



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Lecture:

The Future and Trajectory of the Palestinian Cause in Light of Current Circumstances

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Fifth Historical Studies Conference

Seventy Years since the Palestinian Nakba: Memory and History

12 - 14 May 2018

The Future and Trajectory of the Palestinian Cause in Light of Current Circumstances¹

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Any observer, irrespective of their position towards the Palestinian cause can recognize that the legitimacy and justice of the Palestinian cause fundamentally derives from it being a national liberation cause. The Palestinian people fell victim to classic colonialism that has paved the way for settler-colonialism.

Generally, anyone who does not start from this historical fact, does not consider the Palestinian cause to be legitimate, or at best considers it a conflict over land between two national movements. In the latter case, it thus becomes not an issue of liberation but a Palestinian-Israeli conflict, to which qualifiers such as complex, chronic, and so forth are frequently added. Recently added terminology also include 'dispute over territories occupied in 1967', or 'disputed territories', which frame it as a dispute over lands. Among the European and American right there are also those who deal with the Palestinian Cause through the prism of terrorism – terrorism that began as Palestinian and then became Islamic – or that approach it from a clash-of-religions perspective.

Since the early 1990s some of the abovementioned terminology of Palestinian Israeli conflict has even crept into the syllabus on Palestine in the official school curricula of some Arab states. These curricula have been modified and the understanding of Israel as a settler- colonial state expunged. This also became the trend in some Asian states,² after the discourse of a national liberation movement was "officially" dropped by the Oslo accords. Until then, that very discourse had been the source of political legitimacy in Asia and elsewhere, where Palestine represented the last case of colonialism, a symbol of the liberation struggle, and even a model in the view of subsequent liberation movements.

Before the discourse of a national liberation movement was formally dropped, with the advent of the Oslo Accords and the birth of the Palestinian Authority (currently Authorities), historical politico-cultural factors acted to distort the issue settler colonialism of Palestine. The most important of these are a) its entanglement with the Jewish question in Europe and b) it becoming involved in what I have previously referred to as 'the Arab question' in our region, a matter I have dealt with extensively in a book with the same title. Added to this, more recently, is the attempt to transform the Palestinian cause into a religious issue, with its opponents and some of their allies Islamizing it. This had discouraged some democratic and

¹ Public Lecture given at the Fifth Annual Conference for Historical Studies: "Seventy Years of Nakba: Memory and History", held by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, May 12 -14 2018.

² See the atmosphere of Indian premier Modi's visit to Tel Aviv, Mohammed Muhsin Watad, "Israel and India: An Alliance Weakening the Palestinian Cause," *Al Jazeera*, July 7, 2017,[Arabic], accessed on May 8, 2018 at: <https://bit.ly/2jN5A9r>; Amit Baruah, "India may end support to Palestine at U.N.," *The Hindu*, December 21, 2014, accessed on May 8, 2018 at: <https://goo.gl/p6tZRK>; and Suhasini Haidar, "We waited 70 years, Bibi tells Modi", *The Hindu*, July 4, 2017, accessed on May 8, 2018 at: <https://goo.gl/TR5DK3>.

pro-justice forces. Also, in some states an overlap has been fabricated between the Palestinian cause and other conflicts with Islamist movements, or even with Muslim's demands, as is the case in India and China in East Asia, and some African states.

Its entanglement with the Jewish question in Europe gave rise to two problems. Firstly, guilt over anti-Semitism and crimes of genocide was exported through the recognition of a state for Jews outside Europe, and the projection of hostility towards Jews onto the Arabs, followed by the acceptance of the Jews in Europe as a part of western civilization after previous exclusion. The term Judeo-Christian was coined on the same continent where the Holocaust took place.

Secondly, in Palestine, settler-colonial perpetrators perceive themselves as victims, and also monopolize the role of victim. They do not perceive themselves as colonizers of other countries, but as a nationalist movement. This entails a special kind of religious nationalism that has created an ethno-religious state which takes religious affiliation as the basis for granting citizenship, in a formulation that it calls the Law of Return, and a settler regime based on apartheid by expelling the demographic majority from their homeland in 1948 and constructing a two-fold system of laws, one for the Jews and another for the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip post 1967. Israel has attempted to entrench this by building the apartheid separation wall. Moreover, it considers the minority of Palestinians who remained inside the 1948 borders and were granted Israeli nationality as aliens in their own homeland and deals with them officially as a group of non-Jewish minorities inside a Jewish state.

