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Palestine

# Behind Israel's offensive

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### Q What is the aim of the current military attack on the Palestinians?

A The current brutal military offensive of the Israeli army against the Palestinians, entitled *Defensive Wall Operation*, typical to Israel's Orwellian double talk, indicates the opening of a new stage in the long process that aims at destroying the Palestinian national movement embodied in the Intifada strugglers and liquidating the existence of the Palestinian people on the land of Palestine' (Haidar Abdel Shafi in an interview to Yossi Algazi, Ha'aretz, April 2). This strategic aim of the Jewish-Zionist state is in accord with the US imperialist interest in eliminating any independent nationalist regime or political movement in the Middle East (as well as in the third world in general) which by definition constitute a barrier to the capitalist globalisation project in the area.

[[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/palest\\_02.jpg](https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/palest_02.jpg)]

The Oslo Agreement, initiated and executed by a government led by the Labour party, which represents the Israeli capitalist class, was an attempt to implement these US-Israeli aims. However, the Israeli military operation which has begun two weeks ago, signals the end of the former stage of the Oslo process.. The central assumption upon which the Bantustan plan of Oslo was founded was that the Palestinian Authority headed by Arafat, would fulfil the function of repressing any opposition to this plan, thus abolishing the Palestinian national movement and bringing about the 'Kurdisation of the Palestinian question', as Azmi Bishara formerly coined the term. That assumption has proved to be wrong.

Palestinian resistance fightersThe Intifada has erupted precisely because the Palestinians refused to play the role assigned to them in Oslo and to accept the humiliating proposals of Clinton and Barak at Camp David and Taba. It indicates the awakening of the national popular forces that seemed dormant during the 7 years since Oslo. During this time, the entire *67 Occupied Territories were covered with settlements and split by roads, that have been the central elements for their fragmentation into a Bantustan state. The Intifada however, which is led by all Palestinian political organisations including Fatah and supported by almost the entire populace, marks the breaking away from the Oslo framework and the efforts to establish an alternative agenda to its*peace negotiations', which proved to be but a cover for the continuity of the Israeli occupation. The entire people with their popular leadership which developed here and fought against the occupation, have now returned to the path of resistance, which at the same time includes critical positions towards the Tunis bourgeois, bureaucratic leadership and the authoritarian regime that has emerged under their rule.

It is this struggle for liberation that Sharon's government is determined to destroy in the current offensive. The professed aim of *dismantling the terrorist infrastructure' has nothing to do with the premeditated, systematic demolition of the minimal infrastructural means of carrying on daily life such as PA ministries and institutions, roads, hospitals, schools and electricity and water networks and demolishing of houses of the civil population. Indeed, Israel has declared total war on the Palestinians as a civic and national entity along with a decision to finish with Arafat who has come to symbolize the national movement which is now under attack, and with the PA which is the creation of the Oslo framework. Sharon has refused to obey the demand of US president Bush to immediately stop the operation and retreat to the areas in which Israeli troops have been situated prior to the*Defensive Wall' operation. It seems that even the ceasefire mission of US secretary of State, Colin Powell is doomed to fail, and that he is going to let Sharon complete the operation until *the infrastructure of terror is dismantled.'* This indicates that within the parameters set by the US for Israel's policies, Israel has a relative free hand in selecting the time and methods of implementing the joint strategic goals of both states. In the post-Oslo era, Israel is returning to a version of direct colonial rule. This time however Israel cunningly attempts to only take over security responsibility in Area A' (since Areas B and C - representing 82% of the West Bank - are already beneath Israeli security control) thus leaving

