

## **Palestinian Options as the Nakba turns 60**

by Mazin Qumsiyeh, PhD

We are 126 years after the practical initiation of Zionist project to colonize Palestine and we are 60 years after the realization of that vision in the form of a Jewish ethnocentric nationalistic state. These are very short periods in human histories (the crusader kingdoms lasted much longer). History teaches us that native people are not guaranteed victory but that they always have many options moving forward. In this essay, I explore the challenges and the many options open for Palestinians as we enter perhaps the most challenging period of our history. George Bush's speech in front of the Israeli Knesset "celebrating" this ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the politicide that followed included this with no bit of irony:

"The alliance between our governments is unbreakable, yet the source of our friendship runs deeper than any treaty. It is grounded in the shared spirit of our people, the bonds of the Book, the ties of the soul. When William Bradford stepped off the Mayflower in 1620, he quoted the words of Jeremiah: 'Come let us declare in Zion the word of God.' The founders of my country saw a new promised land and bestowed upon their towns names like Bethlehem and New Canaan. And in time, many Americans became passionate advocates for a Jewish state."

Will his "Manifest destiny" characterize the future and will Palestinian natives follow the trajectory of America's natives? Will he be proven wrong here as he was proven wrong in Iraq and Afghanistan? We cannot guarantee anything. We only know that history is not something that happens; it is made. Further, natives can learn to analyze objectively without losing their dreams and aspirations (and natives in America have not given up). In Palestine, we actually have far more options and possibilities if we look at things objectively.

Today, there are millions of Jews who identify themselves as Zionist of various shades and who hold significant power in Western Countries. There are some 5 million Jews and five million Palestinian (Christian, Muslim, and other) who live under the rule of the apartheid Israeli state. Half the Jews who live in Palestine/Israel are immigrants. Seven million of the 10 million Palestinians in the world are refugees or displaced people. Israel stole most of the land and now controls some 93% of the land of Palestine (before the British invasion and the Balfour Declaration, native and Zionist Jews collectively owned only 2% of Palestine).

The CIA predicted accurately the meaning of Truman's push to partition Palestine despite the wishes of its inhabitant and despite the UN charter and they wrote in a now declassified document (ORIGINAL November 28, 1947):

"Armed hostilities between Jews and Arabs will break out if the UN General Assembly accepts the plan to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states....The Jews are expected to be able to mobilize some 200,000 fighters in Palestine.. The Jewish armed groups in Palestine are well equipped and well trained in commando tactics. Initially they will achieve marked success over the Arabs because of superior organization and equipment....The US by supporting partition has already lost much of its prestige in the Near East in the event that partition is imposed on Palestine, the resulting conflict will seriously disturb the social, economic, and political stability of the Arab world, and US commercial and strategic interests will be dangerously jeopardized. ..The poverty, unrest, and hopelessness upon which Communist propaganda thrives will increase throughout the Arab world. (and later in the document, p. 6) US prestige on the other hand has steadily decreased with each new indication that the US supports the Zionists. The good will enjoyed by the US at the time of the Roosevelt-Ibn Saud Conference and following backing of Lebanese and Syrian claims for independence was short lived as a result of President Truman's support of Jewish immigration to Palestine and of the Anglo-American Committee report. Because

of the long standing cultural ties between the US and the Arab world, the friendly role that the US played in the achievement of Syrian and Lebanese independence, the partial dependence of certain Arab states on oil royalties from US companies, and the promise of increased royalties in the future, the Arab states would like to maintain friendly relations with the US. ... Little of this (positive) development will be possible, if the US supports a Jewish state in Palestine." (<http://tinyurl.com/2c4kh3>)

History may be written many times by the colonizers and their supporters (and rewritten, revised, distorted by those with agendas) but while it can't be rewinded, it can be shaped. For example, the colonization of South Africa and the dismantlement of apartheid happened without expelling the white settlers or their descendants and it is still a work in progress. But other fates can await us in Palestine: the fate of Algeria's struggle against colonial rule or the fate of Native Americans or the fate of Northern Ireland. No one has a crystal ball and can predict the future with certainty. We can reflect on trends and we can also reflect on available options. While oppressors and their supporters have many options, the natives also have options.