As for the Arab question, among its many complexities, the most significant ones are compensating ideologically for the failure to achieve unity, obstruction of the creation of citizen nations, and obstruction of the unification between the Arab states and democracy in all the Arab countries individually by fueling geographical, sectarian, regional, and other conflicts. The Arab question was also revealed through the exploitation of the Palestinian cause in internal Arab conflicts, whereby the aim and impetus for positions on the question of Palestine was in many cases the conflict between one Arab state and another. Not to be excluded from this are critical periods such as the 1948 and 1967 wars, even when the motivations for those who fought in Palestine were in fact sincere.

The Contradictory Faces of Instrumentalism

During the Arab cold war, the Palestine cause was instrumentally used in the conflict between the Arab axes, often to prove the legitimacy of the regimes internally. This happened to the extent of artificially putting the cause in a confrontation with the legitimate aspirations of the people under the slogan "no voice should be louder than that of the battle" (everything should be subdued to the needs of the confrontation with Israel).

Despite this, the Palestinian cause continued, and continues, to occupy a central place in Arab public opinion. Its continuation however, also symbolizes the perpetuation of corruption, autocracy, the failure of the official Arab order, and the reality of Arab subordination and division. The results of the Arab Opinion Index, announced by the ACRPS last Wednesday (May 9, 2018), show that the issue of Palestine remains central for Arabs. We found near unanimity over the view that it is an issue for the Arabs as a whole, and not Palestinians alone. Eighty seven percent of the Arab public reject recognition of Israel by

their governments, justifying their rejection on grounds of its settler-colonial and racist character and its hostility to the region's people. Despite the crises, conflicts, and foreign interventions in several countries afflicting the Arab region, Arab opinion remains uniform (at 90 percent) in the view that Israel poses a threat to regional security and stability, and that it represents the main threat to Arab national security.

The results of the Arab Opinion Index clearly show that the positions and policies of regional and international powers towards the Palestinian cause is a determining factor in shaping Arab viewpoints towards those powers and in assessing their policies in the region. When explaining developments in the Arab region, or phenomena emerging in its scope, Arab public opinion also consistently mentions aspects related to the Palestinian issue. To take just one example, in the 2011 survey, a portion of the Arab public explained the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution as being a result of the Egyptian regime's alliance, or subordination at the time, to Israel. Arab citizens, and in significant numbers, also assert that one of the ways to confront extremism and terrorism is a just solution to the Palestinian question or the fulfillment of the rights of the Palestinian people.³

It thus became clear – later – that using the Palestinian cause instrumentally within Arab-Arab conflicts, to prove regime legitimacy in its confrontation with the people, is the flipside of normalization with Israel. With a change in circumstances, it is possible to make use of the same instrument in diametrically opposite fashion to achieve the same end, namely maintaining the regime. It can be used to bully another Arab regime or the Palestinians themselves and accuse them of betrayal and dereliction, and it can be instrumentalized to gain the favor of the United States by means of pleasing Israel through making concessions over the question of Palestine.

Strangely, dereliction of the rights of the Palestinian people is accompanied by giving free rein to the chorus of pro-regime writers (and recently the online battalions of the ministries of media and the interior) to incite against the Palestinians and repeat the lie of the land having been sold to the Zionists. We have probably heard Zionists say that they purchased the land of Palestine and did not usurp it by armed force. The perplexed Palestinian, facing an onslaught of insults, surely asks why Arab regimes would do this. If they want to get close to Israel for their own interests, why should Palestinians be insulted? The answer lies in the cognitive dissonance between prior and subsequent positions, and between ideology and action, which is expressed in this outpouring of hostile attacks against the victim and as a response to the questions raised by the self and the conscience over the justification for such a betrayal and abandonment of the victim. There is no better justification than the demonization of the victim, even if the demonization is carried out by online armies and trolls created by the regime. There is also a sudden return to religion (which, as these regimes claim in their persecution of Islamic movements, should not be part of politics) to find ideological religious justifications to legitimize Zionism, or simply accepting the Zionist narrative to a degree that astonished arch Zionist right-wingers such as Dennis Ross.⁴ This was not the approach of Sadat, who spoke the language of reconciliation and political interests.

