the United States. For these reasons, any clash between Israel and the Palestinians also implicates Hezbollah, both as a military force and an agent of Iranian foreign policy.

The Yom Kippur War and the Settler Movement

After the 1967 war, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a new phase of Israeli colonization began. Israel started to allow settlers to enter the Occupied Territories and build settlements. The Israeli government, in the name of securing Israel's self-defense, enthusiastically supported the creation of settlements. The settler movement itself was organized and led by religious Zionists, who added a religious justification to the colonization project, which had previously been more or less absent. The settler movement, Gush Emunim, argued that biblical texts justified the settlements, and that the story of the ancient Hebrews was the "title to the land" of Palestine. The settlers aimed to "create facts in the field" by establishing settlements that would force the Israeli government to annex the West Bank and Gaza, and continue the ethnic cleansing and expulsion of the Palestinians.

Up until the 1970s, Israel was governed by the Labor Party. The Labor Party was the main vehicle for military colonization, having presided over the 1948 conquest of Palestine and the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. But within Israel the Labor Party was the "left" of the mainstream parties, relying on the support of trade unions, and committed to a secular, democratic society and a welfare state for Israeli Jews. In 1973, the Labor Party suffered a major blow when the Egyptian and Syrian armies carried out a surprise attack – the Yom Kippur war. The goal of Egypt and Syria was to seize territory and negotiate a settlement that would return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and the Golan

Heights to Syria. The Israeli military was initially caught unaware, but then responded with exceptional force, sending its troops deep into Syria and re-taking the Sinai Peninsula. The Arab states were again no match militarily for Israel, armed with U.S.-supplied weapons paid for with U.S. military funding. Nevertheless, the 1973 war was seen as a small victory in the Arab world, for having taken Israel by surprise and proving that its defenses were not perfect.



The 1973 war was a scandal for the Labor Party in Israel. It was challenged from the right-wing by a new party, the Likud Party, founded in 1973. The Likud Party received support from the settlers who opposed the secularism of the Labor Party. It also received support from the Sephardim, the Jewish Israelis of Arab and North African descent. The Israeli government had encouraged immigration of Jews from Arab and North African countries to Israel, to build up the population of the state. But the Sephardim were discriminated against and were intentionally settled on the borders of Israel, where they were the first to get hit by Palestinian guerrilla attacks. The resentment of the Sephardim towards the Labor Party and towards the Palestinians led them to support the Likud Party. The Likud Party was also supported by Israeli elites and international companies that wanted to roll back Israel's welfare state to the benefit of private corporations. In 1977, the Likud Party won in a landslide election.

The Likud Party in power aimed to stabilize the situation by making peace with the Arab states, while simultaneously encouraging the settler movement and maintaining control of the Occupied Territories. Under Prime Minister Menachem Begin, for the first time since 1952, Israel entered into peace negotiations with Egypt. Israel's negotiations with Egypt were made possible by shifts in Egyptian politics. After the 1973 war, the Egyptian government of Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor, moved to dramatically shift Egyptian domestic and foreign policy towards an alliance and accommodation with the U.S. and imperialism. Sadat cut Egypt's historic ties with the Soviet Union, expelled Soviet diplomats and military advisors, and established a connection with the United States. Sadat's government dramatically cut subsidies and wages for Egypt's poor and working class, and opened the

economy to private investment by international companies. When students and workers protested, Sadat sent the military in to crush the protests. Most importantly, Sadat's government abandoned Egypt's perceived leading role among the Arab states in opposition to Israel and imperialism. All of this made it possible for Egypt to negotiate with Israel, resulting in the Camp David Accords.

In 1978, the Egyptian and Israeli governments met at Camp David in the U.S., hosted by President Jimmy Carter. The Camp David accords that emerged established a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, and laid out a series of steps towards an end to the Israeli military occupation and for limited Palestinian self-government. Only the first half of the accords was implemented. Egypt signed, and has ever since maintained, a peace treaty with Israel. The Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egyptian control. However, none of the promises made to Palestinians were fulfilled. Israel maintained its occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In fact, the Camp David Accords fulfilled Egypt's transition into the camp of U.S. imperialism at the expense of the Palestinians, and the Egyptian example was followed by other Arab states seeking accommodation with imperialism.

The First Intifada and the Rebirth of the Palestinian National Movement

After the defeat of the PLO in 1982 and Egypt's treaties with Israel, it seemed that the Palestinians' hopes were crushed. The PLO leaders in Tunis were isolated and their forces diminished. Egypt led the way as other Arab states explored relationships and agreements with the U.S. It seemed that the Palestinians were abandoned, disarmed, and had no prospects to assert themselves against the occupation.

It was then that the Palestinians themselves, in the Occupied Territories, were the ones to shift the balance of forces. A new generation had grown up under occupation, aggravated by its conditions, full of frustrated energy and anger against Israel and the occupation. By the mid-'80s, 40 percent of Palestinian workers labored in second-class jobs in Israel, in construction or service industries. Others worked marginally as teachers, cab drivers, and in other services in the West Bank and Gaza. Unemployment was rampant, and frustrations grew intense as many more Palestinians focused on seeking to better their lives through education in the Palestinian university system. But, in 1987, only one in eight college-educated Palestinians could find work in their field.

Outside of building support for the armed struggle, the PLO had neglected organizing in the Occupied Territories. It was the Communist Party of Palestine that led the way in Gaza and the West Bank, organizing volunteer work brigades to assist farmers, and unions to contest Palestinian workers' conditions of daily life. Seeing the success of these activities, in the 1980s the PLO parties took up similar organizing efforts, and the Occupied Territories saw the growth of grassroots activism. But neither the PLO and its parties, nor the Communist Party which officially supported the PLO, saw this grassroots activity as the basis for anything but a support for the armed struggle led from exile.

In 1987 everything changed. The Palestinians in the Occupied Territories launched a mass uprising against Israel and the military occupation. This uprising was known as the Intifada, Arabic for "shaking off." What sparked the uprising is still up for debate, but certainly it was a result of the occupation – the arbitrary violence of the Israeli military and the encroachment of settlers on Palestinian land.



