The Question of Palestine

written by Bashir Abu-Manneh | March 9, 2009

***New Politics**: 2008 is the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Israel and of the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe. What do you see as the Israeli goal and has it changed over the years?*

Bashir Abu-Manneh: Israel's goal has been a constant: Jewish sovereignty in Palestine. Israel has always sought to expropriate as much Palestinian land as possible and to rule over as few Palestinians as possible. This has been the single most important ideological and political principle informing the practices of the dominant strand of Zionism which founded the Jewish State in Palestine against the wishes of the Arab indigenous majority. 1948 epitomizes this principle: 78 percent of Palestine was forcibly conquered and 750,000-840,000 Palestinians were systematically expelled and prevented from returning to their cities and villages (hundreds of which were completely erased) in violation of international law and of UN General Assembly resolution 194 safeguarding refugees' right of return. Israel bears full responsibility for destroying Palestinian society and for turning most Palestinians into stateless refugees. No Israeli denial or American diplomatic summersaults can erase this nagging and unresolved fact. Palestinians still constitute the largest refugee population in the world today: 70 percent of Palestinians, out of 10 million in all, are refugees (the American occupation of Iraq has produced around 4 million refugees and internally displaced Iraqis). For most Palestinians and Arabs, the Palestinian question is a refugee question and 1948 remains at the heart of the Arab- Israel conflict. If Israel wants real peace, it must rectify the wrongs it willfully committed in 1948, and do so in a way that is democratically acceptable to a majority of Palestinians (i.e. subject to popular referendum). There is no historical reconciliation or lasting peace without justice and national rights for the Palestinians.

Sixty years after the Palestinian Catastrophe, the complete opposite is now taking place: Israel is extending and deepening Palestinian dispossession and suffering, rather than alleviating them. Refugee rights are ignored and marginalized, and Palestinians are being pushed to accept besieged Bantustans for a state. After the political destruction of Arab nationalism in 1967 and the capitulation of secular Palestinian nationalism in Oslo in 1993, Palestinian refugees have been basically left to fend for themselves, with little protection or support from the Palestinian Liberation Organization or the Palestinian Authority (PLO/PA). We can see the consequences of this neglect in events like the depopulation and destruction of the Naher il-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon (once home to 31,000 refugees) over the summer and in the expulsion of thousands of Palestinians from Iraq. Though the two cases are very different, and Iraqis themselves have suffered a catastrophic fate as a result of the American occupation, Palestinians are always deeply affected and hit hard by regional developments and externally induced insecurities. So they always suffer both as dispossessed Palestinians and as oppressed Arabs: no other Arab nation is placed that way and carries that burden.

1991 is a good indicator of what it means to be a refugee: 350,000 Palestinians were unjustly expelled from Kuwait because Arafat stupidly supported Saddam's adventurism and his occupation of Kuwait. The New World Order was declared on the backs of Iraqis, who were killed in their hundreds of thousands, and on the backs of Palestinians, who had to suffer another exile. To be stateless is to be vulnerable to such ravages and be completely dependent on the whims and interests of others.

And this is only a part of the story. On top of political insecurity, there is discrimination and willful impoverishment. Take Lebanon as an example. To be a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon is to

live without any political and civil rights, be legally barred from working in 73 professions, and suffer extremely high rates of poverty and unemployment. 1948 is far from over: Israel's expulsion is experienced daily as stateless wretchedness by Palestinians.

***NP**: 2007 was the fortieth anniversary of the June 1967 war. What is the significance of 1967 in this history?*

BAM: 1967 was an additional historical injury. Occupying the West Bank and Gaza fulfilled Israel's colonial imperative to expropriate the remainder of Palestine. If before the June 1967 war Israel controlled 78 percent of Palestine, after the war it controlled all of it, illegally occupying the remaining 22 percent. 1967 should really be understood as stage two of 1948, as outstanding Zionist business previously considered but delayed for tactical not fundamental reasons. 1967 was thus part of the ongoing pattern of the Israeli expropriation and dispossession of Palestine: only this time Israel managed to expel only a minority of Palestinians, 320,000. The majority couldn't be pushed out. So Israel was faced with what now people freely refer to as a "demographic problem," a racist designation which basically means that Israel was forced to rule over Arabs because it couldn't expel them en masse as before. For a settler-colonial state premised on exclusion not exploitation, incorporating undesired natives is indeed an issue. All of Israel's plans—from Allon's strategic settlement and land control to closure, Sharon's Wall, and his "disengagement"—are fundamentally about the fact that a Zionist Israel can neither incorporate Palestinians as equal citizens, turning Israel into a binational state, nor can it expel them all in one go (due to what many Zionists regard as "unfavorable international circumstances," i.e. international objection). And yet Israel still wants more Palestinian land. So: no expulsion, no incorporation, and no withdrawal. What Israel is left with is a powerful internal contradiction. A desired territorial expansion has led to an undesired demographic burden.

