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Palestine

Al-Aqsa Intifada: The Refusal to Surrender

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Description:

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The same occupation has been carrying out a policy of terror for years toward the Palestinian people, including arrests, deportations, killings, and robbery of the national economy, in addition to confiscating lands and building settlements. This same occupying force still refuses to acknowledge the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, namely, the right for self-determination, the creation of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the right for all refugees to return.

The spark that ignited this Intifada, moreover, was the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon, accompanied by hundreds of Israeli soldiers, to Al Haram A-Sharif. Any attempt to minimise this fact or to explain the events in any other way would be a deception.

A Refusal to Surrender

There has been an increasing loss of confidence in the peace process designed according to the American-Israeli vision, which implies the exclusive implementation of Israeli terms. These terms include:

- ▶ Sundering the geographic and demographic unity of the Palestinian people into cantons A, B, and C, divided in concrete by bypass roads that consume thousands of dunums of Palestinian lands;
- ▶ The building and expansion of new settlements;
- ▶ The continuing siege of Palestinian cities, villages, and camps;
- ▶ The policy of house demolitions;
- ▶ The rejection of Palestinian basic human as well as national rights;
- ▶ The use of Palestinian prisoners as bargaining chips for more concessions.

In addition, Israel consistently refuses to comply with UN resolutions, replacing them with its own self-serving terms of reference, reinforced by creating "facts on the ground." Israel depends exclusively on biased American support which whitewashes Israel's practices against the Palestinian people. The United States, moreover, continues to threaten to use its veto power against any attempt to condemn Israeli crimes.

The recent events, as well as the results of seven years of the Oslo Agreement fiasco and all the subsequent "agreements" are nothing but devices intended to neutralise and deny the rights of the Palestinian people. None of these agreements constitute an effective means for achieving a just peace in the region. The extreme violence employed by Israel against the Palestinian uprising is nothing but another attempt to dictate by force a peace based on surrender.

Israel's Intransigence

Although Israel presents itself as a party willing to make compromises, in reality the "facts on the ground" illustrate clearly its complete intransigence with respect to any and all negotiations. Barak went to Camp David, which he saw as the beginning of the final status negotiations, bringing with him the following conditions:

- ▶ No withdrawal to the 6 June 1967 borders, in violation of UN resolutions 242 and 338;
- ▶ Insistence that most of the settlements should remain and be annexed to Israel - also in contradiction to both UN resolutions and internal law which consider all settlements on the West Bank and in Gaza illegal;
- ▶ Denial of Palestinian rights to East Jerusalem, and dealing with Jerusalem in toto as the eternal capital of Israel;
- ▶ Refusal to allow Palestinians to return to the homes from which they were expelled in 1948, also in contradiction to UN Resolution 194;
- ▶ Refusal to allow a "foreign" army west of the Jordan River.

The meaning of all this is clear: if Israel ever does accept the creation of a Palestinian state, it would be a dependent, non-viable entity without any means of defending itself.

It is important to understand the significance of these conditions for Palestinians, and especially the main "facts" on the ground: the settlements and the growing network of Israeli highways. The settlements are an Israeli political project aimed at nothing less than defeating Palestinian aspirations for freedom and independence. Any realistic discourse focused on the creation of a Palestinian state with the coexistence of the settlements and bypass roads would imply a state without sovereignty. This has always been a main cause of conflict and confrontation. Israel's vision of annexing the already-existing settlements translates into annexation of an additional 15% of Palestinian lands. At present, there are approximately 200,000 settlers in more than 140 settlements throughout the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. In Hebron, to take a dramatic case, 400 Jewish settlers live in the midst of 140,000 Palestinians but control 20% of the city.

The refugee problem is another basic issue at the heart of the Palestinian cause. Refugees were created as a direct result of the Zionist project in Palestine. Seventy-eight percent of Palestine was occupied in 1948, and as a result, approximately one million Palestinians were made refugees. During the 1967 War, another half a million refugees

were added to this number. Today there are approximately four million refugees living in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and elsewhere, as well as in Palestine itself.