The Intifada was a youth-led rebellion. The generation who had grown up knowing nothing except the occupation had reached a breaking point. Their actions, confronting the heavily armed soldiers with rocks and slings, became the symbol of revolt for the entire people.

The leadership of the Intifada was formed by committees composed of militants from the different political parties. The leadership of the different committees was assembled in the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising. As the movement gathered, the national

leadership gave its strategic orders – when and where to demonstrate, with what slogans, while local committees distributed leaflets, organized people to turn out, and worked to maintain food and supplies for the community in the face of Israeli repression.

The Intifada's mass action completely confounded the Israelis. The entire population of the Occupied Territories was mobilized in its own name, and everyone from the youngest child to their grandparents and great grandparents were participants. Israel's extensive network of spies and compromised individuals dissolved. The leadership of the uprising gave informers 24 hours to admit what they had done at a mosque or church, and the people would know their crimes, but forgive them.

The Israeli military attempted to squash the uprising. The borders of the Occupied Territories were shut off and people who had worked in Israel were no longer allowed to enter. During the First Intifada, 1,284 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli military, including more than 300 children. Hundreds were deported from the Occupied Territories and thousands had their houses torn down. In spite of the repression, the mobilized population remained steadfast. Israeli officials began to consider that the First Intifada made continuing the direct military occupation of Palestine an impossibility, or at least undesirable. In doing so, in less than six years, the Intifada had achieved more than the guerrilla struggle had in decades.

The Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accords

The First Intifada gave the PLO a new lease on life. Their forces had been crushed in Lebanon, and the leadership of the PLO was in exile in Tunis. However, the First Intifada gave the PLO a new means of influencing the situation. The PLO claimed its right to represent the Palestinian people, and began to open secret talks with Israel, with the goal of achieving a political settlement. In fact, one of the fears that PLO leaders had was that a new leadership in the Occupied Territories would emerge. For the most part, the leaders of the Intifada were young, new recruits to the parties. What if they drew a balance sheet based on the PLO's failed strategy, and took matters into their own hands? In fact, the PLO was more worried than it had to be, as the young leaders of the First Intifada were deeply loyal. Nevertheless, this fear drove the PLO leaders in exile to seek what they saw as their only avenue to seize control of the situation – diplomatic negotiations with Israel.

The Israeli government was desperate to control what was happening in the Occupied Territories. Furthermore, it feared, as before, that the Palestinian struggle would create a groundswell of support in the rest of the Arab world. The United States was similarly concerned that the Intifada would destabilize the Middle East and undermine its imperialist interests. The Arab states' governments in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt were also worried that a Palestinian revolt would challenge their policies and possibly lead to the overthrow of their regimes. Like the Egyptian government, they wanted to collaborate with the U.S. and reap the rewards of accommodating imperialism at the expense of their people. The Soviet Union, which in the past had represented another major world power that Arab states and movements could turn to, was dealing with its own internal problems and the fallout from its war in Afghanistan, and also supported negotiations to stabilize the region.

The U.S. and the Soviet Union co-sponsored a peace conference in Madrid. While the conference achieved little to nothing, it had a huge symbolic importance. Along with the Syrian, Jordanian, and Israeli governments, the PLO was allowed to participate and for the first time was in face-to-face, official negotiations with Israel.

Following the Madrid Conference, Israel and the PLO entered into secret, direct negotiations, known as the Oslo process, conducted in Oslo, Norway. The starting point of the Oslo negotiations was the 1978 Camp David Accords – a course of action with the end goal of giving Palestinians an independent state using the 1967 borders. The PLO made a major concession - recognizing the State of Israel and accepting a “two-state solution” – a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders living side by side with the State of Israel.

The Oslo negotiations led to two major agreements in 1993 and 1995, known collectively as the Oslo Accords. These were negotiated at Camp David, presided over by the United States. The PLO was at an even deeper disadvantage than it had anticipated. When the PLO moved towards a diplomatic solution in 1987, following the Intifada, the Soviet Union still existed. The PLO expected the Soviet Union to play a role as at the Madrid conference, counterbalancing the interests of the United States and imperialism. However, the Soviet Union collapsed under its own internal contradictions in 1991. Yasser Arafat and the PLO found themselves negotiating with Israel and its patron, the United States, with no counterbalancing world power on the other side.

The Oslo Accords proceeded with a plan for a “two-state solution” based on the 1978 Camp David Accords that Egypt had negotiated with Israel. The first Oslo Accord in 1993 promised a future Palestinian state and established the Palestinian National Authority (PA), an interim governing body that had limited authority within the West Bank and Gaza. Yasser Arafat and the other top leaders of the PLO were allowed to return to the Occupied Territories to set up the PA.

The second Oslo Accord in 1995 divided the West Bank into three categories – Areas A, B, and C. In Area A, 18% of the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority would have control of civilian authority and the police. In Area B, 22% of the West Bank, the Palestinian Authority would control civilian affairs, while the Israeli military policed it. Area C, 60% of the West Bank, would be under full control of Israel. Israeli military forces were meant to gradually withdraw from controlling areas B and C. However, the agreement allowed Israel to maintain its settlements, and therefore military bases to protect them, deep within Palestinian territory.



The Oslo Accords were a major compromise for the Palestinians, but they were initially greeted with hope. Arafat returned to Ramallah, the seat of the new PA government, with parades and celebrations. People felt that, at the very least, their desperate conditions under occupation were at an end. However, the glow of possibility faded quickly. Entry to Israel was not open for work as it had been before the Intifada, and unemployment skyrocketed. Meanwhile, during the 1990s, the number of Israeli settlements doubled. The PLO signed the accords, which laid out a five-year timeline for an independent state. But issues of territory, the status of Jerusalem, and the rights of refugees to return from exile remained unsettled.

Hamas and the Reaction to Oslo

Hamas, an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, was founded in 1987 during the First Intifada. It had its beginnings in a charitable organization linked to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, located in Gaza. Islamic activists like those who founded Hamas had been a part of Palestinian political life for decades, but never had the influence of the PLO or the leftist parties.