With the first Intifada of 1987, Israel's 1967 contradiction exploded in its face. Having severely weakened the PLO and expelled it from Lebanon in 1982, Israel expected quiet, a drastic lowering of national demands: submission. But what it got was a mass popular self-organized Palestinian revolt demanding the end of the Israeli occupation and independence. The Intifada left major population centers in the West Bank and Gaza completely free from Israeli control. It also left Israel, after the failure of brute force and massive repression, groping for a political solution. Oslo became Israel's answer to the first Intifada, and was formulated to help Israel get out of the bind it had put itself into with the occupation of 1967, but without reversing it. So rather than granting Jordan control over "autonomous" Palestinian areas in the West Bank, as the original Allon plan had stipulated, Israel would now grant it to Arafat's PLO. As Chomsky put it then, the PLO would become Israel's "colonial enforcer," controlling, de-mobilizing, and suppressing Palestinians for the benefit of their dispossessors and occupiers. [1] So, with Palestinian elite consent, Israel remained sovereign, was allowed to build and expand Jewish settlements and roads, and control all borders. All UN resolutions requiring Israel to fully withdraw to the 1967 borders, dismantle all illegal settlements, and accept Palestinian statehood and independence were shelved and sidelined by Oslo. Zionism was victorious and the principle of Jewish sovereignty was reaffirmed. Israeli colonialism was also given further lease on life to encircle, suffocate, and slowly dispossess more occupied Palestinians.

1967, however, is not Israel's only "demographic problem." An internal population "time bomb" has also reared its head inside Israel. There, remnants of Palestinians from 1948, who managed by some historical fluke to stay behind after the mass expulsions of Israel's founding, have slowly increased in relative number. In 1948 they numbered 150,000. Now there are 1.2 million, about 18 percent of the Israeli population, with nearly half living in the Galilee and only a small minority in "mixed towns" like Haifa, Lydda, and Jaffa. Israel refers to them as "Israeli Arabs" or "the minorities," and has not only subjected them to 18 years of military rule until 1966, and discriminated against them systematically and by racist law from 1948 to the present, but it has also

dispossessed them of most of their lands, treating them in exactly the same way it treated their refugee brethren. Their dispossession is still taking place even today: the Negev Bedouins have suffered the brunt of it in recent months. Many "unrecognized villages" have been internally displaced and have had their lands stolen by the state.[2]

Worse still: Palestinians inside Israel suffer periodic massacres conducted by the Israeli army and police, some to facilitate flight. Kufr Kassem in 1956 was one such massacre: 49 Palestinian citizens were killed. On 30 March 1976, six were killed while protesting land expropriations in the Galilee as part of a national day of mass demonstrations and strikes, now annually commemorated as Land Day. In 2000, 13 were killed and hundreds injured when Palestinians inside protested against Israel's massive repression of the second Intifada. Dispossession and occasional killing are compounded by political discrimination and endless repression, as well as economic suffocation and impoverishment. Israel intentionally induces high rates of unemployment and poverty among its Palestinian citizens to encourage their emigration and lessen their growing numbers. Recent Israeli National Insurance figures show that, as Ynet reported: "The percentage of Arab citizens is nearing 50 percent of the overall poor population in Israel as opposed to 40 percent in 2004," and 400,000 out of 550,000 children who go hungry in Israel happen to be Palestinian![3]

In addition, a new instrument of control and exclusion has recently been developed by the Israeli elite: the threat of population swap: Palestinian citizens in Israel for colonial settlers in the West Bank. This option has become subject to growing discussion and debate in Israel, both in the media and in strategic circles. It has also been recently aired in diplomatic discussions with Abbas and his team. Israel dubs it a "land-swap" or "population exchange": Israeli settlers become de jure (not only de facto) part of Israel as some of Israel's Palestinian citizens become part of the Palestinian Authority. A minor border adjustment in the Triangle area and Israel would miraculously lose around 200,000 of its Palestinian citizens. A stationary transfer/expulsion if ever there was one, and another looming danger to the Palestinian presence inside Israel.

So has Israel succeeded in achieving an Arab-free Palestine? Not yet, and hopefully never. But it has certainly been working hard on it.

