

The Return of Palestine



By Abdalrhadi Aljila

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uring the second week of May 2021, Israel launched an offensive against the Gaza Strip, after a few weeks of besieging and harassing the residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem. The

Israeli decision to expel the Palestinians of Jerusalem was met with warnings from the resistance movements in Gaza that, after two ultimatums, fired rockets at Tel Aviv as a clear message to the Israeli leadership. During the following days, almost all Palestinian cities in historical Palestine, including Akka, Yaffa, Haifa, those in the Triangle, and others, took to the streets. The clashes that erupted showed the real face of the apartheid and discrimination against all Palestinians in historical Palestine, from the river to the sea.

Between 1998 and 2000, when I was in my mid-teens, I worked in the summers as a vendor in one of Gaza's most crowded markets on Omar Mukhtar Street. Every Friday or Saturday, dozens of buses would arrive from historical Palestine, filled with Palestinians from Haifa, the Triangle region, and other cities. We used to call them "Arabs of Israel." During that time, the idea of Palestine as one united geographical unit existed only as a fantasy and nostalgic idea. It was derived from the Palestinian struggle and spirit of *sumud* (perseverance) in Lebanon and elsewhere. Certainly, this idea of Palestine as both one entity and one people was almost absent in the popular narrative in the aftermath of the Oslo Accord. More than twenty years later, however, Palestine has returned as the concept of a unified people in all its land.

The resistance of Jerusalemites in Sheikh Jarrah, the ten days of airstrikes on Gaza, and the clashes in historical Palestine have united the Palestinian struggle, demonstrating that 73 years of Israelization of the Palestinians who have Israeli citizenship has crashed. The new generations of Palestinians

in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are informally coordinating political activism and raising their voices against both the settler-colonial practices of apartheid and occupation forces on the one hand and the Palestinian political elites in Ramallah on the other. In addition, Palestinian youth and the new generation of Palestinians in the diaspora have begun an ongoing campaign of mobilization and awareness-raising in North America and Europe that has led not only to a worldwide outcry against Israel's use of the most advanced weapons and bombs against civilians in the Gaza Strip but also to the condemnation of Israeli state violence against Palestinian cities such as Lod, Haifa, Yaffa, Taybeh, Umm al-Fahm, and others.

In addition, the recent round of airstrikes against the Gaza Strip reveals the baselessness of the arguments raised to justify the dictatorship of the recent normalization agreements. The reasoning of the normalizers was ridiculed during the ten-day assault on Gaza and the protests against the ongoing apartheid in the West Bank and the Judaization of Jerusalem. In other words, Palestine has returned to bury the "Deal of the Century" that Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner had tried to sell across the region. During these past weeks, this deal has completely disappeared

Photo by Patrick Birkans.





Photo by Atieh Darwish.

and a new reality has arisen. One indicator is the US administration's decision to send its secretary of state to visit the region that it had neglected for months and to reopen the US consulate in East Jerusalem to (again) serve as the de facto embassy for the Palestinians.ⁱ The new US administration had not initiated any contact with the Palestinians, not even with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, until the last round of airstrikes and the Palestinian resistance attacks in response to the Israeli airstrikes. The Americans are trying to turn back the clocks to their old doctrine of engagement in the region, through the so-called peace process.

As the Americans try to be more actively involved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Israel has performed a *Hollywood-esque* show of arresting and intimidating Palestinians, including many with

Israeli citizenship,ⁱⁱ but not Jewish Israelis.ⁱⁱⁱ Israel has arrested around 500 Palestinians while threatening to launch new airstrikes against the Gaza Strip and continuing to kill Palestinians at checkpoints in Jerusalem and the West Bank. For the Palestinians, this experience has brought back the time of a united struggle before the *Nakba*, reminding us of our great revolution in 1936. The shared oppression serves as a reminder that the Palestinians who remained in Palestine and who were given Israeli citizenship are not considered to be full citizens but rather enemies of the state's institutions, uncovering the many lies about the only democracy in the Middle East.

Contributing to this sense of one nation, the Human Rights Council, the top UN human rights body, adopted at its 30th special session a resolution on the grave human rights situation in Palestine, which includes

As the continuously expanding settlements and settlement blocks – unlikely to be dismantled – permeate the West Bank, rendering impossible the two-state solution, calls for a unified country, a Palestine from the river to the sea, are spreading, particularly among Palestinian youth – imitating the narrative of the Israeli far right but without the implication of ethnic cleansing!

an investigation of racism and discrimination against the Palestinians who have Israeli citizenship.^{iv} It is the first time since 1947 that a UN body refers to the Palestinian people in all of Palestine.

Among the most important consequences of the most recent slaughter in Gaza and the onslaught on Sheikh Jarrah is the creation of a new generation of Palestinian youth, giving new life to the Palestinian struggle. Shared Palestinian identity is re-emerging among Palestinians everywhere. The Israeli airstrikes and attacks on Palestinians in the occupied territories and in historical Palestine have paved the way for a more united and clearer idea of the struggle for all Palestine and all Palestinians. I am convinced that the younger generations of Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the diaspora are inextricably connected; they believe that one state from the river to the sea with equal rights for all its inhabitants is the only solution. It has become clear that artificially separating and dividing Palestine and the Palestinians will neither work nor succeed.

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ⁱ In 2019, the Trump administration made the controversial decision to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in violation of UN Resolution 478, establishing a Palestinian Affairs Unit for American communication with Palestinians, "mark[ing] a significant downgrade of the US diplomatic mission to the Palestinians" (BBC News, "Israel Gaza Conflict: US moves to rebuild relations with Palestinians," May 27, 2021).

ⁱⁱ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/24/a-war-declaration-palestinians-in-israel-decry-mass-arrests>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mel Frykberb, "The hardline Israelis stoking violence in East Jerusalem," Aljazeera News, May 23, 2021.

^{iv} ABC Net Australia, UN Human Rights Council to launch an investigation into potential Israel-Gaza conflict 'war crimes,' May 27, 2021.