The Islamic activists saw the Arab struggle as a religious question, the struggle of the Ummah, or Islamic community, and criticized the PLO for its secularism. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Israeli military ignored and even encouraged Islamic activists, seeing them as less militant than the PLO and, with incompatible ideologies, a means to divide and conquer the Palestinians.

During the Oslo period, Hamas severely criticized the PLO when it came out for a “two-state” solution and accepted the State of Israel with the 1967 borders. Hamas also criticized the PLO when, during negotiations, it announced that it was giving up the strategy of violence and armed struggle. During the Oslo negotiations, violence against Palestinians did not stop, and on the part of the settlers it even grew. On February 25, 1994, an American-Israeli settler murdered 29 people at a mosque in Hebron. While the PLO maintained its negotiations and its promises, Hamas declared that it would strike back, even at Israeli civilians.

While the PLO was negotiating, Hamas activists carried out attacks, including suicide bombings in Israel. These attacks had the effect of polarizing Israeli politics, and turning public support against the Oslo Accords. The attacks also horrified many people in the world, as the media reported with images of bombed-out buses. In the Occupied Territories, however, Hamas gained credit among many people who were frustrated by the living conditions they faced, and the compromise represented by Oslo. In 1989, less than three percent of Palestinians in Gaza were supporters of Hamas. By 1993, 16.6% of Gazans and 10% of West Bank Palestinians supported Hamas. While the PLO was hanging up its

weapons and leading the Palestinians into an increasingly disappointing diplomatic agreement, Hamas was able to criticize from the sidelines and win.

There were additional reasons for the frustration with the PLO that led to support for Hamas. The PLO staffed the PA with activists from Fatah and the other PLO parties. The PA basic laws spelled out that “the economic system in Palestine shall be based on the principles of a free market economy.” A new class of rich Palestinian businessmen emerged as the few wealthy Palestinians in the diaspora returned, seeing a future for themselves as capitalists as well as Palestinian citizens in a future Palestinian state. The PA was riddled with corruption as members of the new bureaucracy used their positions to enrich themselves, brokering business deals and selling influence. Not only was this new “Oslo bourgeoisie” becoming conspicuously wealthy, most of them were exiles who hadn’t lived in Palestine for decades, if they ever had. While the PLO was becoming mired in corruption, Hamas was able to appear as the more honest, more militant alternative.

The Second Intifada – The Death of the “Two-State” Solution

In 2000, the final Camp David summit was held. This meeting was supposed to finalize the Oslo Accords and begin the transition of the PA towards taking control of the whole Occupied Territories. These meetings broke down as the details became clear. Israel’s final offer would retain its major settlements, linked by Israeli-only bypass roads. The West Bank would be split down the middle by an Israel-controlled road to the Dead Sea. Gaza and the West Bank would be linked by an elevated highway or tunnel, controlled by Israel. These proposals divided the West Bank into three areas, each cut off from the other by Israeli-controlled roads and settlements. Israel also demanded control of the border of the West Bank with Jordan. These final details were too much for Arafat and the PLO to accept, and the PLO walked away from the table.



The collapse of the Oslo Accords coincided with a new uprising in the Occupied Territories, the Second Intifada. In September 2000, as the Oslo Accords were collapsing, the head of the Likud Party, General Ariel Sharon, made a provocative visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Sharon, the Israeli general personally responsible for allowing the Sabra and Shatila massacres in 1982, was known among Palestinians as the “butcher of Beirut.” Sharon was campaigning for Prime Minister on a

platform of national security, against the so-called peace process, and his visit to Al-Aqsa was an appeal to Israel’s settlers and the religious right-wing. Al-Aqsa is, according to religious and right-wing interpretations, the site of the original temple of David and, in order to fully restore the Jewish Kingdom, Al-Aqsa needs to be torn down so the temple can be rebuilt. For Palestinians, Sharon’s visit was a threat and an insult to their religious beliefs, their cultural heritage, their national pride, or all

three. Palestinian protesters at Al-Aqsa were met with tear gas and rubber bullets. Shortly after, the Occupied Territories erupted in revolt.

In the Second Intifada, the Israeli military decided that it needed to avoid a repeat of the First Intifada, to stop the whole population of Palestinians from mobilizing. Their solution? To quickly militarize the conflict. The Second Intifada began with mass demonstrations, just like the First Intifada, but this time Israeli tanks and soldiers used extreme force against the demonstrators. Soon, ordinary people went into hiding, and the Second Intifada played out in clashes between armed Palestinian groups and the Israeli military. The Palestinians were hopelessly outmatched. Over 3,000 Palestinians were killed in the Second Intifada, while Israel lost 300 soldiers.

The Second Intifada had repercussions in Israel. For decades, Israeli policy had been to isolate the Palestinians in Israel from those in the West Bank. Just over two million people in Israel, twenty percent of its population, are Palestinian. The Palestinians in Israel have been, for the duration of Israel's history, treated as second-class citizens, subject to both formal and informal discrimination. The Israeli education system removed any reference to Palestinian history and culture. Many Palestinians, cut off from their history, came to think of themselves as "Israeli Arabs." Since the First Intifada, however, and especially during the Second Intifada, this consciousness began to change as Palestinians in Israel identified with their fellow Palestinians, and as such they felt the right-wing backlash in Israel stirred up by politicians like Ariel Sharon. The myth of "Arab-Israelis" separate from Palestinians was rapidly evaporating. During the Second Intifada, the North of Israel, where Palestinians are a majority, saw a general strike and open confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli police, including the use of live ammunition by the cops.

Ariel Sharon was elected Prime Minister of Israel in 2001. The "butcher of Beirut" campaigned against the Oslo Agreements and for increased security. During the Oslo negotiations and the Second Intifada, the suicide bombings and attacks by Hamas were imitated by some of the other Palestinian parties who did not want to be out-manuevered, and fear gripped the Israeli population. While the attacks won Hamas credibility among the Palestinians who wanted to see retaliation, they hardened the Israeli public behind its right-wing politicians, and the media and politicians were able, on a world scale, to paint the Palestinians as "terrorists" who needed to be controlled.