***NP**: You have quoted Edward Said's judgment regarding the PLO elite that "No other liberation group in history has sold itself to its enemies like this."[4] But why is this so? Surely other liberation movements had leaders with similar class backgrounds, with dubious friends and ruthless enemies. Many liberation leaders showed themselves to be cold-blooded and autocratic – but yet at the end of the day they tended to be fanatically committed to their national cause. What accounts for the uniqueness of the Palestinian leadership in selling out?*

BAM: Edward Said's formulation is a correct description of Oslo: no Palestinian national rights were achieved in Oslo, neither sovereignty nor self-determination. The state that the PLO said it was working to create since 1974 in the West Bank and Gaza never materialized. If what Israel was offering didn't conform to Palestinian national demands, why did Arafat accept it? Opportunist self-preservation was, I believe, his strongest motivator. Arafat opted to exploit the Intifada in order to regain political and organizational hegemony over the Palestinians and cash those in with the Israelis. After Beirut 1982, the PLO was severely weakened and its cadres dispersed and fragmented. It lost organizational coherence. Edward Said then spoke of the "end of the Palestinian narrative," seeing the fall of Beirut as the destruction of Palestinian nationalism. With the New World Order and Arafat's unprincipled and disastrous decision in siding with Saddam, the PLO lost the substantial financial support of the Gulf States, weakening it even further. So by the early 1990s, Arafat was desperate and ready to trade in his nation for international recognition and a meager post. There is, then, a combination of factors pushing for capitulation and opportunism:

FIRST: SEVERE AND RELENTLESS ISRAELI BRUTALITY and force, shunning peace and equitable settlement. One can hardly emphasize this cause enough: Israel was always immeasurably more powerful than the Palestinians. It, thus, didn't only seek to rid Palestine of its indigenous population, but it also wanted to destroy any national movement they organized in order to retrieve their lost homeland. So on top of expulsion there was attempted political de-nationalization of the Palestinians, and this is an ongoing Zionist project. Palestinians are not seen as a group that has collective national rights but are regarded as a collection of fragmented communities with particularist, local, or religious wants. So, for example, you start talking about things like: access to religious sites in East Jerusalem (anyway always severely restricted, in violation of free worship) rather than Palestinian national claims to Jerusalem; Arab neighborhoods rather than Palestinian sovereignty over land; or, finally, alleviating Palestinian suffering through humanitarian aid rather than ending the occupation. What Israel always rejects is the notion that Palestinians have national rights and that it is responsible for having violated them. Israel's is an extremist, rejectionist stance.

SECOND: AN INHOSPITABLE ARAB POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT. This is another key structural constraint for a nation in exile like the Palestinians. The Palestinian national movement was subjected to severe repression and disciplining by Arab state actors. Jordan 1970-71 is the best example: an authoritarian, Western- backed regime liquidates the Palestinian resistance as other Arab states look on. It's a myth that Arab states wanted or want to liberate Palestine. 1948 is a great example of how little Arab states have done to help save Palestinians from national catastrophe.[5] What this meant for the PLO is that it was never fully sponsored or aided enough by Arab states to become powerful enough to undermine the Zionist project. Contrast that with Hezbollah now. Because it's an organization embedded within its own people and territory (with strong and principled leaders), and because it receives tremendous amounts of external aid, training, and support, it did what no Arab country has ever managed to do: defeat Israel militarily. The Palestinians never had that. They suffered the reverse: banishment, persecution, and destruction. Of course they were also corrupted and de-radicalized by oil money: it's no joke that the PLO was the richest liberation movement in the Third World. The failure to liberate Palestinian should also be seen as part of what Abd al-Rahman Munif calls the "culture of oil."[6]

THIRD: THE SUBJECTIVE FACTOR. Though structural conditions increased the propensity for opportunism and defeatism, you needed an agent with sufficient national legitimacy that was capable of containing Palestinian aspirations and preparing them for settlement. Fatah's political elite performed this task, especially after Black September 1970. Many Fatah leaders believed that the Palestinian Revolution was unique in world history for being, as one of them put it: "the revolution of the impossible."[7] As Abu Iyad acknowledged early on, Fatah leaders knew that they couldn't deliver liberation: they were just waiting for the Palestinian people to come round to this conclusion so they could safely settle with the Israelis and get a state. In the meantime, they made sure, through bureaucratic and authoritarian means, that they remained hegemonic within the PLO and that their political rivals were co-opted or weakened.