³ See "The Arab Opinion Index 2017/2018: Full Report," ACRPS, Doha, May 9, 2018, [Arabic], accessed on May 11, 2018 at: <https://goo.gl/QVjZh1>.

⁴ Jeffrey Goldberg, "Saudi Crown Prince: Iran's Supreme Leader 'Makes Hitler Look Good'", *The Atlantic*, April 2, 2018, accessed on May 5, 2018: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/mohammed-bin-salman-iran-israel/557036/>.

As is well-known, there is another side to instrumentalism, since the oppressed in the Arab world and many other parts of the world channeled their rejection of oppression through the Palestinian cause and also made use of it, because of its legitimacy, to take to the streets in solidarity with Palestine with noble motivations. At a specific period of our history, political gatherings in Arab cities were only permitted in the mosque or under the umbrella of the Palestinian cause, because its legitimacy was hegemonic. The expression “the number one cause of the Arabs” gained traction for valid reasons, even if it was exploited in many cases for invalid purposes. The valid reasons are the understanding of the Arab peoples, and even the officers who undertook coups against the regimes that had failed to confront the Zionist gangs in the 1948 war, that the question of Palestine was an expression of colonial hegemony in the region and the fragmentation of Arabs, and that Zionism and its backers in the West would always insist that the region’s states make themselves conform to the presence and demands of Israel rather than Israel conforming to the requirements of living in this region. I say that without regard for the failure of those officers themselves and others to confront Israel for reasons I will not go into here.

Yet the slogan “the number one cause of the Arabs” – was also a statement of truth employed for false ends that could be used to marginalize the causes of other oppressed people and to allow all those in the Arab nation who raise any other issue than the Palestinian cause to be accused of abandoning it. This logic assumes the absence of solidarity with persecuted people in any Arab state. For example, according to this approach, it is not acceptable to take a stance on the massacre of the Syrian people and the genocidal operations they face, because that would be at the expense of the Palestinian cause. Such logic is warped and perverse. Any struggle against oppression derives its legitimacy from standing alongside justice and rejecting policies that repress and humiliate societies as a means to control them, irrespective of the identity of the perpetrator. What does one expect the position of a people facing usurpation of their homeland and expulsion towards a fraternal people subject to genocide and mass expulsion on live TV to be?

Does the difference lie in the fact that the perpetrator is a foreign colonizer? Does that difference make it easier for the victims of what might be called “the internal colonizer”? Or is the problem inherent in the fact that the crimes of the “internal colonizer” have made the crimes of foreign occupation appear relative, and it is necessary to deny the former to avoid such relativism? The justice of the cause does not depend on the numbers of killed and injured and the number of crimes and massacres committed. The source of legitimacy for the Palestinian cause is it being a case of colonial occupation, and that the victimizer in the case of Palestine acts also against progress towards freedom and democracy in the entire Arab world as well.

In adopting the Palestine cause as the number one cause for the Arabs, the people were in fact taking it as a fulcrum of Arab identity, or one form of the expression of Arab identity. The truth is that historical developments since 1948 prove that the adoption of and engagement with the Palestinian cause is directly correlated with the rise of Arab identity and inversely correlated with localist ethnic tendencies. We can show evidence that whenever an Arab leader decides to move towards normalization with Israel, or to abandon the principles of the Palestinian cause, this is accompanied by a campaign against Arab identity and the affirmation of a local “ethnicity” with imagined historical roots (not of course a civic nation based

on citizenship). There is thus an almost instinctual perception of the link between commitment to Palestine and the Arab identity of the country.

The Last Decade

To mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakba I wrote a long analysis of the course of the Palestinian cause, which was published in the book *To Be an Arab in Our Times* in 2009. I have several reasons to resume from where that left off, and not review the whole history of the Palestinian cause, not least the amount of time allocated to this lecture.

Since that time, Israel has launched three wars against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian authority has split into one in the West Bank and another in the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian divide has been consolidated into two authorities led by two opposing factions in two separate geographical regions with Israel in between, enabling it to deepen the split. The siege imposed on the Gaza Strip by the occupation and Egypt, and the marginalization of the Palestine Liberation Organization, along with the Palestinian refugees – or the Palestinian diaspora – have continued. The Arab revolutions erupted followed by counter-revolutions, for whom normalization with Israel was a concomitant feature.

