

# A Path to Peace

## The Challenge Transformed into an Opportunity



By Mazin B. Qumsiyeh

**I**n 2024, active colonial conflicts remain in a few places, such as Western Sahara, Palestine, and Tibet. The situation in Palestine is the most volatile of these, and the recent and ongoing genocide in Gaza has already opened a regional conflict. This is not difficult to understand in the context of the key position of Palestine at the intersection of continents and its religious significance to 2.4 billion Christians, 2.2 billion Muslims, some 15 million Jews, and others (Baha'is and Samaritans, among others). Arguably, its global geopolitical complexity is greater than in any other place on earth. Added to this is the global outreach and influence of Zionists, especially in Western countries, and media, which gives this conflict a uniqueness. But this should not make us fall into the Zionist trap that tells us that it is not solvable, that peace is not possible. Only pacification works because “we are not in Europe but in the savage ‘Middle East’” (a colonial term, so I prefer “Western Asia”). They forget the history of Europe that has engaged in many more wars than our region has witnessed. In fact, Palestine is one of the most peaceful countries on earth! It has been such since the dawn of civilization, after the invention of agriculture

and the domestication of animals 11 millennia ago. Relative to its long history, Palestine has had fewer conflicts than most other countries. Furthermore, essentially all its conflicts have come from outside. Notably, in the past 1,000 years, Zionism (starting in the late nineteenth century), the British invasion (1917–1948), and the Crusaders (eleventh and twelfth centuries) all came from Europe. So (to borrow terminology from my medical background), what is the diagnosis, what is the therapy, and what is the prognosis for this conflict?

### The Nature of the Problem

Thousands of books have been written about this conflict in the past 75 years, perhaps more than about any other conflict region of a similar size in the world. The story is now very clear. Political Zionism could not establish a Jewish state, as it wished, without a catastrophic impact on the local people (ongoing *Nakba*). At its core, our situation is simple: 15 million Palestinians are denied self-determination, and more than half are refugees or displaced people denied even the simple right of return to our homes and lands.



The Palestinian version of Picasso's *Guernica*.  
Artwork by Claudia Stella de Resende.



Courtesy of aawsat.com.

Some 7 million Jews live now in historical Palestine: the vast majority of them immigrants who came under the banner of Zionist colonization.

The right-wing Zionists have maximalist views and believe that this entire country is “Jewish land” and that the Palestinians have no rights (but accept being tolerated as a pacified minority). Indeed, recent laws emphasize this point, stipulating that only Jews have a right to self-determination in “Eretz Yisrael.” The latter branch of Zionism grew to represent most Israeli Jews. Its origins trace back to its founding father Vladimir Jabotinsky. His thought was actually logical, and one hundred years ago in 1923 he wrote these prophetic words:

“It is of no importance whether we quote Herzl or Herbert Samuel to justify our activities. Colonization

itself has its own explanation, integral and inescapable, and understood by every Arab and every Jew with his wits about him. Colonization can have only one goal. For the Palestinian Arabs this goal is inadmissible. This is in the nature of things. To change that nature is impossible. . . . Zionist colonization, even the most restricted, must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population. This colonization can, therefore, continue and develop only under the protection of a force independent of the local population – an iron wall, which the native population cannot break through. This is, in toto, our policy towards the Arabs. To formulate it any other way would only be hypocrisy.”\*

Many once thought that “intractable” ethno-nationalist conflicts that originate from

colonial activities had ended in the twentieth century. The two most recent conflicts were in Northern Ireland, concluding with the Good Friday Agreement on April 10, 1998, and in South Africa, where protracted negotiations between 1990 and 1993 culminated in an interim constitution which led to a final constitution in 1996. So this conflict is also amenable to solvable. Colonial and anti-colonial struggles have existed in essentially every country or geographic region on earth. Examining these struggles shows that their outcomes fall into three categories: The first involves the genocide of the natives (such as in Australia and the United States). The second entails the expulsion of the colonizers (also very bloody; for example, 1.5–2 million Algerians were killed in the struggle against French colonization). And the third allows for coexistence of the descendants of colonizers and colonized in one country after the end of colonization. This third category is relevant to the vast majority of situations (the first two scenarios are rare). This third scenario is the least bloody and most accommodating once the trauma of colonization ends.

The recent genocide and ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Israel in Gaza shows the futility of trying to invent a fourth scenario (perpetual apartheid/subjugation of the Palestinians). It was tried and failed in South Africa. How do we end the very costly 75-year conflict that could drag the world into another catastrophic world war? What future is there for this long struggle in historical Palestine, and what hope? In laying out the variables, symptoms, and diagnoses, we arrive at the most logical prognosis, which is the third scenario.