SO WHAT FATAH FAILED TO DO was empower Palestinians to act as independent, self-organized, and self-liberating agents, turning their refugeedom to their own advantage and utilizing it to better their own conditions and those of the whole Arab world. An Arab Revolution was necessary for Palestinians to have sufficient capacity and leverage to liberate Palestine. But Fatah was never revolutionary in that way. Ideologically and politically conservative, it had no interest in organizing and mobilizing Palestinian and Arab masses in their struggle for democracy and social justice against Arab authoritarian regimes. The Palestinian armed struggle was thus never wedded to social revolution: the fetishized gun stood in for serious social and political organizing and mobilizing. So Fatah ended up succumbing to the conditions it had refused earlier to overturn. At a certain point in its history, the burdens of Israeli rejectionism and the constraints of its Arab

environment became unbearable: so its elite submitted.

And this is why Hamas constantly tells Fatah: make way if you're tired, we'll take over. There's really a lot in common between Hamas and pre-1982 Fatah. Both are socially conservative and suspicious of self-organized popular mobilization, with vast networks of philanthropic and social provision. Both are focused on ending the occupation and creating a sovereign state in the West Bank and Gaza, being anti-colonial petty-bourgeois nationalist pragmatists not rejectionists. Both share the same conception of liberation as armed struggle, pursuing a policy of non-interference in and accommodation with Arab regimes and receiving Gulf money in return.

Important to remember, though, is that Hamas is a post-Fatah movement born under occupation. So it sees itself as having learned from what it regards as Fatah's mistakes, that: a) recognizing Israel (as an ideological pre-condition for negotiation) gives you nothing, and b) depending on the U.S. is counterproductive and gets you nowhere. There are also significant political differences in social ideology and conception of a future state between a secular movement and an Islamic fundamentalist one. There's no question that what Hamas ultimately strives for is Islamic restoration. Its conception of the future is a reactionary utopia, and its social ideology is regressive: curtailment of freedom of congregation and freedom of speech; religion as the dominant social discourse; suppression of individual liberties; and, finally, recourse to force in internal Palestinian affairs. Only a small minority of Palestinians support this program; a majority supported Fatah's earlier secular program. It's important to keep this in mind. Many of the Palestinians who vote for and support Hamas do so because it fights against the Israeli occupation, not because of its religious project.

***NP**: What about the Palestinian left? Is there any left left? What explains its weakness?*

BAM: The left was also subject to the same structural constrains of exile and dispossession as other Palestinian groups were. It was far too entangled with and dependent on Arab authoritarian regimes (at times even regarded as a stooge of Asad's Syria, Saddam's Iraq, or Gaddafi's Libya). And it suffered from lack of independence and lack of sufficient radicalism. But the picture is a mixed one. The Palestinian left experience did have some important positive dimensions.

Ideologically, the left had significant progressive positions. It saw the question of Palestine as intrinsically linked to the problem of underdevelopment in the Arab East. The loss of Palestine was an indication that the traditional Arab ruling classes were complicit with Western imperialism: Palestine was their shame. So they had to be discarded as leaders of the Palestinian national project. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, they were replaced by petty bourgeois leaderships, then on the rise in the whole Arab world. When the Arab national project suffered Israel's death-blow of 1967, the Palestinians rose as a leading revolutionary force and emblematized the hopes of a defeated Arab nationalism. Here the Palestinian left made its most important contribution. The left understood that 1967 meant the failure of petty bourgeois nationalism as leader of the Arab revolution. Nasser's anti- imperialism was insufficient as a revolutionary force and incapable of releasing the potential of the Arab masses and completing the national tasks of democracy and independence. The Palestinian left also strongly believed that Palestinians were incapable of decolonizing Palestine on their own and needed Arab popular help. But they argued that Arab petty-bourgeois regimes were too weak and too uninterested in doing that. So their main theoretical and political innovation was raising the specter of a revolutionary alliance from below: Palestinians would revolutionize themselves and help revolutionize the Arab masses. They understood that their task as Palestinian revolutionaries was to help Arab masses free themselves from the oppressive hold of Arab reaction. This meant that the left clearly understood (unlike Fatah) that Western-backed Arab authoritarian regimes were actually their main enemies and couldn't be ignored or depicted as a "secondary contradiction." So their conception of liberation meant tackling three very powerful

and interlinked forces: Zionist colonialism, Western imperialism, and Arab reaction. The stakes were very high.