Israel's separation wall dividing the Israeli settlement of Pisgat Zeev (L) and the Palestinian Shuafat refugee camp (R), 2020.

From 2000 to 2006, a bloody status quo was established. The negotiations were off the table, the settlers were given a boost by the Sharon government, and violence back and forth between the Israeli military and Palestinian groups continued. From 2000 to 2005, Palestinians launched 150 suicide bombing attacks in retaliation for Israeli violence.

In 2002, the Sharon administration authorized the construction of a "separation barrier," a wall between the Occupied

Territories and Israel. The wall sits mostly on Palestinian land within the Occupied Territories. The construction of the wall itself was a colonial land-grab with 9.5 percent of the West Bank sitting behind the wall on the Israeli side, effectively annexed to Israel. The wall's construction cuts through communities and creates barriers to travel within the territories.

The New Popular Resistance

The construction of the wall touched off a new wave of political activism. Palestinians, in dozens of villages with land sitting in the path of the wall's construction, organized what they called the "popular resistance," a nonviolent campaign of civil disobedience. The activists behind the popular resistance, men and women who had organized the First Intifada when they were young, were deeply critical of the suicide bombings. They argued that, while Palestinians may feel vindicated in lashing out against Israelis to exact revenge, tactically the suicide bombings were futile. They did nothing to stop the advance of settlements, the brutality of the military occupation, or to force any political settlement. The bombings, especially attacks on civilians, put the Palestinian struggle in a bad light in the eyes of the world. Military operations also excluded the majority of Palestinians. The First Intifada showed the power of a mass struggle that engages the whole population, and the popular resistance intended to mobilize this power again, to confront the construction of the wall and, with mass nonviolent civil disobedience, show the world that Palestinians stood on the moral high ground.

For the most part, Israeli state ideology, separation from the Occupied Territories, and relative wealth insulates Israelis from the Palestinian struggle. The roots of Palestinian grievances are denied and dismissed, and Palestinian resistance, especially violence, becomes justification for the occupation, the settlement construction, and the overall continuation of the state's colonial policy. However, a small number of Israelis grasped the situation, and took action against the occupation. The popular resistance was joined by Israeli activists from Anarchists Against the Wall, a group who joined Palestinians in the villages in their nonviolent demonstrations, facing arrest, tear gas, rubber bullets, and sometimes live ammunition. The popular resistance also invited international activists to join the demonstrations, spreading awareness and consciousness of Israel's crimes on a global scale. As a consequence, the villages of Budrus and Bil'in regained some of the land they had lost to the wall's construction.



In 2005, hundreds of Palestinian unions and civil society organizations came together to call for an international campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) on the State of Israel. This international campaign has grown, as part of a growing global consciousness of the plight of the Palestinian people. An important aspect of this campaign is a demand for rights for all Palestinians governed by Israel. This is a challenge, not only to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, but also to the unequal society within Israel's borders that treats the 20% of Israel's population that is Palestinian as an internal enemy. While the BDS campaign does not have the power

to overturn the Israeli state, it has been a fundamental element in building international consciousness and solidarity with the Palestinians.

Israel's Withdrawal from Gaza and the 2006 Election

Alongside the construction of the wall, Israel moved to seal off and control Gaza. Some Israeli settlements, constructed in Gaza by the settler movement, were withdrawn. The Sharon administration made a big deal about “withdrawal” and even claimed that Gaza is no longer occupied. In fact, a wall was erected around Gaza and the only way in and out is through Israeli-controlled checkpoints, whether on the Israeli or Egyptian side. Israel controls the Palestinian Population Registry, which keeps track of Gaza residents. Israel's government also passed a law that allows Israel to prosecute and imprison Gazans in Israel. Human Rights organizations linked to the United Nations describe Gaza as “the world's largest open-air prison.”

In 2003, the U.S. administration of George W. Bush put forward a plan for a new round of negotiations, called the “road map.” The road was supposed to lead to an independent Palestinian state but, as with Oslo, this was a goal that Israel never actually agreed to or pursued. The real reason for the “road map” was that the U.S. was preparing its invasion of Iraq. Making gestures towards solving the Palestinian problem was a way to win international support for the invasion as, for example, Britain made it a precondition for its support. Israel put forward 14 objections to the road map, essentially denying its willingness to support it. However, the Bush administration still trumpeted the “road map” as a success and used it to win support for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

In 2005, the PLO's long-time leading figure, Yasser Arafat, died. Israel and the United States had both refused to deal with him after the PLO walked away from the Oslo Accords. After his death, Israel and the United States hoped that the PLO would come under the control of a more pliable leader. They pushed the PLO to hold elections to the PA with this goal in mind. However, elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council, the legislative body of the PA, returned a slim majority for Hamas. In spite of holding a free and open election, as demanded by Israel and the United States, the outcome was deemed unacceptable. International funds supporting the PA were cut off, and Israel refused to release taxes paid to the PA by Palestinians, funds that Israel retains ultimate control over.



Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, President George W. Bush, and President Mahmoud Abbas, 2007.

After Arafat, Mahmoud Abbas became the leading figure in Fatah and the PLO. Unlike Arafat, Abbas was much more ready to submit to pressure and plans imposed by the United States. In the West Bank, the

PLO refused to surrender the PA to Hamas. Then, in 2007, supported by the U.S., the PLO attempted a coup against Hamas in Gaza. The coup failed, and after weeks of bloody fighting between PLO and Hamas forces, a new situation emerged – the PA in control of the West Bank, and Hamas in control of Gaza.

The Siege of Gaza

Gaza, with Hamas in control, was declared “hostile territory” by Israel. With total control over what comes in and out of Gaza, Israel limited food and fuel supplies to a minimum, counting calories to keep Gazans just above the starvation level. Hamas, in Gaza, used its victimization as a source of moral credit. While the PA under Mahmoud Abbas was doing the bidding of the U.S., Hamas was able to appear as a true resistance organization, and Hamas’s military wing carried out regular attacks, launching rockets into Israel.