First a realistic check. Today after this history of conflict and war, Israel is an economically vibrant state with support from much of the world governments. It has tremendous military power with the fourth or fifth strongest army on earth and with 100% support from the only remaining superpower (whose internal politics dictate that people running for high office grovel at the feet of the Israel lobby). This unrivaled political and military power ensures that places where the public is very much in support of Palestinian rights (including the right to return to their homes and lands) like Italy and Egypt have governments that are subservient to Zionist and US imperial and elite interests. It ensures that money is funneled through corporations and governments in support of Zionism from ordinary citizens who have no clue about these transactions. Hence extra cost for products that carry a "kosher label" that go not for the cost of such certification but through the Orthodox Union to support Israel and Zionism. Hence US taxpayers unwittingly pumping several billion every year to Israel because their politicians want to be (re-)elected and need the power of the Israel-first lobby (cash and media access). Hence silencing of investigations into Israeli military and economic spying on Western countries (Israel now sells lots of US technology to countries like China). Hence repackaging of stolen US technology sold back to the US public unwittingly not knowing its origin. Hence Michael Chertof, Zionist head of US national security awarding no-bid contracts for security of the US Mexico borders to Israeli instead of US Companies. Hence the Iran-(Israel)-Contra affair (yes Israel was the Middleman in that deal with a big cut). Hence the attacks on honorable Americans like Senator Fullbright, Congressman Findley, and ex-President Jimmy Carter. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. and the list is endless.

On the positive side, the original Zionist blue prints are for control of the area between the Euphrates and the Nile. Here we are 126 years later and even the area between the Jordan and the Mediterranean is roughly at parity between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. 30 years ago, Zionists had convinced most of the world that there was no such thing as Palestinians (only Arabs who happen to be in our out of Eretz Yisrael). Today most of the world and even Zionists themselves recognize that not only are there Palestinians but that indeed there is such a thing as Palestine. The Palestinian flag now flies around Palestine even inside the Green line.

But whether one looks at the glass as half full or half empty, it is how to go beyond the descriptive to the prescriptive that captivates most Palestinian intellectuals and ordinary Palestinians. Of course there is no uniformity of Israeli opinions and there is even less uniformity of Palestinian opinions. Here are just two Palestinians expressing certain opinions/sentiments:

1) Prof. Edward Said (e.g. in the Question of Palestine) provides the intellectual analysis:

"The irreducible and functional meaning of being a Palestinian has meant living through Zionism first as a method of acquiring Palestine, second as a method for dispossessing and exiling Palestinians, and third as a method for maintaining Israel as a state in which Palestinians are treated as non-Jews, and from which politically they remain exiles despite (in the case of the 650,000 Israeli-Palestinian citizens)[now 1.5 million-MQ] their continued presence on the land"

or in this

"Who is now asking the existential questions about our future as a people? The task cannot be left to a cacophony of religious fanatics and submissive, fatalistic sheep. ...Years of sacrifice and struggle, of bones broken in hundreds of prisons and torture chambers from the Atlantic to the Gulf, families destroyed, endless poverty and suffering. Huge, expensive armies. For what? This is not a matter of party or ideology or faction: it's a matter of what the great theologian Paul Tillich used to call ultimate seriousness. Technology, modernization and certainly globalization are not the answer for what threatens us as a people now. We have in our tradition an entire body of secular and religious discourse that treats of beginnings and endings, of life and death, of love and anger, of society and history. This is there, but no voice, no individual with great vision and moral authority seems able now to tap into that and bring it to attention....There is a wonderful expression that very precisely and ironically catches our unacceptable helplessness, our passivity and inability to help ourselves now when our strength is most needed. The expression is: will the last person to leave please turn out the lights? We are that close to a kind of upheaval that will leave very little standing and perilously little left even to record, except for the last injunction that begs for extinction. Hasn't the time come for us collectively to demand and formulate a genuinely Arab alternative to the wreckage about to engulf our world?"

2) Fawaz Turki provides the language of the heart (The Disinherited, 2nd edition (Monthly Review Press, 1972) pp. 160-161).

"The private terrors that shadow the everyday life of the exile, the refugee, the occupied, the stateless would have forever remained private were it not for the fact that from these terrors an occasional outcry of fathomless anger is emitted, spilling over to the outside world. This outside world, standing with its back to the human passions housed within the confines of the ghetto, the refugee camp, the occupied city, and the colonized town, does not understand these occasional outcries, simply because their idiom and their metaphor, their cause and effect stem from a reality alien to the outside world. Yet those of us who have known no other reality, driven by it as if by the terrors of a primal pain, also share our humanity with other men and women, denying them monopoly of this humanity. Such is the matrix of logic of the outside world in this day that the onus always falls on the oppressed to explain his position, to prove his sincerity, to justify his platform, to articulate his vision of the future and to truly, truly convince his oppressor (whose napalm and military occupation, whose racist excesses and sadistic regressions have crushed his very soul and reduced him to a fragment) that he is motivated by love and not hate. Above all, he is called upon to believe in the notion that the violence of the oppressor to subdue him with sophisticated weapons and keys to the dungeons, is moral. His own violence which he uses to break his chains is immoral."

in the 1960s civil rights struggle, the phrase was used "free your mind and your ass will follow." Surely, between these two voices of the past and thousands, millions of other Palestinian voices, surely we can have a vision and a direction and free all our minds. Surely there are many options despite the attempt of our oppressors to convince us that our options are gone save for surrender. Surely, there is hope.

