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Pal^estine

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the era of military globalisation

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The political process in which Palestinians and Israelis found themselves at the end of the 1991 Gulf War was an aspect of the then US global policy to stabilize the post-cold war world. The process in the Middle East was linked to similar processes in Europe, Africa, Asia and Central America of negotiating solutions to cold-war conflicts.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/05_US_troops.jpg]

Despite the establishment of a quasi-independent Palestinian entity in the OPT, for the Palestinian public the process after September 1993 meant the loss of employment as a consequence of the permanent closure, growing poverty and a rapid slow-down in the economy. At the same time, there was a parallel development of monopolies that controlled and suffocated the Palestinian economy.

Internal contradictions in Israel surrounding the neo-liberal policies adopted by Israel and the PA, in addition to the weakness of the latter, prevented the full accomplishment of the de-colonization process in the OPT.

The Rabin government was unwilling to propose alternatives to settlement building and as a matter of fact the construction of colonies continued unabated, only now financed by private capital. The growing social gap between the poorer and richer in Israel created a front against the peace process such that by 1994, the country found itself on the edge of a civil war.

The end of the Oslo process

The assassination of Rabin was a turning point in Israeli politics. Immediately after the assassination, the Oslo elite began searching for a new national consensus that would maintain the neo-liberal policies while adapting them to a neo-colonial offensive against the PA. The PA would be forced to accept a dictate that would preserve the cohesiveness of the Israeli society, expressed as an agreement between the contradicting sections of the Israeli ruling classes. The new Israeli consensus was an attempt to square the circle: it agreed to continuing with the political process vis-à-vis the PA, Syria and Lebanon, but this process could not damage the settlement enterprise in the OPT and the Occupied Syrian Golan Heights. The short-lived governments of Peres, Netanyahu and Barak assumed that it would be possible to dictate an agreement to the Palestinians that would not damage the agreed national consensus. They disagreed on how much it would be possible to force the Palestinians to give up. The Palestinian popular resistance made this project impossible and the political society in Israel collapsed.

The project of Ehud Barak was the most pretentious: to lead the Palestinian leadership to sign a final agreement based on this aforementioned consensus. The other alternative was to impose this agreement by force.

The domestic social tensions in the Palestinian society, the popular rejection of the corrupted monopolizing policies of the PA and its continuous cooperation with Israeli policies led in September 2000 to the uprising.

For Barak, the uprising seemed at the beginning to be a means of salvation. He could use the 'state of emergency' created by a 'rejectionist Arafat' to consolidate popular support to his government for a "war that we didn't choose." But it was Sharon that would capitalize the move of Barak.

Globalising the war

Sharon came to power in 2001 with an old megalomaniac vision of the Middle East: Israel has the power, and ultimately the right, to re-shift the ME geopolitics in order to secure its vital and other interests.

Ariel Sharon, expressing an old scheme of thought in the army ranks, has no political project for the future of the region; in his eyes, the scope of Israeli control are the limits set by international or military pressures. On the internal front both Sharon and the army work to neutralize the government, the high court and the parliament as forms of competing state institutions.

Sharon's domestic and international policies are based on the concept of 'state of emergency.' In the domestic arena, 'the war against terror' neutralizes potential opposition forces such as parts of the government, the parliament and the supreme court, because those institutions are a luxury for times of peace. The press is being cleansed of critical (described as anti-national) elements. In the international arena, Sharon has no problem in extending the 'state of emergency' to neighbouring countries and leading the region toward war with the objective of securing Israeli supremacy.

But the 'state of emergency' is an aim by itself. It alone can secure national consensus and social cohesiveness while preserving neo-liberal policies. The 'war against terror' becomes a need for national survival that cancels the debate on the future of the settlements, the economic distress, increasing unemployment and ethnic tensions when the Prime Minister turns directly to the fearful 'people.'

September 11, 2001 was a turning point in the US administration politics toward the Middle East. Prior to this date the US conceived the stability of the region on the assumptions from the end of the Gulf War: a pro-US Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia, conducting normal relations with Israel. After this date, and specifically after the decision to open a new massive attack in Iraq with or without Arab support, the public balance of power started to shift toward a clear preference of Israel over the Arab partners. Or, and it seems more accurate, using Israel to further undermine the basic assumptions of Arab nationalism.

In his visit to Israel, US defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld attacked one of the last remaining concepts of Arab nationalism: the very existence of a Palestinian cause. During a question-and-answer session with military and civilian workers he stated that 'my feelings about the so called occupied territories are that there was a war, Israel argued neighbouring countries not to get involved in it once it started. They all jumped in and they lost a lot of real estate to Israel, because Israel prevailed in the conflict' (Jerusalem Post, August 7, 2002).