the Palestinians to take care of their daily needs (senior political commentator Akiva Eldar, Haaretz, April 11), apparently beneath the strangling conditions Israel imposes on them. As emphasized by Sharon, this situation will continue until an alternative responsible Palestinian leadership will be found', which apparently can arise only after the Palestinian national movement is abolished. The opening of Sharon's government to the extreme-Right National Religious Party (now headed by the fanatic messianic Brigadier (res.) Efi Eitam who is preaching for 'Transfer' of the Palestinians), and to David Levi (Gesher') together with the forthcoming re-entrance of the right-wing extremist Avigdor Liberman, aims at ensuring a majority in the government for the implementation of the re-conquest plan, with or without the Labour party. {{Q Will the Israeli government succeed in catching or killing all the Palestinian activists/militants?}} <img721|left> {{A}} We have to be careful not to play into Israeli hands and present the brutal onslaught on the civilian population and infrastructure, as if it is aimed only at catching the alleged terrorists' whom the army can identify according to a list of names at their disposal. As the Israelis themselves emphasize it is the 'terror infrastructure' they are after, which is a very blurred concept and one that includes political leaders as well as military commanders, like Maruan Barghouti (Fatah) [who was arrested after this interview] and Ahmed Sa'adat the general secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) who is currently hiding in the besieged Arafat compound. Thus the Israeli media, when announcing a number of Palestinians killed (not often), takes care to emphasize that they had been 'armed', as if the participation of civilians in defending their camp or neighbourhood justifies depicting them as 'terrorists'. Of course, catching the 'heavy' wanted persons has been one of the aims of this military attack. Indeed according to Israeli officials, the hundreds who have been killed and the four thousand who have been arrested during the first two weeks of the invasion (one thousand of them have been released to date) include 300 wanted activists. However, the success in catching these activists and the demolition of some 'laboratories' in which weapons have been produced cannot stop the resistance, including its military operations and suicide bombers, as has been already proved by the bombing operations near Haifa and in Jerusalem, and the military attacks on settlers and soldiers which took place while the Israeli military operation continues.

A senior military command estimated that the 'terror infrastructure' can be rebuilt in four months time and thus, as Israeli commentators emphasize, in a very short time the army is bound to reenter the Palestinian cities (which at the time these words are written, it has not yet withdrawn from) and the entire area A and commit a harsher military offensive than the present. Moreover, this may be the opportunity for Sharon to finally commit the 'big blow' which will light the fire in the North as well, and under whose pretext Israel would try to finish once and for all with the Palestinian 'problem'. {{Q I suppose the long term aim of the Israeli government is to mount the pressure on the majority of the Palestinian population in order to make them leave the country'}. Is this what the government is trying to do: Putting into practice the politics of transfer without describing it in this way?

**A** The policies which are aimed at making the life of the Palestinian population unbearable in order either to make them surrender or leave the country, has been adopted by all Israeli governments, both Likud and Labour. However, Sharon's plan of mass expulsion of Palestinians under the cover of 'the stormy circumstances' of the coming 'premeditated big blow', has never been pronounced publicly. Until around two years ago, the explicit call for 'transfer' has been looked upon as a 'barbaric' idea to which only the marginal messianic circles held. This is not any more the case. The unified government of Sharon-Peres has included within it the 'Transfer Party- Moledet' whose leader (Gandi) was killed by members of the military wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Also the recent entrance into the government and the 'security' cabinet of the above mentioned General (Res.) Efi Eitam who calls for transfer of Palestinians has not been considered by Labour a sufficient reason for leaving this extremist Right government. Moreover, transfer of Palestinians has become a legitimate topic of discussion in the Israeli media and among different circle of academics and research centres. These plans include the expulsion of the Palestinian citizens of Israel as well, whose national identity and solidarity with the struggle for liberation of their brothers in the 1967 occupied territories has been strengthening rapidly. Moreover, a total change has been taking place in their political demands regarding the relations between the Palestinian minority and the Jewish-Zionist state. Inspired by the National