In 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu came to power as Israeli Prime Minister, using the threat of Hamas, and the threat posed by attacks from Gaza, as fuel for his campaign, and making appeals to the settler movement and Israel’s far right that wanted to ramp up the construction of settlements and the annexation of Palestinian land. Israeli policy officially changed from “conflict resolution” to “conflict management.”

Israel’s War on Lebanon

Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982 had directly led to the creation of Hezbollah, a Shia political party and armed force with links to Iran. Israel’s occupation of South Lebanon, which lasted 18 years, saw the Israeli military in constant conflict with Hezbollah’s military forces. Even after Israel’s withdrawal in 2000, Hezbollah and Israeli forces clashed at the border. In 2006, Hezbollah forces captured two Israeli soldiers, hoping to trade them for Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails. Israel responded with a blockade, bombardment, and invasion of Lebanon to “destroy Hezbollah.” Over the course of a month, Israeli forces pounded Lebanon, especially Beirut’s Shia neighborhoods where Hezbollah has its support base.

The war brutalized Lebanon, destroying infrastructure and displacing over a million Lebanese, one-third of the population, from their homes. At the same time, the war was a failure in terms of Israel’s goals. Hezbollah proved to be well-prepared, and even though its forces were outmatched, it came out of the war stronger, and with more political credit in Lebanese politics. The war also showed the power of Iranian military support, which Hezbollah had benefited from since its creation.

The 2006 war set a precedent for future conflicts. Israel’s wars against the Palestinians always threaten to overflow the borders of Palestine and Israel and spill over into other countries, starting with Lebanon.

A Cycle of Brutality – Israeli Politics and the Gaza Wars

Since 2007, a vicious and cynical cycle of violence has taken hold. In Gaza, under siege, the pressure builds and, to maintain credibility, to appear to be doing something about the situation, Hamas and other, smaller Palestinian groups affiliated with Hamas carry out attacks. Israel then responds with exceptional brutality, air strikes, and periodic ground invasions. The right-wing in Israel, led by Netanyahu, benefits politically from these wars on Gaza as the Israeli population rallies around the government in the name of “self-defense.” It became almost a joke, that when Israel has an election, a war on Gaza is just around the corner. Hamas has maintained a rain of rockets on Israel, mostly

intercepted by the U.S.-funded Iron Dome missile defense system. In Israel, many more people die in car crashes than from Hamas rockets.

Since 2007, Israel has waged five bloody wars against the people of Gaza. In 2008, in response to rockets fired from Gaza, Israel launched “Operation Cast Lead.” In the following invasion, 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed. In 2012, Israel announced “Operation Pillar of Defense.” In that conflict, 177 Palestinians were killed in airstrikes. In 2014, Israel waged a full-blown ground invasion, called “Operation Protective Edge,” in which 2,205 Palestinians and 71 Israelis were killed. Then in 2021, another attack, dubbed “Operation Guardian of the Walls,” led to 256 Palestinians being killed.

A child in Gaza, born in 2007, would be sixteen years old today, and would have lived through constant siege, deprivation, and multiple wars, with all of the psychological damage that comes from that experience. Half of Gaza’s population is under the age of 18, and this history of war and deprivation is what they have known for most, if not all, of their lives. This is the reality of the siege of Gaza. It is an atrocity of historic proportions, unfolding in front of our eyes. Now, with the current war, the horrors have escalated to unimaginable heights.



Operation Protective Edge, 2014.

The Arab Spring – From Hope to Disillusionment

In 2011, a revolt swept Arab nations. The Arab Spring resulted in the toppling of long-standing dictatorships in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, and attempts to do the same in other countries. The Arab Spring raised great hopes, and the demands of the masses of poor and working people were clear. They raised the call for bread, dignity, and social justice. While the masses were revolutionary, they lacked

leadership that could direct that energy. Instead, they generally followed organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Islamist militias operating in Syria. These organizations' priority was to take power at the head of the states without fundamentally challenging the status quo for the masses.

Many Palestinians hoped that the Arab Spring would lead to a new struggle of the Arab people as a unified force that could save the Palestinians from their ongoing colonization and occupation by the State of Israel. These hopes were dashed. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt pledged to maintain Egypt's treaties with Israel. Likewise, the new regime in Libya aimed to make an accommodation with the imperialist order. Syria and Libya descended into chaos and civil war. The wave of revolt failed to overturn regimes elsewhere, and the hopes of the Palestinians for any assistance were frustrated.



Demonstration for standing with Palestine in Tunisia, 2011.

Nonetheless, the Arab Spring demonstrated the latent revolutionary impulse across the Middle East. While it did not result in a revolutionary change, and is widely regarded as a defeat, social struggles have not ceased. Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria have all seen waves of struggle. If a revolutionary leadership emerges to express the real demands of the population, it will not only transform life for millions in the Arab states; it could finally achieve the unification of the Arab people and present a fundamental challenge to the State of Israel, even possibly leading to its defeat.

The Rise of the Far Right in Israel

The Gaza wars coincided with the rise to power of the far right in Israel. The traditional right-wing party in Israel, the Likud, under the leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu, has used the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to its benefit, playing on security fears and stoking Israeli nationalism. One of the major supports for Likud has been the settler population, which has in turn produced its own politicians. Over the last decade and a half, far-right politicians who would have once been marginal, fringe figures, have been incorporated into Netanyahu's ruling coalition and have become public officials. For example, Israel's current Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich is a settler in the West Bank and head of the Religious Zionism Party. Not only is Smotrich committed to the settler project, he opposes LGBTQ+ rights in Israel and wants to use legislation to force people to live according to religious law. The National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, another settler, heads the Jewish Power Party. Ben-Gvir was convicted in 2007 of inciting racist attacks on Palestinians and supporting far-right terrorism. Today, he personally heads up a security force that defends settlers in the West Bank. These far-right figures aren't just playing the usual politics of the last decades. They want to advance the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians at a more accelerated pace, and transform Israeli politics with a religious basis for civil law.