These are the facts and the foundation upon which the present Intifada broke out. The only conclusion to be drawn from all this is that while Israel speaks eloquently about its desire for peace, it acts on the ground as a brutal occupying intending to maintain its control forever. Oslo only aided the Israeli occupation army in tightening its grip on each and every Palestinian city and village. Plans for redeployment as laid out in Oslo have only served to improve Israel's strategic military position rather than actually facilitate its withdrawal. The recent summit at Sharm a-Sheikh on 17 October with Clinton, Mubarak, Annan, Solana, Arafat, and Barak, was yet another step in perpetuating the deception that has dominated all attempts to deal rationally with the conflict. The Summit described the Palestinian resistance as simple rioting rather than as the profound expression of the aspirations of an entire population for freedom and independence. The Sharm-a Sheikh Summit and its results were clearly dictated by the American view of "peace" in the region - a vision that would crush the Palestinian Intifada, block the Arab national movement and hinder the broadening of solidarity movements in Europe and elsewhere in the world. One of the most dangerous consequences of the Summit was the equalisation of the victim and the victimiser, as well as its attempt to ignore the liberation movement's political dimension, which underlie Palestinian resistance. In short, Sharm a-Sheikh was an attempt to transform the reality of Israeli brute force into political gains that would dictate Israel's political conditions in any future agreements.

Al-Aqsa Intifada: Unprecedented Palestinian Unity

The present Intifada is distinguished by a unique unanimity of intent and motivation among all sectors of Palestinian society. Palestinians on the streets of Gaza, Jerusalem, and the West Bank are using similar slogans to express their state of despair and their loss of confidence in the peace process. They have united for the first time with the Palestinians living inside the Green Line, as well as with those living in refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

Since 1948, Israel has tried to isolate the Palestinians inside the Green Line from the rest of the Palestinian people, treating them as "Israeli Arabs". Nevertheless, Palestinians from 1948 have entered fully into the present Intifada (and one of their number, MK Mohammad Barakeh, is facing trial for his call to support the uprising). Their participation in the Al-Aqsa Intifada is an acknowledgement of their belonging to the Palestinian people. The wide Intifada is also theirs, a means for them to fight for their own rights.

Israel's Strategy of Confrontation: "Bring Them to Their Knees"

Palestinians throughout the world are committed to reaffirming their inalienable, national rights. Sharon's intention, with the blessing of the Israeli government, was to create yet another "fact on the ground". This alone is sufficient to explain Israel's violent reaction toward the Palestinian demonstrators protesting Sharon's visit. Barak's government wanted to deliver a clear message to the Palestinian people: that Israel is ready to do everything necessary to protect its own political interests as defined by Barak at Camp David. The Palestinians must either kneel in submission and accept Israeli terms, or to be subject to Israeli terror and killing.

Israeli army tactics - use of utmost force as quickly as possible in order to crush resistance - has thus far been successfully (though not completely successfully) "hidden" under claims of political and "security" considerations.

Four elements define Israel's strategy in dealing with the Intifada:

- ▶ Maintaining Israeli superiority through tactics that ensure the highest possible number of Palestinian losses and the least among the Israeli army;
- ▶ Tightening the siege over Palestinian cities and villages, as well as severely restricting freedom of movement through the Israeli army's complete control of all roads;
- ▶ Encouraging settlers throughout the West Bank and Gaza to attack Palestinian villages;
- ▶ Attempting to portray the confrontations as one with a truly armed and dangerous Palestinian force, although Israel knows very well that the Palestinian police possess only small or limited arms. Israel, nevertheless, has used this argument as a cover and an excuse for its disproportionate use of combat helicopters, rockets and tanks.

The Bottom Line

Confronted with this reality, Arafat has found himself in front of yet another closed door. Any further compromise on the basic points of the final status negotiations would mean defeat in the struggle toward gaining recognition of the legitimate rights of Palestinians. No Palestinian would stand for it. The demands of the Palestinian people remain simple and clear: a complete end to the occupation; the dismantling of all settlements; the granting of freedom and true independence to Palestinians in a sovereign state, with Jerusalem as its capital; and the right of return to all refugees.

The Palestinian people seek a just political solution, not a new creative form of occupation. This is the reason that the conflict continues and resistance becomes stronger. And this is the reason that the Israeli occupation, with all its tactics of terror and aggression, will never be able to crush the Palestinian spirit and longing for justice. The Intifada is popular political resistance with a political program and clear goals. It will continue until those political goals are achieved.

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