The Arab League was unable to convene a summit during the war on Gaza, and the Gaza summit convened in Doha was undermined by open and direct calls for non-attendance. This effort to make it fail was undertaken by the very states that are currently openly normalizing with Israel and stating that Hamas runs a terrorist state. As was the case with the Israeli aggression in the 2006 war in Lebanon, an entire Arab axis in 2008–2009 awaited an Israeli victory over the Palestinian resistance and the elimination of Hamas.

That was before the Arab revolutions. At that time, we were going through a period of division into moderate and rejectionist (or resistance) camps, which took the place of the division between the progressive regimes (allied with the Soviets) and the reactionary regimes (allied with Britain and the US) during the cold war. However, everybody knew that the so-called leadership of the rejectionist axis at the time, as represented for the Arabs by the Syrian regime, was officially involved in rounds of peace talks with Israel, the last of which in those days were mediated by Istanbul. The issue of Palestine was not on the agenda of those talks, but withdrawal from the Golan.⁵ That is to say, the central Arab regime in the so-called rejectionist camp was trying to persuade Israel to adopt the Camp David model for peace with Syria, i.e., withdrawal from the Syrian territory occupied in 1967 in exchange for full peace. The sought-after Syrian-Israeli peace did not include the right of return of the Palestinian refugees (that applied to Lebanon, who awaited the results of the Syrian-Israeli talks), nor was there talk of a just solution to the Palestinian question, which was left to the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation track after Oslo.

The Palestinian cause was thus at the center of Arab regimes' concerns purely for instrumental reasons; sometimes to use peace with Israel to gain approval inside the US, and sometimes for escalation against

⁵ Ethan Bronner, "Israel Holds Peace Talks With Syria", *The New York Times*, May 22, 2008, accessed on May 11, 2018 at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/world/middleeast/22mideast.html>; Peter Walker, "Syria and Israel officially confirm peace talks", *The Guardian*, May 21, 2008, accessed on May 11, 2018 at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/may/21/israelandthepalestinians.syria>.

other regimes and in bargaining with the US-led western camp. In some cases, this bargaining process required an escalation against the US and Israel, as in Iraq and Lebanon.

I am almost certain that the marginalization of the Palestinian cause was one of the factors triggering the eruption of Arab revolutions, after dictatorship, corruption, the inheritance of power in republics, and others. Our published work on Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere proved that a large part of the leaderships of the 2011 revolutionaries trained in struggle in the solidarity demonstrations with Iraq against siege and aggression (2003) and with the Palestinian people during the second intifada and the aggression against Gaza in 2008 and 2009.

The Arab revolutions did not marginalize the question of Palestine, if anything they restored it to the center of the struggle, which is its natural place alongside the people and their aspiration for justice, dignity, democracy, and human rights, and against the authoritarian regimes that marginalized it. However, the logic of the counter-revolutions, which one can summarize as “reinstating a worse form of tyranny than the one removed” also applies to the attitude towards the Palestinian cause. The counter-revolution, in terms of the question of Palestine, revealed itself by transforming normalization with Israel into an open alliance in some cases.

Israel – from a researcher’s perspective– considered 2011 a terrible year because it was a period of total uncertainty, unpredictable outcomes in the Arab world, and the fear that the Arab peoples would break into the public sphere and the political decision-making process (Israel has no intention of anticipating every year, or every few months, election results in another Arab state.) Nevertheless, 2013 was a good time for Israel. This was when the counter-revolution, by which I mean the military coups strongly supported by reactionary (in the sense of their hostility to change, progress, and democracy) Gulf regimes, began to achieve its ends. I also mean the counter-revolution that emerged from below in the form of extremist movements like the Islamic State group and others, which exploited the spontaneity and disorganization of the revolutions, and what they deemed the state of chaos, to impose their agendas. They have been and will be defeated, and will only leave behind the desire for security and stability in place of people’s aspiration for freedom and the meeting of their demands. This will continue for some time, but not forever.