Where the left clearly failed was in preparing for and organizing against a looming liquidation by the Jordanian regime in 1970-71, in which 5,000 Palestinian civilians and 1,300 guerrillas were killed. American imperialism and its regional allies were agreed on the fact that Palestinians were a radicalizing force in the region and had to be severely weakened, if not totally liquidated. This came in Black September, when left adventurism and hijackings were used as an excuse to crush the whole guerilla movement in Jordan. This led to the strengthening of Palestinian bureaucratism and centrism within the Palestinian resistance movement and facilitated the growing hegemony of Palestinian conservatism, weakening the left even more. So a longstanding criticism that is made of the Palestinian left is that even though it did have a correct analysis of historical developments then and did in fact formulate correct ideological positions to tackle them, these never materialized into political organization and practice. It's not a theoretical weakness that is usually identified as the main failure of the left (though, as I indicated above, there are some) but a lack of a coherent and effective organizational strategy. The left was never politically organized enough to be able to lead the Palestinian nation to victory. They failed under the weight of what Ghassan Kanafani in 1971 called the "contradiction between the greatness of the task [of liberation] and the objective reality of the means available to us."[8]

To jump 40 years forward. In today's very different conditions, this political weakness remains a problem. The left today understands the nature of the Palestinian crisis and the threat of complete collapse and decay of Palestinian nationalism. It just can't seem to be able to organize against it. There's a tendency to think that slogans and speeches will do the work, but these are clearly no substitute for organization building. The Palestinian left today is organizationally weak and disengaged from the needs of the Palestinian masses both under occupation and in exile. The fundamentalist movement has out-organized both Fatah and the left, providing education, health services, and ideological sustenance. The weakness of the left is also compounded by internal factionalism: it's not clear why there should be four different left factions in the West Bank and Gaza. Though there is increasing coordination and cooperation between them, there is no unity of voice, no unity of strategy, no combined mass mobilization. On top of that, all factions seem solely preoccupied with ending the political polarization between Hamas and Fatah. Ending the infighting is clearly important: but it can't be the primary thing that the left does. What if both factions shun unity? What then? And what if the unity realized doesn't achieve what's required today: a national strategy for liberation, as conceived in the majority-supported prisoners' document of spring 2006 advocating resistance, democracy, and safeguarding all Palestinian national rights.[9] What then?

The Palestinian left today seems hesitant about competing with the two main factions for political supremacy, thus accepting that the struggle is between endless capitulatory negotiations and Islamic fundamentalism. Without left mobilization and organization, we risk continuing to either paint Hamas in red, pretending they are the redeemers of the Palestinian nation, or supporting yet another flawed "peace process," when what needs to be undertaken is an ideological and political struggle against both Palestinian subordination and its fundamentalist alternative. It is the job of radicals to fight against such ideological regressions in Palestinian politics and fight for social, not only political, emancipation. The cause of Palestine should again come to be associated with not only national freedoms but also Arab democratic and social rights. The word Palestinian should again come to mean Arab revolt for democracy, social justice, and unity, not only suffering and *sumud* (steadfastness). There is thus an urgent need for reinvigorating the Palestinian left and for educating a new generation of Palestinian and Arab activists about the history and politics of radical and national liberation movements, their failings and weaknesses as well as their universalism and internationalism. The object should be to create a new radical secular movement struggling against

national oppression and armed with a strategy for Palestinian and Arab emancipation. This seems quite difficult now, but many Palestinians are completely fed up with both Hamas and Fatah and need an alternative. So the field is wide open.

***NP**: How do you assess the Israeli left, and what do you see as the prospects for joint "cross border" struggles involving Israelis and Palestinians?*

BAM: THE EXPROPRIATION AND CONQUEST OF PALESTINE was organized and managed by self-identified socialists and labor bureaucrats. So being on the left, broadly defined, never has been a guarantee of concern for Palestinian rights.

Israel's mainstream peace movement, its nationalist left, and in particular Peace Now, the largest peace formation in Israel, has been far too entangled with the values and practices of labor Zionism to either act as an independent peace force inside Israel or to present a real alternative to government policies. Peace Now not only cheered Rabin and Barak on, but also legitimized their colonial policies, including separation and closure. Even though Peace Now's positions have evolved over the years, coming to accept and recognize (at least rhetorically) Palestinian rights of self-determination and statehood (mainly as a result of the first Intifada), the movement has remained far too committed to either an expansive conception of Israeli national security or to vague and inadequate notions of territorial compromise and mutual recognition. As a result, Peace Now never insisted or campaigned on the fact that, for example, 1967 is Israel's border and that full withdrawal and evacuation of all settlements is a necessary precondition for peace. This basically left the door wide open for unequal peace treaties like Oslo (which they celebrated), and allowed Israel to impose more and more conditions on, and extract more and more concessions from, Palestinian negotiators. So Israel's mainstream peace camp ended up serving rather than undermining or counter-balancing Israel's vastly superior power in relation to the Palestinians, guaranteeing unjust diplomatic outcomes.