Democratic Alliance movement (Tajamu), they no longer suffice in calling for equality in civil rights, but also demand the recognition of their collective rights as a Palestinian national minority. This demand constitutes a genuine challenge to the definition of Israel as a 'Jewish state' which almost the entire Jewish population of Israel perceives as the essence of Zionism and which even amongst those termed 'Left' find wholehearted adherence and identification. Moreover, the prevailing interpretation of the 'Jewish state' definition is the notion of a numerical majority of Jews which is claimed to be a necessary condition for sustaining the 'Jewish identity' of Israel, and whose violation puts in danger that of the entire Jewish people. This interpretation is doomed to bring its followers, including those amongst the 'Zionist Left' who genuinely believe in the two states solution, to support policies aiming at fighting the 'demographic danger' of a Palestinian majority, through different policies of oppression aiming at encouraging Palestinians to leave, including that of 'inevitable' ethnic cleansing. (as recent articles by Israeli "peace-seekers" Amos Oz (novelist) and Benny Morris (historian) attest). {Q Who are the potential allies for a long term policy for a real alternative? Are there political movements/organisations that can be won for such a perspective?} {A} At present, there are no political forces among the Jewish population in Israel which can lead the struggle against the US-Israeli colonialist project. All Jewish political parties actually represent the interests of the Ashkenazi [[Jews of European origin]] capitalist class and the Ashkenazi bourgeoisie whose hegemony has not been seriously challenged yet. Not only is there no difference between the neo-liberal ideologies of 'Right and Left' but also it is precisely the Labour Party which has led the Oslo policy, that serves as their political home. The Zionist ideology with the notion of the Jewish state at its centre which constitutes the hegemonic ideology of Israel, has proved a successful tool in uniting the Jewish population, including the working class, behind the ongoing Zionist colonialist project.

The Israeli working class is split along national and ethnic lines. The Mizrahim Jews, [1] who (together with the Palestinian citizens of Israel) comprise the majority of the lower layers of the proletariat lack any independent organisations that express their economic, social and cultural oppression. Their past cooptation by the Labour has been replaced by the political Right, now with the help of the false leadership of the apparent 'Mizrahi' party of Shas. The entire working class, both Jews and Palestinian Arabs lack even trade unions which fight for their minimal basic rights as workers. The past powerful Histadrut, which traditionally has served the needs of Zionism in cooperation with Jewish capital is now serving the sheer interests of 'The big Committees', which comprise largely the Ashkenazi elite of the organised working class.

What is mistakenly named the 'Left' in Israel refers only to those within the Jewish population who support a 'political solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict' which includes the 'concessions' of withdrawal to the 1967 borders' and the creation of a 'Palestinian state' - with different opinions regarding the fate of the settlements and the extent of the indirect control that Israel will have on the Palestinian entity. Most of them have wholeheartedly accepted the Oslo agreements, while ignoring the Bantustan nature of the solution which was offered by them. No real soul searching regarding the essence of Oslo has been committed by even the 'more radical' sector which constitutes a minority of the peace camp. This minority adheres to the belief that the failure of Oslo has been a result of Israel's violation of both its written articles and the 'understandings' on which Oslo was founded. The peace camp mainly consists of Zionist Ashkenazi middle class whose fight for the 'end of occupation' and the establishment of a Palestinian state (with different meanings attributed to these slogans) are generally not contextualised or couched within any comprehensive anti-imperialist perspective, any understanding and challenge of Israel as a US client state in the region and the US as the prime supporter of the Israeli occupation. Nor are these 'Leftists' in opposition to capitalist globalisation and the neo-liberal policies of Israel's economy. For too long the anti-Zionist socialist analysis has concentrated largely on the prevailing slogans and confessed values and self images within the Israeli peace camp, as the main basis for explaining their political positions and has drawn from them alone conclusions regarding their main potential allies. Thus we too often have forgotten to insert into our analysis the basic Marxist assumptions regarding the inter-relationships between their membership in the hegemonic bourgeoisie Ashkenazi class, and their interests in keeping this hegemony through the 'Jewish state' and the Bantustan regime it would govern in the whole of historic Palestine. Their class origin as well as their Zionist ideology makes them incapable of leading the

democratic struggle here, which is a condition for the implementation of Palestinian national rights. Moreover, if we stop seeing in their consciousness and declared motives, the only explanation for their political behaviour we shall find out that their European origin and class belonging which makes them benefactors of the different versions of the Bantustan solutions offered till now, is a significant factor in determining the allies they search for among the Palestinians.