Israeli officials deemed the ascent of the head of military intelligence, who became minister of defense then president, to power in the largest Arab state, major strategic ammunition. Of no less significance is the accelerating process that began with the public profession of intent to normalize and establish relations with Israel on the part of Gulf states, who consider Israel an ally in the conflict with Iran. I say the “public profession of intent” of these regimes to normalize, because some of these security and political contacts began long beforehand, without being made public or without bragging about them as is happening now. Normalizations is accompanied by the abandonment of the Palestinian cause, which appears to be psychologically justified by insulting Palestinians and Arabs, and in some cases, Muslims as a whole. This is a matter we are accustomed to, even on the Palestinian scene: becoming close to Israel demands that our history be demeaned, Arabs and Muslims be insulted, imaginary historical roots of ethnicities be fabricated, and the sacrifices made by the state in question for Palestine be exaggerated, usually by individuals who have given nothing for Palestine or anything else in the first place.

Despite the use of words like liberalization, the process of normalization with Israel is not accompanied by any form of liberalization, not even economically. The Neoliberalism that suits an autocratic junta and the spread of some forms of consumerism has nothing to do with Liberalism, which places freedom and respect for liberties at the center of its values. The Neoliberalism promulgated in the normalization states is openly anti-democracy, and sees itself as a response to the demand for democracy. Normalization with Israel is bartering with the West, bartering normalization in exchange for western backing for the regime and disregard for issues of freedoms, human rights, and others, even if American and European human rights organizations show solidarity with the victims.

The Western states, because of the reason I mentioned above, and several other reasons including their interests which are ensured by these authoritarian regimes, and which, so they believe, would not be guaranteed if democracy were to be applied, accept and adapt to this barter. This reveals the hypocrisy of the Western world concerning issues of human rights and democracy. Those who normalize with Israel are praised and encouraged even when they lock up the opposition, suppress freedom of opinion, curtail general freedoms, and trample on civil rights.

But Israel is still not satisfied. It will never be satisfied with concessions or with the Arab recognition of its legitimacy, because it, most of all, it knows what it has done and knows it is a foreign settler body in this region. Whenever Israel is offered something, it demands more. It will accept nothing less than subordination. Israel does not accept allies and does not fight for the Arab regimes. Rather it wants them as its agents in the region.

The experience of the Arab Peace Initiative, Israel's rejection of it and demand for more, and some Arab leaders' becoming hostage to the need to please Israel make this clear. The Saudi crown prince has adopted the cliché current in Israeli propaganda formulated by Abba Eban that "the Arabs never miss the opportunity to miss an opportunity" and added something that the former Israeli foreign minister did not say, namely that the Palestinians have to accept what the United States offers them or shut up. He did not dare condemn the transfer of the US Embassy to Jerusalem even when asked directly about it.⁶ The Saudi crown prince is receiving Israeli plaudits now, and he still has more to offer to Israel in the name of the land of the two holy shrines. Turning to the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization, they offered everything they could to Israel, yet Israel still accuses them of extremism (and even recently anti-Semitism) whenever there is a difference of opinion, even if they do so shamefacedly since they will certainly not break the agreements and only act on the international stage within the framework of those agreements.

Israeli politics is descending further and further to the right and the religious right, confident in the correctness of the logic of force when dealing with the Arabs. Governments formed there are practically dominated by extremist settlers. Israel claims there is no Palestinian partner for peace after all the concessions made to it, and threatens to replace the leadership with new, more "moderate" Palestinian

⁶ "Bin Salman: The Issue of Palestine is not Top Priority for Saudi Arabia," Al-Arabi Al-Jadid, April 29, 2018, [Arabic], accessed on May 9, 2018 at: <https://bit.ly/2l6w2VV>; and see "Palestinians must make peace or shut up, Saudi crown prince said to tell US Jews", *The Times of Israel*, April 29, 2018, accessed on May 9, 2018 at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-must-make-peace-or-shut-up-saudi-crown-prince-said-to-tell-us-jews/>.

leaders. It is doing this despite its need for the PA under all circumstances because the PA has demonstrated its security success, that is in maintaining Israel's security. However, it is conscious of the dimensions of the struggle over authority which are camouflaged by ideological rhetoric over power and the extent to which individuals cling to it, and the effectiveness of threatening to take it away.

This leads us to the condition of the Palestinian Authority and Palestine.

A Return to the Issue of the Palestinian National Project

We have previously stated what needed to be said, and more, in the past when explaining the historical mistake made in accepting the Oslo Accords following the change that happened to the Arab order in light of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the change to the world order following the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, this does not prevent the reaffirmation of key points in order to continue the analysis, rather than gloating and saying I told you so!