This has led many critics of the peace movement in Israel to argue that groups like Peace Now are essentially nationalist-colonialist. They are not only unprincipled and opportunist, but also regard American diplomacy in the region (including wars like the first Iraq War) as Israel's only salvation. More: they tend to be very active when Likud is in power, appealing for American controls over Israel, and very passive when Labor is in power or in coalition, merely pushing for minor reforms or adjustments in policy rather than putting forward real alternatives. Shulamit Aloni [*] offered this self-criticism during the Gulf War crisis in 1990, when the peace movement in Israel was cracking under its own internal contradictions, and when Palestinians became desperate enough to support Saddam Hussein:

> "Why should I be disappointed with the Palestinians? Did I do something for them? Did the Israeli left do anything for them? …the Israel left is a loyal part of the government and the establishment…we tried to raise a moral voice…de facto we did nothing. The government continued to control the territories, to deny human rights, to destroy and kill, and we are part of this because we did not declare a rebellion…we were the fig leaf of Israeli democracy…the Palestinians do not owe us anything."[10]

Very few groups in Israel have ever broken from such left complicity with state power and such indifference towards Palestinian suffering and suffocation.

The most significant formation historically has been the revolutionary socialist group Matzpen. Though organizationally weak, in the 1960s and 1970s it mounted the most important ideological

challenge to Zionism ever to come out of Israel, much more robust and principled than anything "post-Zionism" ever articulated in the 1990s. Matzpen not only launched the "Israel as colonial-settler state" paradigm in Israeli society but argued that Zionism was a specific form of settler colonialism in which Palestinian natives were to be totally replaced by Jewish settlers, not incorporated or exploited by them.[11] Clearly anti-imperialist, Matzpen was also consistently critical of Israel's role as watchdog of US interests in the region, crushing Arab radicalism and curbing Arab national rights in return for military and economic subsidy. What Matzpen clearly understood, then, was that the Palestine question wasn't only a Palestinian-Israeli issue but an Arab problem as well. This had important political repercussions, and Matzpen looked towards the Arab world, not only towards Palestinians, for an answer to Zionism. An Arab socialist revolution would thus redeem both Israel-Palestine from Zionism and the Arab East from Western imperialism, as it safeguards the rights of national minorities like Israeli-Jews and Kurds in the region as whole. No other Israeli group came close to Matzpen's theoretical innovations, or its internationalist commitments and openness to surrounding Arab societies. Its members were subjected to severe Israeli state repression.

In the 1980s, other, different groups emerged. Dai Lakibush (Stop the Occupation) played an important radicalizing role, but then lost steam. Women in Black organized vigils against the occupation all over the country, as well as abroad, but it too was weakened by the aggressions and false peace carnivals of the New World Order.

Other groups emerged after Oslo (some have remerged, like the refusniks who reject military service in the Occupied Territories). Today Tayyush , Gush Shalom, and Anarchists Against the Wall are very active against the occupation. Their most important success on the ground has been a long popular resistance campaign against certain sections of the Wall in the West Bank. Bil'in has become their symbol, representing cross border and global peace activism conjoined with Palestinian-led non-violent struggle.[12] Such combinations have managed to force a modification in the route of the Wall, saving half of the lands of Bil'in even as Israel's Supreme Court decision legitimized the expropriation of the other half.[13] It was a small and ambiguous victory, but an important one nonetheless, if only as a reminder that Palestinians and Israelis can still jointly resist the occupation and can still manage to form new cross national relations of trust and solidarity.

So what has always been missing in Israel is an organized anti-occupation, pro-justice mass movement that is powerful enough to rattle and undermine Israel's colonialism. Israel still lacks a genuine peace movement, certainly one that is principled enough to build on the fact that at least 40 percent of Israelis are ready to end the occupation now and withdraw to the 1967 border in accordance with the international consensus in place since 1976. Can this change? Sure. If a significant mobilized Israeli majority comes to see Israel in the way most people around the world see it—that is, as a violent usurper of the rights of others and as a danger to world peace—then: most probably. Since 1967, the U.S. has shielded Israelis from seeing their state as a pariah state and shielded Israel from paying the costs of the longest military occupation in recent history. This situation can't last forever, especially if a re-emergent peace movement in the US puts Palestinian rights at the heart of its struggle for peace in the Middle East. Israelis need to feel the pressure of organized public opinion (including boycott and state sanctions) if they are to mobilize against their elite's colonial desires. No place matters more for the Israeli elite than the U.S., so anti- occupation struggle here is particularly relevant and can be especially decisive. Only then will Israelis themselves come to organize en mass against Israel's subjugation and negation of a whole nation.