Thus, even the more radical sector of the Israeli Peace camp has, till the current military offensive (which will reshuffle the relations of forces within the Palestinian leadership), been committed to the bureaucratic leadership of the PA, most of whom Arafat brought when he returned from Tunis and remain alienated from the popular strata in the refugee camps and villages, student and labourers who are the backbone of the resistance. The Israeli peace camp has preferred to disregard the rise of local leaders who represent the revived spirit of the Palestinian national movement, which embodies the seeds of social and political transformation of the corrupted autocratic regime which has emerged under the PA as well.

### **Q What role do the Palestinian citizens in Israel play? Are they of any importance concerning the fight for an alternative?**

**A** The Palestinian citizens of Israel are oppressed both in national and class terms and are assigned no share in [peace dividends' of the era of capitalist globalisation of the New Middle East'](#). They have emerged as the only genuine democratic force in the Israeli political scene who seriously challenge the Jewish Zionist state. Inspired by the National Democratic Assembly party, headed by MK (member of Knesset) Azmi Bishara, they have increasingly taken a step forward from the traditional demand for [equality of citizen rights' to that of collective rights as a national minority'](#).

This demand negates the very foundations of the Jewish state, as emphasized by ex Prime Minister Ehud Barak in the midst of the hot public debate which took place after the October 2000 militant demonstrations in which 13 Palestinian citizens of Israel were killed by the police: "We, as a Jewish state, can agree to equality of individual rights of Arabs which does not harm the democratic Jewish-Zionist state. But the Jewish state cannot accept the aspiration to define another national collective identity within it, with the long run vision of [a state of all its citizens' held by extremists"](#). [The strengthening of the national identity of the 1948 Palestinians and their growing solidarity with their brothers' and sisters' resistance in the 1967 occupied territories, indeed may grow to be a threat to the Jewish state which is the embodiment of the Zionist movement. The question of Palestine has been for decades defined only in terms of the 1967 occupied territories \(including by the majority of the Israeli Left\)](#)'), which it is said, can be solved by the two state solution. The atomisation and marginalisation of the Palestinian citizens of Israel has been mistakenly taken for granted, as has been proved when they boycotted the last general elections and during the 18 months that have passed since the outbreak of the Intifada. Moreover, the assumption that underlined the very 1947 UN decision to partition Palestine that the destruction of the entire Palestinian National movement could be easily achieved, has proved false as well. Thus after more than 50 years since the establishment of the state of Israel, we have witnessed the return of the old concerns of Imperialism and Zionism that an uncontrolled uprising of a united Palestinian people in Israel and in the 1967 occupied territories will stir the oppressed masses in the Arab countries and in the entire Middle East.

This growing awareness of the false assumptions regarding the Palestinians in Israel, is the reason for the war that has been opened recently by the Israeli establishment against the Palestinian leadership and citizens within Israel, who have been defined as a 'time bomb'. No doubt, a second front has been opened by the Palestinians inside Israel against the Zionist implementation of the apartheid regime throughout historic Palestine, which may prove to be no less important than the struggle of the Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories. That is why I have concluded that anti-Zionist internationalists and socialists among the Jewish population should support this growing genuine nationalist stream among the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Indeed, their members are not committed to class politics, or to socialist programs regarding the future of Palestine. But their nationalism should be estimated according to the

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only criterion that true internationalists should adopt in deciding whether any national movement is progressive, namely its challenging imperialism (which in Israel/Palestine equals the struggle against the Zionist project), as Aijaz Ahmed emphasizes in his book *Lineages of the Present* (p.300): "I have long been very suspicious of nationalism, because a great many nationalists strike me as at least very chauvinistic if not altogether fascist. But the blanket contempt for all nationalisms tends to slide over the question of imperialism. I think that they who are fighting against imperialism cannot just forego their nationalism"...

The daily struggles led by the Palestinians in Israel against the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state as well as the struggle of the 1967 Palestinians for liberation is at the same time a struggle against US imperialism in the region. Therefore joining them as well as accepting their leading role in determining the agenda of the Jewish radical circles in Israel is the most progressive democratic assignment confronting internationalists.

*Questions asked by Daniel Berger for German Inprekorr, and for Avanti (monthly paper of the German socialist organisation, the RSB)*

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[1] Jews of Middle Eastern origin