## A Sustainable Future

The late Professor Edward Said and many other intellectuals and activists have provided detailed programs for the only viable and real peacemaking solution to the problems in our country. It is based on one secular, democratic country for all its citizens, regardless of their religion or lack thereof (not a Jewish or Muslim or Christian state). Palestinians cannot continue to live under an apartheid regime that considers them subhuman and engages in ethnic cleansing and genocidal actions against them (as is happening in Gaza). The Gaza Strip is the ultimate test case because it is a crowded impoverished population, most are refugees who were ethnically cleansed by the Zionist movement in 1948 in order to create a Jewish state. The Strip has been subjected to strangulation for two decades, and yet the population has resisted.

Our Canaanite ancestors domesticated animals and plants and thus became part of the cradle of civilizations (the Fertile Crescent). For thousands of years people lived mostly in rural agricultural communities in relative harmony with nature. Things began to change in the nineteenth century with the advent of industrialization and of the Zionist project, and they accelerated as the environment was subjected to human-induced climate change, habitat destruction, overexploitation, pollution, and invasive species. Furthermore, these threats to the environment are interconnected. The impacts on the environment of the situation created since 1948 and even before have been nothing short of catastrophic. The wetlands and the Lake of the

Hula area have been drained, the waters of the Jordan River Basin have been diverted, residential and industrial colonial settlements have been created, the segregation wall has been built, millions of local trees have been uprooted and a monoculture of pine trees has been planted, and during wars tons of explosives have been dropped, including depleted uranium and white phosphorous.

While these obstacles make this conflict more difficult than others to resolve, it is still possible to resolve it based on human rights. In 2004, I wrote in *Sharing the Land of Canaan*: During the many years of the Oslo so-called “peace process,” many of us warned that what Israel is doing (as it engages in land confiscation, settlement building, home demolitions, torture, a slow process of ethnic cleansing,



Palestinian children draw war rather than green pastures.

The colonization mentality is the main obstacle to peace, and it had to go in both Northern Ireland and South Africa. Other challenges and obstacles to peace include geopolitics, the Zionist lobby, the imperial interests of countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, and the corrupt and dictatorial Arab regimes that are beholden to the West (sadly, also many among the Palestinian “leadership”).

and other human rights violations) cannot lead to peace. I and other authors argued that a just peace could not be achieved between strong, colonial, and belligerent Israeli governments and weak Palestinians under occupation or dispersed as refugees. We argued that violence and military power do not solve problems but exacerbate them. We argued for international intervention to defend human rights. This involvement of the international

community, we argued, is similar to what materialized in South Africa. Many in the US media chose to shut off our voices and instead listen to Israeli government officials who thought they had figured out how to deal with the Palestinian “problem” and “violence.”

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949) should be implemented as a roadmap to peace. This inevitably leads to the only viable and stable solution, which is a democratic secular state for all its people, and we are working on this (see One Democratic State Campaign). Incidentally, it is the only solution that also solves the so-called thorny issues that are nearly impossible to solve in the delusional two-state “solution”: refugees (they must be allowed to return to their homes and lands), Jerusalem (cannot stay under a “Jewish state” control), the fate of colonial settlement, shared natural resources and sustainability issues, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. (Israel as it exists now is an apartheid, racist regime that cannot be allowed to continue to apply 65 laws and hundreds of military orders that discriminate against the non-Jewish indigenous people.) Palestinians will not settle for anything less than basic human rights, including their internationally recognized right to return to their homes and lands, and self-determination. Israelis, on the other hand, want security that is impossible without ensuring human rights for millions of Indigenous Palestinians.

The actions of the State of Israel in Gaza and the West Bank have aroused a global uprising and will reshape Western Asia and perhaps even global geopolitics. The US-dominated unipolar system is already in decline and the birth of a multipolar world is unfolding. A democratic secular state for all its citizens in historical Palestine “from the River to the Sea” created by global pressures such as boycotts, divestments, and sanctions would make this birth process much smoother and be the best possible outcome for all people, here and abroad. The alternative – a global war – is far too deadly for all to contemplate.

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\* Vladimir Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall: We and the Arabs,” first published in Russian under the title “O Zheleznoi Stene,” in *Rassvyet*, November 4, 1923, published in English in *Jewish Herald* (South Africa), November 26, 1937.