***NP**: There is a debate on the left as to whether we should be urging a "two-state" or a "one-state" solution for Israel-Palestine. What is your view of these alternatives?*

BAM: I think its strange to present these solutions as two equally available options. Even those

advocating a revolutionary option recognize that, whatever else needs to happen, the occupation has to end first. This is what most Palestinians want, as well as a significant portion of Israelis, if not a majority. So a Palestinian strategy needs to be formulated around this demand as a national priority. Palestinian suffering under occupation has to be addressed as a national emergency. The question we need to ask is not whether to decolonize the West Bank and Gaza, but how: who will lead the struggle; what are its informing values; how to solicit Arab and other support; how to remobilize collective self-organization; how to help people become agents of their own liberation; how to mobilize refugees and the occupied in a new grassroots, democratic organization; and how to activate existing UN resolutions and international legal opinions against the illegal Wall, settlements, roads, etc.

The one-state solution is an excellent idea, but it's utopian and is not attainable in practice now. There is no constituency for a one-state solution, nor is there capacity or leverage enough at the moment to achieve it. Political realism requires you to begin where you have the potential to be most successful and most effective. De-Zionizing Israel won't, I think, come from the West, as some one-staters believe. I still think that the question of Palestine is an Arab question: Zionism and Western imperialism continue to oppress Arabs and, importantly, continue to be seen by them as doing so. It is in the interests of Arabs to reverse Zionist expansionism, end Zionist exclusivism in Palestine, decolonize it, and implement the right of return. One can hardly say that about a capitalist West, not even its masses now. One-staters tend to think that if they shout hard and long enough people in the West will come round to supporting a one-state solution. But most people in the West don't support ending Zionism in Palestine, as most Arabs do, yet do support ending the occupation. So the strategy of some Palestine advocates becomes making it harder for people in the West to support them? That's not politics. It smacks of discursive strategies not real ones. The ideological struggle against Zionism in the West is important, and needs to be continued, but one can hardly expect it to yield the necessary pressure to overturn Zionism in Palestine. For that, we need to look East—towards the Arab world—or towards a revitalized progressive workers' movement in the West with sufficient capacity to effect state policy. But I never hear one-staters of today say that the answer to Zionism in Palestine lies with the progressive organized working- class movements in the West. If workers' unions are engaged at all by Palestine advocates today, it is to boycott Israel for its illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, not to end Zionism. Solidarity for that in the West can only come from a radical, anti-imperialist mass resurgence. There are unfortunately no signs of that. Should the Palestinians then wait for what Fanon called "sleeping beauty" to awake? Or do they in the meantime utilize the support and solidarity that they can get and begin bettering their lives now? It's only reasonable to opt for the second route.

***NP**: In thinking about solutions, you urge political realism. How does the issue of the right of return fit into this? That is, is there a way to address the needs and rights of the Palestinian refugees that is at the same time politically realistic? Will Israelis support the "return" of seven million Palestinians?*

BAM: NO THEY WON'T. And this is a serious problem. Most Israelis are becoming more racist. Their support for "transfer" of Palestinian citizens is increasing, and has reached very worrying levels. The Israeli political and military elite sees Palestinians as a sub-human group that it can bully, crush, humiliate, kill, and starve. The Israeli "left" is mostly Zionist, and advocates separation and partition, not equality. The Jewish groups that support the right of return are on the margins of Israeli society, and are mainly preoccupied with ending the occupation. So I can't see Israelis at the moment supporting the right of return. They still want to live in a state that is theirs and want that state to be a Jewish democracy (not a liberal one). But that doesn't mean that they can't come to realize that historic reconciliation (ratified by a Palestinian majority) is necessary and that they are responsible for rectifying the wrongs of the present and the past. That's more likely to happen than straight out acceptance of the right of return.

So what does one advocate for Palestinian refugees today? That's a very hard question to answer. The right of return is an inalienable Palestinian right, recognized by international laws and resolutions. It's a right that a majority of Palestinians today support. Yet every time it is invoked Palestinians are accused of wanting to destroy the state of Israel, as if their expulsion and refugeedom are their own fault, and as if Israeli colonial racism is a Palestinian creation. It's an absurd situation when victims of a historical crime are put on the defensive by their own persecutors for the very same act that made them victims in the first place. No nation has a right to be racist or to oppress or deny the universal rights of another, certainly not one that is solely responsible for completely dispossessing the other.