From January to September, 2023, Israel was gripped by massive protests. Netanyahu and his right-wing cabinet aimed to remove power from the Supreme Court, to free the right-wing government to

advance its agenda without obstacles. This is important for the religious and other far-right parties, both to push pro-settlement policies, but also to impose religiously motivated legislation within Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to protest, including middle and upper class Israelis, former politicians, and celebrities. While these protests were dramatic, the protesters failed to or were unwilling to touch the source of the problem. The far right in Israel wants to aggressively advance the colonization of Palestinian land. It was created in the settlements, and has seized power in the state. The Israelis who protest may want to protect their historic rights and liberties, but the very foundations of the state are rotten, being based on the colonization of Palestinian land. The rise of the far-right in Israel represents Israeli colonialism unleashed and shamelessly arguing for annexation, population transfer, and genocide. For Palestinians, not much is different between the far-right and Israel's more moderate politicians. The only thing that separates them is the violence of their rhetoric and the speed with which they propose to complete the same project – colonization. Most Palestinians in Israel did not support or participate in the protest movement, as it did nothing to address their concerns.

The Great March of Return and the Rebirth of Armed Struggle

In 2018, Palestinians in Gaza attempted a different solution to their plight, other than waiting and watching for the next invasion. In March, 30,000 Palestinians marched to the wall separating Gaza from Israel in a mass, nonviolent demonstration called the Great March of Return. For the following year, every Friday, Gazans marched to the wall to protest. They were met with brutal violence. Tear gas and rubber bullets were fired at the protesters, while Israeli snipers carried out targeted assassinations or delivered crippling and paralyzing wounds. Some 223 Palestinians were killed and 1,400 wounded, including 800 struck by live ammunition.

The Great March of Return was a desperate plea to the conscience of the world. However, the best that world governments were willing to do was raise questions about Israeli conduct, or condemn the repression. But these words amounted to little more than hot air. After the Great March of Return, many Palestinian youth in the West Bank began to question the effectiveness of mass mobilizations. A romantic identification with the guerrilla struggle of the past, along with the daily, brutal violence of Israeli soldiers and settlers, led young Palestinians to form new armed cells with the goal of deterring settler and military violence with the retaliatory violence of the new militant groups.

In 2023, prior to October 7, 133 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank, the highest number in years. In Palestinian cities like Jenin and Nablus, militant groups had been formed by young Palestinians across party lines to retaliate against settler violence. The Israeli military, cheered on by the far right and



Thousands of Gazans carry out a six-week sit-in demonstration along the border with Israel, 2018.

settlers, launched major military operations against this retaliation. Settlers rioted and destroyed Palestinian villages, killing civilians with little to no interference by Israeli forces.

October 7 – A Leap into the Unknown

While the Israeli military was preoccupied with resistance in the West Bank, the military wing of Hamas in Gaza, with the help of other, smaller organizations including Gaza-based groups linked to the PLO parties, launched an unprecedented strike against Israel. Three thousand rockets were launched. Then Hamas-led forces breached the Gaza wall using modified hang-gliders. The attack, which successfully captured 240 hostages, also resulted in the deaths of 1,200, many of whom were active-duty Israeli soldiers and officers, while others were civilians including young people partying at a rave held on military land.

Questions swirl around the attack. What was its goal? Who were the targets? How many died from the Hamas and other groups' attack and how many were killed by friendly fire as the Israeli military scrambled to respond? It has also come to light that the Netanyahu government ignored warnings from Egyptian intelligence that an attack was imminent, and the plan itself was seen by the Israeli military a year in advance. The Israeli state either expected or underestimated the scale of the attack.

Like the suicide bombings it had introduced to the struggle, Hamas's attack horrified the world, especially people without knowledge of the conflict's bloody history. But many Palestinians, and people throughout the Middle East and much of the rest of the world, felt otherwise. The Hamas attack was a blow against Israel and its imperialist patron, the United States. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States had been in discussions with Israel, to sign agreements and "stabilize" the Middle East. Part of these agreements meant that the Arab states would favor the PA at the expense of Hamas in their policies towards Palestine.



What has followed is the stuff of nightmares. Israel cut off all food, fuel, and medicine to Gaza. The Israeli military began a bombing campaign, followed by a military invasion of Gaza that has thus far killed at least 20,000, with more added every day. The overwhelming majority of deaths have been civilians, half of them under the age of 18. Israel has bombed schools and hospitals, flattened residences, and reduced much of Gaza to rubble. The population of the North, 1.1 million people, was ordered by Israel to flee to the South, and bombed while they were fleeing. While many Israelis blame Netanyahu and his government for failing to see the danger of a possible attack, they support the war to “root out Hamas.” Israeli politicians openly call for a new Nakba, and say that after Gaza, the West Bank is next. The full extent of Israeli military aggression has been unleashed and we are watching a genocidal erasure of life in Gaza. It is impossible to know what “solution” will be imposed once the bombs stop falling, but plans floated by the Netanyahu government include expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza, possibly to Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula, making Gaza another military conquest of the Israeli state.

Hamas’s Impasse

Hamas’s attack may have delivered a blow against Israel and an embarrassment for Netanyahu. The hostage-taking has given Hamas another boost to its credibility as hostages taken on October 7 are exchanged for Palestinian prisoners, some of whom have languished in Israeli prisons for decades. Hamas has won huge credibility with the young generation, which wants to resist, and was already turning to armed struggle. The cost in human life, due to Israel’s bloody attack, has been devastating, but those deaths are Israel’s responsibility for waging its war over three-quarters of a century, and more broadly for maintaining the Palestinian people in a state of misery.

There is no way that Hamas will be able to militarily defeat Israel, a nuclear-armed, U.S.-funded modern military. Like the PLO before it, the best Hamas can hope for is that a settlement, imposed by the Arab states and the United States, will somehow benefit the Palestinian people, or at least help perpetuate Hamas’s rule. Unlike the time in which the PLO was operating, today the U.S. is the only superpower. The USSR has dissolved and, while its successor, the Russian republic, may be at odds with the U.S., it is in no way as powerful. A much more powerful imperialist cabal, led by the U.S., has demonstrated its support for Israel, and the hold it has over the governments of the Middle East, run by wealthy elites.