There are four conclusions to be drawn from the Oslo and Cairo Accords by virtue of any objective analysis relied on to oppose the Accords, and even the supporters of Oslo now admit to all of them:

1. Bartering Israeli recognition for the Liberation Organization in exchange for direct negotiations between the occupier and occupied without a binding framework and international references along with a commitment to give up the struggle against occupation, thereby becoming hostage to the balance of power with Israel.
2. The use of the legitimacy of the Liberation Organization like a queen bee to produce the agreement and then dispense with it, and then marginalize the Palestinian national liberation movement and replace it with an authority and not a state.
3. The task of the authority, according to the agreements from Oslo on, is to maintain security, meaning Israel's security, and administer the affairs of the population to get rid of the demographic burden at minimum cost and without sovereignty over the land, meaning less than half the territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
4. Finally, the existence of an authority implies a struggle over power, and all of that without a state. This last element had become a key element in Palestinian political behavior. Currently, all Palestinian efforts are being drained in the Palestinian-Palestinian conflict over power without a state. This power struggle has become the driver even for some steps related to the position towards Israel, that is, to a large extent it has replaced the struggle with Israel.

In general, a national liberation movement negotiates after the occupier has accepted the principle of withdrawal and sets up an authority after withdrawal to administer a state. In the case of Palestine, negotiations began before agreement on the principle of withdrawal, and the leadership of the liberation movement agreed to run an authority without a state.

Naturally, the so-called final status talks would reach a dead end. Given the that the Liberation Organization and the PA in Ramallah abandoned resistance, and that resistance in besieged Gaza has become a case of self defense against any coming aggression, and not a strategy for liberation, it is no surprise that every Palestinian is talking of crisis and deadlock.

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies convened conferences on the subject of the Palestinian National Project, thereby raising a subject whose time I believe has come, and which witnessed widespread interest after we raised it. We asked whether the Palestinian National Project was one of an Authority that has become two Authorities, or a project for a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with Jerusalem as its capital? Many further questions flow from this, for example: Why is nothing explicit said about the Palestinian refugees in this case? Why is the Liberation Organization not interested in the fate of the Palestinians in Syria and Lebanon? Are such people part of the Palestinian project, even though the PA declares daily that its project is a state in the West Bank and Gaza with Jerusalem as its capital according to the 1967 borders?

The Palestinian citizen has good reasons to be perplexed. Most importantly are things that the whole world knows. Even John Kerry who stated in his farewell speech in December 2016 that ongoing settlement negates the possibility of withdrawal to the 1967 borders,⁷ and that no mechanism to resist settlement has been proposed apart from negotiations, which have broken down. The logic of the negotiations is that the Palestinians make demands and the Israelis say no. So the matter ends. The Palestinians have no means in the framework of the peace agreements to compel Israel to do anything. The fate of American mediation is well known: never once did it cease to exert pressure on Israel, and it cannot care to. American positions also witness change and erosion with every US election, whose results the Arabs and Palestinians await more keenly than any other people. Take, for example, Trump's attitude as president, which reverses an official US position that had become conventional, whereby he no longer expresses a position against settlement or support for the two-state solution, but agrees to any solution acceptable to both sides. This gives the Israeli government a veto in practice.⁸ In this way, the PA did not end the United States' monopoly as mediator, but it ended it for itself before the decision to move the embassy to Jerusalem and recognize it as the capital of Israel, which is a third reversal of official American positions.

Palestinians also think that the main subject occupying their political leaderships is the internal Palestinian conflict which has reached previously unimaginable levels, finding ourselves calling for Palestinian sanctions on the Gaza Strip to be lifted. The impasse described above and preoccupation with internal Palestinian-Palestinian conflict between the factions are the most important reasons for Palestinian youth to take matters in their own hands in the form of individual violent operations with knives and other means, groups on social media, countless initiatives, and endless debate over the one-state and two-state solutions. Although in reality there is only one state, which is no longer content with being recognized, but demands recognition as a Jewish state, and two Palestinian authorities without sovereignty, one under a siege that has been exhausting its society for more than ten years.

