

From the Mentality of the Nakba to the Mentality of Steadfastness and Confrontation

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The Nakba is not an event in the history of the Palestinian people, but rather the context within which this history has unfolded for more than six decades. The modern history of the Palestinian people has become characterized by the ongoing conscious and prohibitive struggle to escape from this context. The Nakba (catastrophe) was a massive political turmoil that aimed to “annihilate” the Palestinian people. Global politics conspired to eliminate its rights and remove it from history by erasing the homeland from the memory of the people and erasing the people from the memory of the homeland. The Nakba brought about a radical shift in terms of demography and geography, and it has reshaped the political, social, and economic terrain of Palestine - indeed the entire Middle East. It was the result of a plot to force the Palestinian people into a dark tunnel, a tunnel which became haunted by the mentality of the Nakba. There is no end to this tunnel and no way out other than towards loss and despair. The only solution is complicity with the strategies of the dominant imperialist powers and their instrument, Israel, and submitting to their plans and ambitions in the region.

The Palestinian cause has become a dogged battle to escape the mentality of the Nakba and the defeatist attitudes it engendered. It is a struggle to make the transition from the mentality stemming from uprooting and displacement to that of the glorification of the battle to survive and prosper in the homeland. It is a struggle to transition from the psychology of frustration, refugee aid and resettlement projects to that of the battle for the Right of Return. It is a struggle to transition from the mentality of paralysis in the face of the great conspiracy against the Palestinian people, the illusion that “relief” from the reactionary Arab regimes is forthcoming, and acceptance of the dependence of the Palestinian cause on and confinement within the constraints of the official Arab system, to that of seizing independence of decision, shaping Palestinian choice, and the rise of the Palestinian Liberation Organization – the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The PLO rose from the ashes of the Nakba to find itself confronted by the Naksa (setback); it found an official Arab Regime languishing after the defeat of 1967 and the demise of the illusions that fueled it.

In their battle for liberation, the Palestinian people have occupied a unique and remarkable position among the peoples of the world and in the camp of liberation forces. The Palestinian people have garnered international sympathy and solidarity in its struggle for defying the horror, intimidation, and frustration created by Deir Yassin and other massacres: the prelude to the Nakba, displacement, and refuge. Such horrors shattered illusions of trust in the armies of the Arab “brothers,” and demonstrate the importance of resistance to Israel's state terror, the courage of the Intifada, and opposition to the Occupation; the settlements and the Wall and its tenacious hold on the land.

The Arab Palestinian minority inside Israel has made progress. They have made the transition from the mentality of the massacre of Kufr Qassim – whose victims fell while begging for the mercy of the slaughterers – to the mentality of Land Day (March 30, 1976). The dead and injured of Land Day fell defending the land of the Galilee, the Triangle, and the Naqab. They fell bearing stones, their will and right, and a conscious political position, brave and responsible. They did not make bargains but also did not take blind risks. They did not try to “float on an inch of water” or drift about above a quagmire of illusions, heroics, superstitions, or exaggerations. The Arab national minority in Israel, “a living and active part of the Arab Palestinian people,” has formulated as a strategic choice, its political thought and method of honorable struggle, which puts emphasis on political struggle, popular resistance, unity, and the defense of its national and civil rights. This minority seeks to influence the national, civil, and democratic battle, from its position in Israel. It draws on the political and popular modes of work that are available within the complex political arena. This minority acts not as a passive victim who is satisfied merely to receive, but as an active and politically aware national minority, facing up to its oppressors and demanding its rights by confronting the policy of persecution and discrimination based on national belonging.

Broadly speaking, the history of the Palestinian cause over the past six decades is a history of the transition from the mentality of the Nakba to the mentality of steadfastness, defiance, and confrontation. It is a history of the reformulation of the national Palestinian project and the principles of a just solution in a dialectic and realistic manner. It is a history of the transition from a state of confusion about the conspiracy against the rights of the Palestinian people to a position of attack. The three sides of this conspiracy have been exposed: Imperialism, Zionism and Arab reaction. It has become clear to the Palestinians and to the world that this trio bears responsibility for the Nakba. It is responsible for the crimes that were committed by the Zionist movement against the people of Palestine; for their uprooting, the pillaging of their homeland, and violation of their rights. Today, this same trio is responsible for the ongoing conspiracy to deprive the Palestinian people of their freedom and independence and for abrogating their natural national rights - first and foremost the right to self-determination.

Since the mid-20th century, Palestinian history has been a history of the transition from the frustration with the conspiracy against the material, political, and cultural existence of the Palestinian people inside and outside of their homeland, to the choice to defy: to entrench their remarkable revolutionary presence and to claim their inalienable rights. The Palestinian people have gained global recognition for a solution based on three pillars. These are: the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the borders of June 4th, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital; the just resolution of the refugee issue on the basis of United Nations resolutions; and recognition of the Arab Palestinian population in Israel as a national minority entitled to equal national and civil rights in their homeland.

As the illusion that the Nakba would wipe out the Palestinian people, erase their role, and remove them from the stage of history has been exploded, the ruling Zionist circles in Israel are now redoubling their efforts to eradicate the Nakba from history and from Palestinian consciousness and memory. Most egregious of such acts is the so-called "Nakba Law", which criminalizes the commemoration of the Nakba. Tzipi Livni, the former Israeli Foreign Minister and currently the leader of the Kadima Party, bluntly stated in a television interview on the eve of Israel's sixtieth anniversary of its foundation, that "the Palestinians have to understand that they will gain their independence when they remove the word 'Nakba' from their lexicon." The relationship between the establishment of Israel and the Nakba of the Palestinian people is like that between Siamese twins: born together, move together, grow up together. In the years since the Nakba, Israel has worked systematically to rid itself of its twin, to conceal it and eliminate it. But this has not been possible and is the source of Israel's current predicament. For it has become clear that Israel cannot escape responsibility for the Nakba without committing itself to the just resolution of its consequences for the Palestinian people.

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