What of Palestinian suffering and wretchedness in the present? If refugees can't return at this juncture, what should advocates of the Palestinian cause be doing now? Well, everything in their power to better Palestinian lives everywhere, and to help Palestinians realize those of their national rights that can be fulfilled at present. Most occupied Palestinians are refugees, and what they want is clear: a free and sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. This won't only immeasurably improve their lives but would also allow those refugees from outside of Palestine who do accept to come back to do so and live normal lives in a democratic state of their own. Is that better than the vagaries and insecurities of exile? I would think so, but that is something for Palestinians to vote on and decide in a popular referendum. It should only happen if a majority of them agree to it. A "return" it is not: refugees are not returning to their homes and lands in Lydda, Sajara, or Jerusalem. What they are doing is overcoming statelessness and a life without rights. It's not a change one should denigrate or ignore, and I do think it is still possible even in today's bleak conditions.

In addition, if a grass-roots Palestinian anti-occupation struggle is to succeed, it would have to cause a huge rupture within Israeli society, activating and detonating its internal contradictions. This could be powerful enough to nudge Israel out of its denial and rejectionism, pushing it towards historic reconciliation and coexistence. So Palestinians may not only get an end to military occupation but also a people willing to live with them in peace and harmony. This would slowly create the necessary conditions for sharing and solidarity, leaving racialized demography and colonial privileges far behind. The 1948 generation won't see this, but their great-grandchildren may well do. This won't redeem the suffering of 1948, but it would allow a new generation of Palestinians and Israelis to build a new society where dispossession, expulsion, and domination are things of the past. Today's utopian impulses would then be realized.

***NP**: Do you think it's possible that Washington, in its determination to discredit Hamas and therefore legitimize Abbas, might actually – despite its inclinations – provide some momentum toward a settlement?*

BAM: No. Since Hamas' blunder in Gaza,[14] Abbas' endless courting of the Israelis, and his shunning of dialogue and conciliation with Hamas, Israel gave the Palestinians virtually zero. It did release some money and 250 Fatah prisoners, but this is peanuts when one considers that it holds more than 11,000 Palestinian prisoners and continues to arrest dozens of Palestinians a week. There has been no substantive change in the policy of checkpoints,[15] nor one acre of occupied territory saved, nor one Palestinian life spared, as Washington cheerleads, endorses, and protects Israel from international law.

And yet the US hopes to sell the world a so-called international peace conference? Is this the same administration that starved and sanctioned Palestinians for the last year and a half and fortified Israel's colonial siege? What peace can Washington talk about when Palestinians don't have access to 60 percent of the West Bank because of the Israeli occupation? What peace can the U.S. desire in the Middle East when it increased military aid to Israel by 25 percent in one go, reaching

30 billion dollars for the next ten years?

Washington sees no peace in the Arab East: only blood and oil.

Footnotes

* She was the founder in 1973 of the Citizens' Rights Movement, which merged with Mapam and Shinui to form Meretz in the early 1990s.

1. For the most recent account of the PA, see Nigel Parsons, *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority: From Oslo to al-Aqsa*, London: Routledge, 2005.
2. See the Association of Forty website.
3. Sever Plocker, "Arabs are poorer," September 5, 2007.
4. *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Vintage, 2000), p. 345.
5. For an account of how half-heartedly the Arab states supported the Palestinians in 1948, see *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, ed. Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
6. For a summary of Munif's views, see Iskandar Habash, "Unpublished Munif Interview: Crisis in the Arab World – Oil, Political Islam, and Dictatorship," 2003.
7. Hany al-Hassan, "Fatah Between Theory and Practice," *Shuun Falastiniya* [or, Palestinian Affairs], 7(March 1972) (in Arabic), p. 20.
8. "The Current State of the Palestinian Resistance," *Shuun Falastiniya*, 2 (May 1971), pp. 57-74, 62.
9. For a fuller discussion of this document see my "Occupied Palestine: Prisoners, Colonial Elites, and Fundamentalists," ZNet, June 11, 2006.
10. Interview with Tom Segev in *Haaretz*, August 24, 1990, quoted in Reuven Kaminer, *The Politics of Protest: The Israeli Peace Movement and the Palestinian Intifada* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1996). Kaminer's is the best book on the Israeli protest movement.
11. For a representative sample, see here. For a more recent analysis, see Moshe Machover's important lecture, "Israelis and Palestinians: Conflict and Resolution" (November 30, 2006).
12. See here.
13. See Amira Hass, "Disrupting the Separation Policy," *Haaretz*, September 25, 2007.
14. For my analysis of the Hamas seizure of power in Gaza, see "Symptoms of Decay in Occupied Palestine," ZNet, July 16, 2007.
15. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak has said he would remove 24 unmanned barriers on the West Bank (though Israel's military and intelligence agency are opposed), but, as the UN noted, in the most recent month alone 40 new checkpoints were established. UN, Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Report No. 47, Implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access*, (22 August – 4 September 2007).