⁷ John Kerry, "Remarks on Middle East Peace", *U.S. Department of State*. December 28, 2016, accessed on May 8, 2018 at: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/12/266119.htm>; David E. Sanger, "Kerry Rebukes Israel, Calling Settlements a Threat to Peace", *The New York Times*, December 28, 2016, accessed on May 8, 2018 at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/28/us/politics/john-kerry-israel-palestine-peace.html>.

⁸ "Donald Trump says US not committed to two-state Israel-Palestine solution", *The Guardian*, February 16, 2017, accessed on May 9, 2018 at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/15/trump-says-us-not-committed-to-two-state-israel-palestine-solution>.

The historical irony is that this paralysis has happened at a period of growing international consensus over the two-state solution in Palestine, but this consensus does not include any mechanism to impose the solution on Israel. Equally, the Palestinian leadership has not adopted a persistent militant stance to take advantage of on the international stage. There are many reasons for this, most importantly the avoidance of entering into open confrontation with Israel, and the United States behind it, not even in the arena of international organizations.

The movement for a total boycott of Israel had inspired hope for youth, which is strengthened by Israel's and America's anger at that action. Of course, inside Palestine such action is limited. Direct struggle against occupation is more important, since it is not possible for the call for boycott to include the Palestinian normalizer who engages in security coordination with Israel. However, boycott plays a positive and effective role externally by keeping the Palestinian cause on the agenda of the democratic forces looking for a means of solidarity with Palestine, when the PA does not want or seek solidarity. The Boycott causes moral damage for Israel, which is afraid that this could become real material damage affecting political decision-making. That is not possible unless boycott is adopted by states, as happened in the case of South Africa when an international consensus formed against the apartheid regime there. Meanwhile, Arab states openly acknowledge of normalization with Israel, without any progress in negotiations worth mentioning. Is it possible that non-Arab states will adopt boycott? There are new Israeli alliances being formed in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, and unfortunately the Gulf states, in addition to the Arab states which have diplomatic relations with Israel. Worse than this, the PA is not content with not boycotting, but has failed to adopt a strategy calling for the boycott of Israel even abroad. Its position is limited to calling for the boycott of settlement products in Europe. It takes the agreements with Israel completely seriously.

The Palestinians, as a people and as civil institutions, are excluded from the decision-making process. They are trying to break into political action with initiatives such as boycott campaigns and others. There has been an abandonment of previous institutionalization for this people in terms of labor, student, and women's unions. Some (not all) factions undoubtedly have an active grassroots, but they are far from encompassing all the Palestinian people.

I always thought that unity between Fatah and Hamas could begin at the level of the PA. My view was that unity had to begin from the Liberation Organization. But this process was once again made to fail by convening of the National Council in Ramallah. The organizers did not bother to convene it in a location that allowed everyone to attend, to embarrass those who did not wish to attend.

It seems that there must be new initiatives in this regard on the level of organizing the Palestinian people wherever it is found in order to rebuild the Palestinian national liberation movement. This is the only path to overcome Arab efforts to diminish the Palestinian cause and Western efforts to reduce it to the PA in the West Bank, so as to delimit the task to reaching an understanding with it over funding and ensuring its continuity, even if it stops negotiating because of continued settlement. What matters to the West is to maintain the PA at any cost because it is a guarantee against "the chaos" that poses a threat to Israel's security.

What is being built and entrenched in historic Palestine is a system of apartheid (racial separation with two legal systems under single Israeli sovereignty). It is a settler-displacement apartheid. We have looked at and explained this before. Israeli prime minister Netanyahu thinks that the Jewish Nationality Law he is passing at the moment is one of his most important legislative achievements since the law formulates the principle that Israel is the national state of the Jewish people and not just a Jewish state, and that its main functions derive from that, which are to remove any ambiguity over its precedence over citizenship, democracy, and anything else. This law is being passed especially to confront the project of a citizen state on the one hand and to make the Palestinian right of return contradict the Israeli constitution, since the law is a constitutional law, or as Israel calls it, a Basic Law.

This settler-colonialism has particular features. In both South Africa and Palestine it understood itself as a national movement (ethno-religious in the case of Israel) or with a religious essence and a secular character to varying degrees. In contrast to French colonialism in Algeria, it does not follow a mother state to withdraw to. It also built on the land more of a state and institutions than the surrounding Arab and African states. Hence the conflict with it ends in a historic settlement as happened in South Africa. The struggle in Palestine ought to aim to create this just historic resolution, in a sense that guarantees the rights of the victim people. Without that the colonial issue will not be ended, and anything else is exaggeration or dereliction.