To think of many possible options (good or bad) for the native Palestinians moving forward is an exercise worth pursuing if nothing else than to show us that there are choices besides

surrender. These 20 options are listed simply as examples (not an exhaustive list) of potential options that some Palestinians have considered (rightly or wrongly). These options are also not mutually exclusive, not exhaustive, and some may overlap:

- 1) Collaborate or succumb to the power structures, play along and obey the people in power (e.g. Palestinian police to train by the CIA and operate to quell Palestinian violent and nonviolent resistance) and hope for whatever handouts the chiefs decide.
- 2) Revive the Palestine Liberation Organization with the original charter to liberate all of Palestine from Zionist colonial rule (democratized PLO).
- 3) Engage in massive nonviolent resistance in the areas occupied in 1967 (3.6 million Palestinians form a base).
- 4) Engage in massive nonviolent resistance in the areas occupied since 1948 (1.5 million Palestinians who are Israeli citizens form a base).
- 5) Start an Intifada/uprising in the the areas occupied since 1948 (violent and nonviolent resistance, nonviolent resistance ongoing now can be intensified)
- 6) Start an Intifada/uprising in the the areas occupied since 1967 (violent and nonviolent resistance, nonviolent resistance ongoing now can be intensified)
- 7) Engage in nonviolent resistance in areas outside of Palestine (300,000 Palestinians in the US, 350,000 in Lebanon, 2 million in Jordan).
- 8) Engage in resistance outside of Palestine that involves targeting Israeli Zionist companies and interests world wide by economic sabotage.
- 9) Engage in targeting individuals that support war crimes and support Zionist control (e.g. Richard Perle, Alan Dershowitz, Israeli leaders etc) with the logic that this creates a cost for engaging in or supporting war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- 10) Engage in educational campaigns and media campaigns. Lobbying, writing, speaking out etc with the logic of capturing hearts and minds by telling the truth of what colonial Zionism has done.
- 11) Build alliances with powerful states that could provide protection or support.
- 12) Wait for the US/Israel empire to collapse of its own weight and idiocies (Israel pushed the US to go to war on Iraq and are now pushing for a conflict with Iran, these are bankrupting the US).
- 13) Convert to Judaism and claim the right of return as a Jew.
- 14) Engage in boycotts, divestments, and sanctions which are helpful also in raising awareness about the apartheid nature of Israel.
- 15) Depend on God's will and His designs for the future.
- 16) Attack fellow Palestinians you disagree with.
- 17) Live for the moment, build for your family, forget the collective interest.

18) Intermarry with Israeli Jews and move back to Palestine to live with your spouse and produce lots of children

19) Convince enough Israeli Jews to abandon Zionism and vote for a post-Zionist state for all its people.

20) Write poems, do music, perform plays and other resistance arts.

There can be many combinations of the above; statistically even three combinations can result in hundreds of cocktails. Some options were adopted, others talked about, some feasible, some unrealistic. I am sure some readers will think of other options I have not listed. The purpose of this mental exercise was to show that there are many, many options. History of course provides some lessons on what works or what does not work but most people ignore history. (As Hegel pointed out, learn from history that we learn nothing from history.) So what remains for us is that Palestinians need to open up such discussions as to what options they have. We may arrive at some conclusions and we may agree to disagree on directions. But such a discourse ensures we focus on actions not talk. A recent author noted that Israel is successful but Zionism has failed. I would say history in this case is still in flux and as always our actions do make a difference. Actions will speak louder than words and will shape our destinies in the next 60 years. As Palestinians, now the sacrificial lambs for a supine world community, we can shape our future with choices we make. Silence and collaboration are both complicity in this epic injustice that best epitomizes the 21st century, the injustice of continuing ethnic cleansing/continuing Nakba. Just like Palestinians, those who show backbone and support this noble struggle also have equally varied and contradictory choices. But that is the subject of another discussion. For now, the choice that remains relevant is the one posed by Martin Luther King, Jr.:

"Cowardice asks the question - is it safe? Expediency asks the question - is it politic? Vanity asks the question - is it popular? But conscience asks the question - is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but one must take it because it is right."

And choosing to do what is right must also adhere to that universal wisdom: "Grant me the courage to change the things I can, the serenity to accept those I can't, and the WISDOM TO KNOW the difference."

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