The history of the Palestinian struggle has shown that a conventional armed struggle is a losing strategy and that the Middle East states, run by elites, can’t be relied on. They will betray the Palestinians. But that history has also shown that the poor and working class of the Middle East want to fight for Palestine. Dictators like Egypt’s General Sisi remember that the first demonstrations in 2011 against his predecessor, Hosni Mubarak, began with Palestine solidarity demonstrations. The Arab Spring was a massive revolt that shook the Middle East, but the leaders who emerged sold the people out or were unable to lead a successful struggle, and the revolt dissipated.

Perhaps Israel’s latest genocidal crimes will spark a new wave of revolt that can really express the will of the majority in the Middle East. But Hamas’s strategy is no different than the old PLO strategy. They are relying either on guerrilla war or diplomacy, rather than the organization of the oppressed. This policy will lead to the same impasse with tragic results. The working class and other oppressed groups in Palestine, Israel, and the rest of the region and the world have common interests and common enemies

– the ruling classes of each nation and of world imperialism. If the poor and working class have their say, the Middle East may stand up against imperialism, its chief agent in the Middle East, Israel, and the Arab states, all of which betray their people.

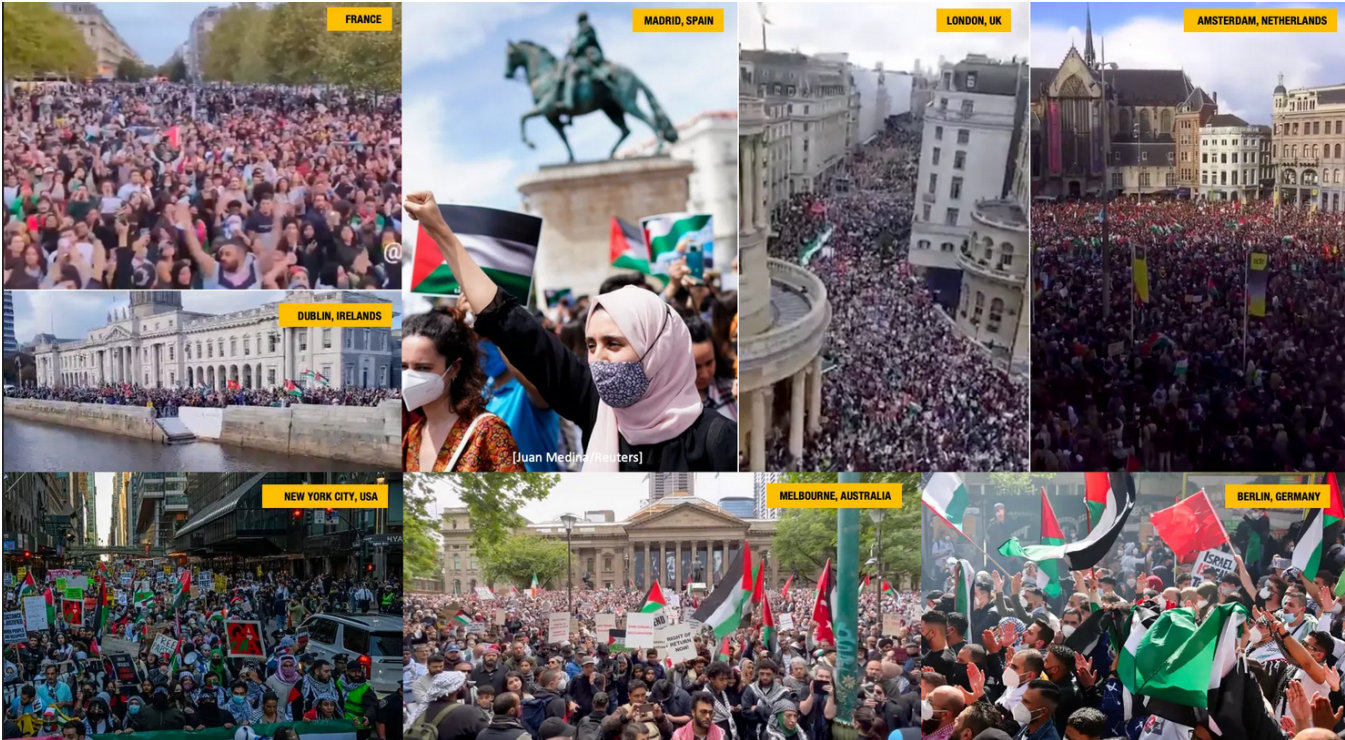
The Threat of War, the Need for Solidarity

The October 7 attack and Israel’s response have shaken the region. Corrupt and dictatorial regimes like General Sisi’s in Egypt and the Saudi monarchy, who had been caught in the midst of making agreements with the U.S. and Israel, are now faced with the rage of their populations, who have poured into the streets, set Israeli and American embassies on fire, and expressed the same solidarity that has led to other waves of revolt in the Middle East. Middle Eastern states are scrambling to condemn Israel and pose as supporters of the Palestinians. Either on their own behalf, or at the urging of their Iranian patrons, Hezbollah has ramped up attacks on Israel’s Northern border and threatened to declare war on Israel. U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria have traded fire with Iran-linked armed groups. The U.S. has sent two carrier strike groups as well as nuclear submarines to the Middle East. The region is a tinder-box set to burn, and October 7 may be the trigger that sparks anything from a revolt from below, to a regional war directed from Tehran and Washington.

The U.S. government and the major European powers have all come out in complete support of Israel in its genocidal war, parroting Israeli talking points and propaganda. However, millions of people all over the world not only oppose the threat of war, but demand that Israel’s genocide be stopped. The media, politicians, and institutions of all sorts have done everything they can to intimidate and silence people. But it hasn’t worked. A global consciousness of the Palestinians’ plight was growing, even before the recent war. Now it has taken the form of a protest movement, with millions of people deciding to take action and do everything they can to stop the genocide.