This situation cannot be confronted by imagining that the PA is a state involved in a border conflict with Israel like Syria and Egypt were before Camp David. First the PA is not a state. Second, it is not engaged in conflict with Zionism but has signed a peace agreement that guarantees Israel's security. Third, the PA is not a tool for conflict with Israel or a tool to mobilize the morale of the Palestinian people or to mobilize its friends east and west. The Palestinian cause acquires its legitimacy from the legitimacy of national liberation in the context of a colonial problem that remains unresolved till today. The test is to present the Palestinian cause as a national and just cause, while considering the two issues that are caught up with it: the Jewish question and the Arab question. The struggle against apartheid requires a democratic program that addresses all the inhabitants of Palestine and the Palestinian refugees, at a time when the character of the two Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is of power essentially built on security agencies. Their main component is the security apparatus, which stifles the energy of the Palestinian people at home and prevents it from engaging with the political sphere.

Civil resistance is an important strategy of which we gained good experience during the first intifada. However, civil resistance was proposed by the PA as a slogan against armed struggle, and not as a means to build real civil resistance in a way that went beyond an outlet during crises and allowing people to demonstrate at checkpoints at particular moments. Civil resistance is a militant strategy against the occupation. It is methodical and persistent non-violent resistance with phased demands and other goals related to the dismantling of the system of colonial control as a whole.

I know some will ask me what the solution is, and I encourage you to ask, but taking into account the avoidance of discussion of ready-made solutions. These arise from two extreme approaches: 1) proposing solutions based on fixed and static facts and circumstances, which does not consider the factor of human will as represented in struggle; and 2) proposing idealistic solutions that do not take any circumstances into account.

I do not have solutions without changing the circumstances, that is without struggle. What does the word solution mean in the circumstances of the conflict of two Palestinian authorities? How is it possible to propose political solutions without militant political forces ready to turn them into a political program? Therefore, even though the single bi-national state has been proposed a number of times in the last century, and I have been written articles that supported it more than twenty five years ago, I accepted the struggle to remove the occupation from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem as the project of the Palestinian national liberation movement. However, and in addition, I proposed a program for a state of citizens to confront Zionism in Israel itself. However, I believe that the current debate over one state or two states is not a debate about a political program, but an academic debate within the current deadlock and not beyond it.

In political reality, the failure of an idea does not lead to the emergence of another idea more just than the first. The alternative to the two-state solution in the current reality is not even necessarily a solution, but a political reality represented by the continuation of settlement, the annexation of parts of Area C to Israel, and the maintenance of an authority shorn of sovereignty in the West Bank and another besieged in Gaza. For one state to become an alternative to the two-state solution, it has to become a demand of the whole of the Palestinian national liberation movement (after it is reorganized away from its current reduction to two authorities) in the context of its proposal for a democratic program that also convinces a proportion of Jewish society and a large proportion of Arab and world public opinion. It took decades for the two-state solution to become accepted. Is there any such project? Presently, I do not think so.

In light of such facts, and in the presence of the will to struggle, efforts must be concentrated in confronting Zionism on the issue of land (occupation, settlement, Judaization of Jerusalem, etc.) and issues of racism which makes the struggle one against the apartheid system. Everyone should take this on from their position, and the proposals of those struggling against occupation and racism should be formulated in the language of justice, national liberation, democracy, and universal human rights. It is no longer possible, or acceptable, to frame the issue of the Palestinian people in any other language. Of no lesser importance is coordination between the difference arenas of confrontation, to overcome fragmentation, and for common mobilization on political issues, such as the push for reconciliation and the reconstruction of the liberation organization, to prevent concessions over the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and to resist normalization. During that it is important to create modern institutions to frame the collective entity of this people.

The crimes of the Arab regimes in destroying countries to preserve their rulers are many, among which approaching Israeli oppression from a relative comparative perspective in the mind of the people is not the least significant. Add to that the chaos of the extremist religious movements and the angry reactions that they have evoked on the Arab and international scene, and the rise of political popularism in the West, culminating with Trump's reaching the White House, and we understand an important aspect of the complexities of this period with regard to Palestine. However, these complexities and their effects will not last forever, and that is not a secret to anyone who thinks.