



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE
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Jewish state must come to terms with demographics

No peace for Israel without justice for the Palestinians

by Saree Makdisi

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The civilian infrastructure - notably Beirut International Airport - was the first target of the attack that Israel unleashed on Lebanon in response to the capture of two Israeli soldiers this week. This mimicks Israel's earlier assaults on the essentially defenseless population of the Gaza Strip. Israeli missiles destroyed Gaza's only power plant, depriving half the population of electricity for the hot summer months (no fans, no fridges, no light after sunset). Israeli interdictions severely disrupted supplies of food, fuel, medicines and water. Midnight air raids, artillery

bombardments, and sleep deprivation are taking a psychological toll, particularly on young children.

Israel is, in short, now punishing more than a million men, women and children in Gaza for a Palestinian guerrilla attack on an Israeli army post (an obviously military target), and the entire population of Lebanon for a Hezbollah attack on Israeli troops on its northern border.

As Israel lashes out indiscriminately, mocking international law, U.S. government officials and prominent pundits have expressed sympathy - not for the victims of these attacks, but for their perpetrators. Moreover, much of the arsenal that Israel uses against Lebanese and Palestinians is American, including the armored bulldozers it uses to crush homes, the missiles recklessly fired into crowded neighborhoods and the gunships that launch them.

Such support tarnishes U.S. standing in a strategically vital region of the world. More and more Americans realize that we pay a price for Israel's abuses - and receive nothing in return.

What we most urgently need to know is that the tragedy now unfolding in Gaza is not merely one more episode in a supposed "cycle of violence" (which implies proportionality), let alone a genuine military contest (for only one side has an army).

But if the current Israeli attacks are utterly disproportionate to their alleged provocations, that is because far more is at stake than Palestinian pinpricks. What is happening in Gaza is an expression of Israel's political vision.

Israeli politicians speak openly of that vision (indeed, the current Israeli government won recent elections with a pledge to fulfill it): the consolidation of a state with a Jewish majority in a land in which barely half the population is actually Jewish.

There is no way to implement such a program without violence. That was the case in 1948, when half of Palestine's non-Jewish population was driven into flight ~ never to be allowed to return - in order for a Jewish state to be created on what had been Palestinians' land. And it is

the case today, as Israel seeks to forcibly isolate the land's remaining non-Jewish population into barren islands cut off from each other and the rest of the world.

Gaza is only one of these islands. The others are in the West Bank which, with Gaza and east Jerusalem, are what remained of Palestine after it was dismembered in 1948 - only to be captured by Israel in 1967.

Jerusalem is already off limits to most Palestinians. Israel has broken the West Bank into three separate cantons. A grid of roadblocks further fragments each canton internally. Israel's separation barrier only adds to the fragmentation, as do a road network barred to Palestinians - and a sprawling array of illegal Jewish settlements - whose annexation to Israel, while bypassing areas of indigenous, non-Jewish population, is Israel's objective.

Israel claims to hold the Palestinian "government" accountable for the raid on its Gaza outpost. But this archipelago of besieged territories does not ~ and it will never - amount to a "state." It is designed to be a collection of open-air holding cells for the land's non-Jewish population: spaces to detain them, isolate them from health-care, educational and infrastructural services, deny them access to land, resources and markets, until they either die or simply give up and go away. Gaza's suffocation over the past year illustrates this perfectly.

Each departing Palestinian will be triumphantly checked off the tally by Israeli demographers like Arnon Sofer who, anxiously monitoring what they unabashedly call the "demographic threat" to their country, obsessively calculate ratios of Jews to non-Jews.

Lacking an army, Palestinians do not pose a material challenge to Israel. They pose an ideological challenge. Raids like the one on the Gaza outpost remind Israelis that the Palestinians will not go away; this is why Israel cannot tolerate them.

Israel's announcement that it now intends to create by force a depopulated "security zone" in northern Gaza is eerily reminiscent of its futile attempt to enforce such a zone in southern Lebanon. Israel's northern border fell silent - not when it had finally used enough

violence against Lebanon - but when it decided to end its illegal military occupation of Lebanese territory. That lesson has apparently been forgotten already, as Israel again holds an entire country hostage.

The same principle applies to Gaza. Israel's use of overwhelming force against civilian targets shows that it still fails to understand that occupation begets resistance - and that peace for Israelis is inseparable from justice for Palestinians.

These are lessons that Americans should learn as well.

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