Outside of the Middle East, no one is better placed to support the Palestinians and to break the grip of imperialism on the people of the Middle East than those of us, poor, working class, and young people in the United States and other imperialist nations. Armed with a knowledge of history, we have to grasp the depth of the problem – the imperialist world system that uses a state like Israel for its own ends – is a product of the same capitalist system that causes the ever-deepening misery of the working class, the destruction of the environment, and wars and atrocities of which this genocide is only the latest. We have no interests in common with this system, its rulers, its defenders, and its apologists. We must demand an end to Israel’s genocidal war now! But to finally put an end to this system of wars and atrocities, we need to transform society and do away with capitalism and imperialism on a global scale. Working people in Israel, Palestine, the U.S., and the rest of the world must see that we have a common struggle for a decent life for all.



Where We Stand

Today we live in a world of rapidly increasing danger to humanity and much of life on Earth. However, this moment in history also contains enormous possibilities. Humanity has the prospect of using all the advances of human knowledge for the benefit of all, engaging the creative potential of each person on the planet, and building a society organized in a conscious fashion.

But we see the world moving in the opposite direction, driven by capitalism, resulting in an increasingly irreversible rush to climate catastrophe, economic disaster, misery and famine for part of humanity, and the risk of pandemics. These crises show the inability of the existing social and political system to protect our lives. This has created a world ruled by prejudice and fear, a world of widespread violence and war, where exploitation and oppression are the rule, and the many are dominated by the few.

The Force for Change Exists Today

Everywhere, working people's labor makes society run. This fact is dismissed and denied by the ruling class, which serves to hide from workers their own class interests and potential power. It is the exploitation of labor that generates profit, which is at the heart of capitalism. Working people have the power to end this system of exploitation and bring about the changes needed to save and transform our lives.

Like slavery, feudalism, and other systems that enriched the minority at the expense of the majority, capitalism's removal is long overdue.

We Stand for Socialism

- A world based on peaceful collaboration and international cooperation of working-class people — not the exploiters who rule today.
- The common ownership and sharing of the world's resources and productive capacity under the democratic control of the world's peoples.
- An economy organized to guarantee the health and well-being of every person, and to provide the resources and tools to develop all their talents and capacities no matter where or to whom they are born.
- An egalitarian and democratic government, organized and controlled from the bottom up, which facilitates people's active participation in making decisions about how society is run.
- Protection of the world's ecological systems, putting science to work to sustain life, not destroy it.
- A society where human relations are based on respect, equality and dignity of all peoples, not racism, sexism, homophobia, or other prejudices.

Our Political Heritage

We base our perspective and our approach to political activity on the communist legacy of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, and on the example of the Russian Revolution of 1917, when the working class took power and began to reorganize society. We stand in the tradition of the international Left Opposition, and Trotsky's Fourth International against Stalinism – the bureaucratic degeneration of the Russian Revolution and its global consequences. We reject the identification of communism and socialism with authoritarian rule and nationalism – this is the legacy of Stalinism, not communism or socialism.

We Must Go Beyond Reforms

We support the struggles of those who are fighting against the oppression caused by capitalism, even if the goals of those struggles are not aimed at replacing the capitalist order. We support the right of nations to self-determination, to throw off the forces of imperialism — be it the domination of corporations, the World Bank, the IMF, military forces or other agents of imperialism. We fight against racist and gender-based discrimination and violence. We fight against attacks on the standard of living of working people — wage and benefit cuts, attacks on health care, education, housing and other basic needs. We fight to prevent climate catastrophe, an existential crisis facing humanity.

Socialism cannot come through a reform of the existing system. It is not a matter of replacing corrupt politicians or union officials with those who are more honest or more willing to see a greater portion of society's resources shared with the poor. Nor is it a matter of getting better contracts or laws. We must remove the capitalist system of exploitation and replace it with a fundamentally different system: socialism.

What Is Needed to Bring This Change About?

It will take a massive social struggle, a revolution, by the majority, the workers and poor of the world, led by the working class, taking power and reorganizing society.

It will take the development of revolutionary parties around the world, based in the working class, tested in struggle, and chosen by the workers as their representatives. It will take the construction of a revolutionary leadership – an international party of socialist revolution.

Our work to contribute to the construction of a revolutionary party in the U.S., the richest capitalist country in the world and the most powerful imperialist state, is an essential component of this overall task.

The fate of the world depends on building such an organization, though today it is represented only by some individuals or small groups with varying degrees of influence who share those goals.

Humanity's fate hangs in the balance. The enormous crises caused by capitalism make our perspective more relevant than ever. The decisions made by a few individuals today may decide the course of

history. Even a small group of people who are ready to start acting on these ideas can play a significant role in determining whether future working-class movements take a revolutionary socialist path.

We in Speak Out Now are ready to collaborate with other groups who fight on the side of the working class to build revolutionary workers' parties and a workers' revolutionary socialist international.

Who We Are

Speak Out Now/Revolutionary Workers Group is a revolutionary socialist group. We believe that a socialist world is possible and can be brought into being by the active struggles of the majority of the people of the world. We believe the international working class is the social force that can transform society and create a new world. But to do so, revolutionary organizations must be built in the working class. For this reason our group aims its activity primarily at large workplaces. Our newsletters are distributed at several workplaces every two weeks.

We think it is important to both analyze the current world situation as well as to know and understand the history of past struggles. We have forums on current events and political topics and we organize Marxist discussions and classes. We have pamphlets on past working class struggles, the revolutionary movements around the world and the current problems we face. We organize with others around many issues – racism, immigrant rights, climate change, police brutality, and more.

If you're interested to find out more, contact us at:

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The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has erupted in massive and horrifying bloodshed. In response to the attack by Hamas on October 7, Israel has responded with a brutal war against Palestinians living in Gaza, and an escalation of violence towards Palestinians living in the West Bank. For many people, this is a wakeup call – watching families driven from their homes, children buried under the rubble, and an intense media campaign on the part of journalists and politicians in Europe and the United States to justify this violence. How did this happen? Where did this conflict come from? How can it be stopped? To consider these questions, we need to examine the history of the conflict.

***Get in touch with us if you want
to fight for a better world!***



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