However, the scope of US policies can not be understood simply on basis of the lack of US criticism against Israeli occupation policies or in the context of the historical support the US administration supplies to Israel. The real link is on a common view of the 'state of emergency' declared in the framework of a 'war on terrorism':

"What's hard for some to understand about this new war of the 21st century is that these are people being treated like international criminals, and so it's like we're on a manhunt. And the United States is working closely with our friends and we have hauled in over a couple of thousand of these folks. They've been arrested and detained. Some of them are in our possession, others are with other countries. Some of the terrorists haven't been quite as lucky as those who have been detained and arrested." (George Bush speech in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, August 14, 2002).

The 'state of emergency' is above politics and above the parliamentary bargaining, as stated by President Bush in the same speech: "It's important for our war on terror that they not play politics with the defense appropriations bills." The President also personalizes the protection of the citizens and their rights. In the words of George Bush Jr.: "My most

important job, I think, is to make sure that I protect - do everything I can to protect the homeland and make sure that an enemy which hates freedom doesn't hit us again." (ibid.)

In this international 'state of emergency' to protect freedom and liberties, the first victims are actually this freedom, liberties and human rights. The detainees in Guantanamo are a frightening example of this new conception of human rights. However, the freedom to disagree and to have political ideas that do not conform with the ruling party might be labelled support of terrorism, such as the way the Spanish PSOE and PP relate to the outlawing of Batasuna and allied social organizations.

The war and after

The interest of the movement for a different globalisation concerning the fate of the Palestinian people goes beyond solidarity with an oppressed nation. Since September 11, Israel has become a laboratory for a global 'state of emergency'. We can see policies - tested by Israel on a local scale - being implemented globally. We should not be surprised if in the framework of the 'war against terror', as it develops, collective punishment against relatives of alleged 'terrorists,' denial of due process and citizenship, massive home demolitions, destruction of crops and other measures that are implemented today by Israel will be used in other countries (again, it is important to see the Spanish law against terror and the process to outlaw Batasuna). In the global war against terrorism, the entire human race became like the Palestinians.

In the regional scale, we can see how the US administration has adopted Sharon's megalomaniac vision that is it possible to re-shift the Middle Eastern geopolitics by force. The next step in the agenda is the attack on Iraq. If we don't struggle to abort this attack before it happens, then we will face a further erosion of our rights and freedoms.

There is also a Palestinian chapter in the war on Iraq. It is quite possible that Israel will exploit an attack on Iraq in order to achieve a terminal solution to the Palestinian uprising. This attempt might take the shape of the elimination of the current Palestinian leadership and a later ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, either within the territory or to neighbouring countries.

On a regional scale, there are even rumours of a possible use of nuclear weapons if Israel is attacked. In reality, military analysts in the Israeli press deal daily with both topics: the ethnic cleansing and the use of nuclear weapons.

The scope of the Israeli threat to use nuclear weapons goes beyond the war in Iraq and is another tool to force the region into a 'state of emergency.' The Israeli security establishment has made a general statement that it is considering using nuclear weapons in case of an attack. Israel may be attacked by Iraq in the context of a war in the Gulf, and may also be attacked by an Arab coalition in case of ethnic cleansing in the OPT (an Arab response similar to the NATO response in Yugoslavia to the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo). The aim of the threat to use nukes is to intimidate the Arab regimes not to respond to a possible ethnic cleansing in the OPT.

The US establishment begins to face a need to re-adapt its politics to a more realistic view of Middle East. The attitude of Europe and the broad opposition in the Arab countries has started to impact Washington. As a matter of fact, the last ally in the coalition against Iraq is Israel. There are some wise voices in the US administration that understand that this is not enough - in this case all the risk will be on US shoulders, as well as all the financial burden.

The task is to oppose the war

It is urgent today to create an international state of emergency against the war. To raise the domestic price to be paid in case of a military intervention in Iraq. The objective is to make the breach in the US administration grow. The internationalisation of the Palestinian cause should be central: we should make the test case fail.

There are today three urgent topics on the agenda:

1 To de-legitimise the nuclear discourse of Israel along with the ethnic cleansing discourse.

To create campaigns that focus on the ongoing legitimisation of the discourse of ethnic cleansing and the use of nuclear weapons. To build a clearing house that will denounce those discourses internationally. To create watch task-forces on practices of localized situations of ethnic cleansing (south Hebron for example) that will visit the region and report/lobby local governments. To lobby the media with information.

2 To fight for the empowerment of the institutions of international legitimacy (such as the UN).

To demand the empowerment of international regulation institutions in the ME such the UN, to demand that a UN delegation on human rights will arrive to the OPT. To demand that country official and unofficial delegations will visit the OPT. To demand the opening of country/semi-official NGOs delegations in the OPT.

3 To fight the new-impunity stated by Israel and the US.

Both the US and Israel preserve the impunity of their armed forces. It is urgent to start building cases for the ICC and to use local legislation in cases of impunity all the time the ICC regulations remain unclear. To build a clearing house on war crimes in the ME.

Of course nothing can substitute for broad and mobilized popular actions against the war in the ME and in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle.