

Palestinian Narrative Program

برنامج السردية الفلسطينية

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THE PALESTINIAN NARRATIVE PROGRAM: Palestine and the Palestinians

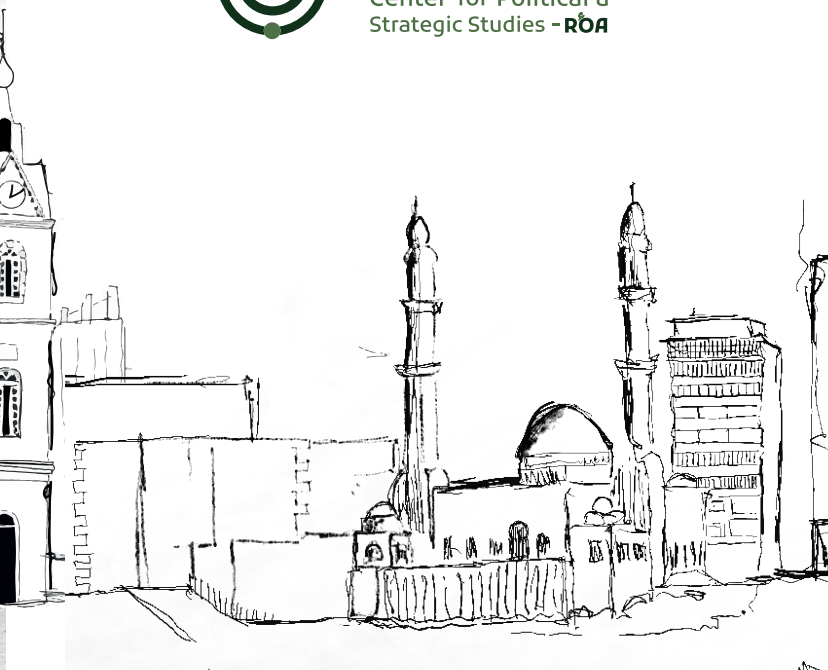
Dr. Johnny Mansour



**رؤى - مركز الدراسات
السياسية و الإستراتيجية**
Center for Political &
Strategic Studies - **RÖA**



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One People, One History.

Palestine from the Late 19th Century to the Nakba of 1948

This chapter reviews the key historical milestones in the journey of the Palestinian people as they resisted the settler-colonial project carried out by the Zionist movement with open support from Britain and other Western states. The Palestinian people had to resist this project using all means possible. This confrontation was not limited to the political, social, geographical and intellectual dimensions of colonial control. Another front also emerged: the struggle against the Zionist-Israeli narrative, which seeks to present the Zionist project as a historical right of the Jewish people to Palestine while denying the Palestinian people any right to their own land.

From that point onward, Palestinians found themselves compelled to assert their human, historical and civilizational right to their homeland.

This chapter sheds light on the most prominent historical milestones and on the Palestinians' enduring determination to confront every attempt that tried to uproot them or erase their history that extends back thousands of years.

The Palestinian struggle therefore became inseparable from the effort that affirm their existence and historical presence in their homeland in the face of the settler colonial occupation, and its policies and repressive tools.

The history of Palestine between 1897 and 1948 represents a period of profound political, economic and social change. During this period, Palestine moved from nearly four centuries of Ottoman rule, from 1516 to 1918, into a colonial «mandate» led by Britain, from 1918 to 1948. This phase paved the way for the establishment of the Zionist entity, Israel, on Palestinian land, after Britain had provided it with legal, political, economic and military infrastructure. The establishment of Israel was a central factor in destroying Palestinian life and forcing a large part of the Palestinian people into refugees inside and outside their homeland.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict¹ began in 1897, with the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, and continues to the present day. It is considered an essential part of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict and of the crises and wars this conflict has generated in the Middle East over many decades.

There is no doubt that this conflict is closely linked to the rise of Zionism, waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine, the settlement movement there, and the role played by major powers such as Britain, the United States and France in strengthening the Zionist project of establishing a Jewish state on Palestinian land.

Many scholars argue that this conflict lies as the root cause of the region's crises and instability. The historical period extending from the late 19th century to the first quarter of the 21st century shaped the features of the region and its people, bringing about numerous radical changes within the region itself and in its relations with other states and nations.

In the late 19th century, Zionist associations emerged in a number of European cities calling for the "return to Zion". These associations became known as Hovevei Zion, or the "Lovers of Zion". They called for the establishment of a national state for the Jews, and many Zionists believed that this state should be located in the same place as the historical Jewish state based on religious claims drawn from biblical texts; the area known as historic Palestine. At that time, Palestine was part of the Ottoman Empire and was inhabited by Palestinian Arabs, who made up around 94% of its total population, while Jewish people accounted for only 5-4%.

At this congress, Theodor Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement and one of its earliest leading figures, came to prominence. The Basel Program was formulated at the congress, officially and clearly declaring, for the first time, the objective of the Zionist movement: to seek the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine under public law.

Palestine was therefore no longer merely the "Holy Land" in the dominant religious imagination of Jewish communities in Europe. It had become a political objective of settler colonialism, with confrontation with its indigenous inhabitants, who had only just begun to formulate their modern national identity.

The Palestinian response was not delayed. Over the decades that followed this congress, Palestinian leaders expressed their definitive rejection of turning Palestine into a Jewish state. Their national and Arab identity began to take shape, and, as we shall see, they sought to confront both the Zionist and the British colonial projects.

Western states viewed these projects as part of their various interests in the Middle East and as a colonial base for dominating and controlling the region's resources, foremost among them; oil.

1 The term "conflict" will be used throughout this paper to refer to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In other words, the Israel-Palestine situation is understood as Palestine being subjected to Israeli, Zionist, settler colonialism.

The Great Arab Revolt

Sharif Hussein bin Ali launched the revolt against the Ottoman Empire in 1916 in the name of all Arabs. The principles of the Great Arab Revolt had been formulated through an understanding between Hussein and the leaders of Arab societies in the Levant and Iraq, in an Arab national covenant with its main aim: to achieve Arab independence and establish a united Arab state. Palestine was among the territories that would form part of this anticipated state. Through the Hussein-McMahon correspondence of 1915, the British Government promised the Arabs recognition of their independence in return for their participation in the war alongside the Allies against the Turks (Ottoman Empire).

The Great Arab Revolt contributed to shifting the Palestinian political trajectory from “demanding reforms” within the Ottoman state, as other Arabs and non-Arabs had done, to “pursuing full independence” within an Arab national project launched by Sharif Hussein.

Significantly, the revolt helped mobilize Palestinian political awareness and action in the formation of Palestinian national identity and broader Arab national identity.

Before the revolt, the prevailing demand among the Palestinian political elites had been to secure Arab rights while preserving the existing framework of the Ottoman state. The revolt, however, offered a political alternative: a transition from “Ottomanism” to “Arabism”. On the ground, Palestinians adopted the flag and slogans of the revolt, and the goal became to join an “independent Arab kingdom” that would include the Levant, the Hijaz and Iraq.

Another point that should be noted is the emergence of an awareness of a shared destiny. Palestinians realized that their cause was not merely a local issue, but part of a broader struggle to restore Arab sovereignty over Arab land. However, Palestinians and Arabs alike, faced Britain’s hegemonic policies, which obstructed the path of Arab unity and the role of Palestine and the Palestinians within it through the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916 and the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement: Preventing Arab Unity

This agreement was concluded in secret between France and Britain, with the approval of the Russian Empire, to divide the northern part of the Arab lands, namely Iraq and the Levant, between France and Britain. Its aim was to determine spheres of influence in the Arab Orient after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which had historically controlled the region, after its defeat in the First World War.

It was decided that the area later carved out of southern Syria and known as Palestine (Southern Syria) would be placed under international administration, excluding the Negev Desert, through consultations between Britain, France and Russia.

Sharif Hussein was granted rule over the Hijaz region only. This stands as clear evidence of Britain’s political maneuvering in its “agreements” with the Arabs and their leaders during the First World War, and of the insincerity of its promises.

The Balfour Declaration

The Great Arab Revolt was the driving force that brought Palestinians into direct confrontation with the colonial reality. This became clear after British Foreign Secretary «Arthur Balfour» issued a declaration bearing his name in 1917. The declaration recognized the Jewish people as a nation and affirmed their right to establish a state in Palestine, in which the British Government pledging to assist them in achieving the said state. In the same declaration, however, Britain did not recognize the existence of the Palestinian people. Instead, it treated them as non-Jewish communities deprived of political rights.

Here, Palestinians came face to face with the contradiction in Britain's promises. They discovered that the "McMahon pledges" made to Sharif Hussein regarding independence contradicted the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration.

As a result, Palestinians were deeply disillusioned, leading to the outbreak of a three-decade struggle against British colonialism.

The transformations that took place after the First World War can also be understood through the way the Great Arab Revolt in Palestine shifted to a distinctly Palestinian national movement, one that focused all its efforts on confronting the British "Mandate" and the Zionist project.

The Mandate for Palestine: International Cover

To give legal cover to the Balfour Declaration, Britain sought to issue the "Mandate for Palestine" under the League of Nations in 1922. The Mandate included several measures that Britain, as the Mandatory Power, was required to implement. Among these, were facilitating the establishment of the Jewish national home in Palestine, recognizing the Jewish Agency as a representative body for Jews, and recognizing the Hebrew language, Jewish holidays and other measures that strengthened the Zionist project.

The "Mandate" for Palestine was a step towards international recognition of Jewish rights in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration and the Mandate became the two main driving forces that moved Palestinian national action from "elite protest" to "comprehensive national and institutional struggle". While The Balfour Declaration was the "promise", the Mandate was the "executive instrument". This existential pressure exerted on Palestinians compelled them to formulate their national project in order to confront this colonial-Zionist alliance.

The Palestinian response came through regular national congresses, beginning in 1919 and continuing until the seventh congress in 1928, to represent the Palestinian people before the international community. This came in response to the Mandate's recognition of the "Jewish Agency" as an official body and its disregard for the Arabs.

Palestinians adopted a policy of "non-cooperation", which was close to a policy of boycott and resistance. They refused to participate in the proposed Mandate Legislative Council in 1923, because participation would have meant recognizing the Mandate and its Zionist promises. Tensions in Palestine began to rise, and several popular uprisings broke out throughout the 1920s, the most prominent of which was the al-Buraq Uprising of 1929.

The Great Palestinian Revolt: From Protest to Arms

Palestinians realized that diplomacy and any petitions submitted to Britain, based on its promises to the Arabs, were of no use, as Britain had willingly bound itself to the Mandate. At this point, the Palestinian struggle began to shift from "peaceful" struggle to "armed" struggle. This phase began with the movement led by Izz ad-Din al-Qassam in Haifa. He formed clusters of resistance fighters, armed and trained them in the forests of Carmel, before a confrontation broke out between them and the British forces in the forests of Ya'bad in 1935. Al-Qassam and several of his comrades were martyred by British occupation forces and their collaborators.

The struggle then expanded when the Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the leading Palestinian figure at the time, declared the general strike of 1936. The strike had a major impact, as it was accompanied by a boycott of British and Zionist goods. Britain then turned to Arab kings and princes to pressure the Palestinian leadership into ending the strike, claiming

that Britain had good intentions towards the Arabs. The opposite proved true: Britain confronted the revolutionaries with excessive violence, issued unjust martial-law orders against them, executed hundreds and burned entire villages.

The Great Palestinian Revolt of 1936-1939 is considered the true crucible in which "modern" Palestinian national identity was forged. It was the moment that moved national action from the "struggle of the elite" to the "struggle of the popular base". For this reason, the revolt was not merely a military rebellion, but a comprehensive reshaping of Palestinian society politically, socially and militarily.

For the first time, national leadership was institutionalized through the Arab Higher Committee, headed by the Mufti. The committee succeeded, for the first time, in uniting competing Palestinian parties under one umbrella.

The revolt also recorded the longest strike in modern history, lasting six months. It entrenched in the national consciousness the idea that "popular resistance" and economic disruption were weapons no less important than military arms in confronting projects of uprooting.

Before the revolt, the national movement had been concentrated in the cities, particularly Jerusalem, Haifa and Jaffa. With the outbreak of fighting in the mountains, the center of leadership shifted to the peasants, namely the mountain revolutionaries.

This shift broke down the class divisions between the urban *effendis* (elites) and the peasants of the villages. The peasant, with his steadfastness and *keffiyeh*, became the true symbol of resistance.

During the revolt, the leaders of the revolutionaries asked city residents to remove the *tarboush*, which symbolized the elite and association with the Ottomans, and to wear the *keffiyeh*, the garment of the peasants, in order to help disguise the *fedayeen* (revolutionaries).

The *keffiyeh* was transformed from a rural class garment into the global national symbol of Palestine. This shaping of symbolic consciousness turned a piece of clothing into a political tool that continues to identify the Palestinian cause in international forums to this day.

The strike was a tool of struggle used to confront the Mandate's policies, which were biased towards the Zionist side and against Palestinians. It was also a tool for demanding the Palestinian people's right to self-determination in their homeland.

In parallel with the development of the Palestinian struggle and resistance against the British and Zionist colonial projects, Zionist institutions intensified their efforts to establish their own administrative, economic and military institutions. They focused on collecting funds from Zionist lobbies in the West, purchasing weapons and developing Zionist military organizations in preparation for the brutal assault on Palestinians in the years that followed.

Partition Resolution No. 181

Britain made every effort to strip the Palestinian national movement of its military capacity by enacting laws, procedures and emergency orders during the Second World War. This weakened the Palestinian military side, while Jewish military organizations benefited from the war and from Britain's covert and overt cooperation.

After the Second World War, Britain found itself unable to administer Palestine for several reasons. These included financial and military exhaustion, as Britain had been economically drained by the cost of the Second World War and was unable to maintain a large army to confront Arab revolts on the one hand and the paramilitary operations of Zionist organizations, such as Irgun and Stern, on the other, which targeted the British troops.

Another reason was Britain's failure to reconcile and mediate between the two sides of the conflict in Palestine, despite the recommendations of the Peel Commission in 1937 to partition Palestine, which the Palestinians rejected.

This led Britain to refer the question of Palestine to the United Nations (previously called League of Nations), announcing that it was relinquishing the Mandate. Resolution No. 181 was then issued, calling for the partition of Palestine into an Arab state, a Jewish state and an international zone; Jerusalem and its surrounding area.

The Nakba of 1948

Arabs and Palestinians rejected the Partition Resolution, which granted the Jewish state around %55 of the land, while granting the Arab state %44. At that stage, Palestinians made up two thirds of the population of Palestine, while Jews made up the remaining third.

Zionist military organizations, such as the Haganah, Irgun and others, began launching brutal terrorist attacks on Palestinian villages and cities with the aim of seizing and depopulating them. The British Mandate Government turned a blind eye to the plans of these organizations and to their arms-smuggling operations. Britain had already announced its intention to end the Mandate in mid-May 1948.

Zionist organizations took advantage of the political and security “vacuum” that had begun to take shape in Palestine. They carried out massacres in several Palestinian villages and cities with the aim of expelling their inhabitants. The most prominent of these was the Deir Yassin massacre on 9th April 1948, which spread terror and fear across many Palestinian villages and cities.

The occupation of Palestinian cities, home to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, then followed in succession, most notably Haifa, Jaffa, Safad and Tiberias. In reality, despite limited weapons and weak capacity for confrontation, Palestinians themselves, with limited support from the Arab Liberation Army led by Fawzi al-Qawuqji, were able to resist many attacks carried out by Zionist military organizations.



The forced displacement of Tantura, 1948



Nahr al-Bared Camp, 1952

After the declaration of the establishment of Israel on 14 May 1948, the armies of the Arab states entered the war against "Israel", but suffered several defeats. This deepened the Palestinian *Nakba*; Israel occupied around 78% of Historic Palestine and carried out further expulsions, massacres, ethnic cleansing and the destruction of villages and entire neighborhoods in several cities to prevent displaced Palestinians from returning. Israel continued to do so even after the United Nations issued Resolution No. 194 on the "Right of Return" before the end of 1948.

The Effects of the Nakba on Palestinians and the Arab World

The Nakba brought about radical and structural transformations in the historical trajectory of the Palestinian people. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Refugeehood and diaspora: Around 800,000 Palestinians were displaced, equivalent to two thirds of the Palestinian people in 1948. They became refugees in the West Bank, Gaza and neighboring Arab countries, such as Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.
2. Palestinians of 1948 (meaning Palestinians who remained inside what became "Israel"): Around 150,000 Palestinians remained within the borders of what came to be known as the "State of Israel". They became a minority subjected to strict military rule until 1966.
3. Palestine was divided into three areas: the Palestinian lands on which Israel was established; the West Bank, which was annexed by Jordan and included the eastern part of Jerusalem and its Old City; and the Gaza Strip, which was placed under Egyptian administration. As a result, the geographical unity of Palestine was fragmented.

The Nakba's aftermath was devastating. The Israeli Government's initiation of the "Israelization" of Palestinian spaces through changing names from Arabic to Hebrew, beginning with villages, mountains, valleys, plains, streets and roads across most Palestinian locations. Its aim was to take control of historical and geographical consciousness and deny the historical connection between Palestine, and its people.

The destruction of major Palestinian cities also led to the loss of centers of cultural, economic and political production. Newspapers, printing presses, theatres, cultural and sports clubs, and major national companies disappeared. As a result, Palestinian urban centers were lost, and the society moved from the *city* to the *refugee camp*. The refugee camp soon became the new laboratory of national identity and resistance movements.

From Expulsion to Symbolic Return and the Oslo Accords (1948-1994)

The period from the Nakba of 1948 to the Oslo Accords of 1994 represents a phase of revival for Palestinian national identity. During this period, the Palestinian people moved from diaspora, despair and political disorientation to revolutionary reshaping and organization of the national liberation project, leading to international recognition of the Palestinian people's right to establish their state and to the search for political solutions.

This section reviews the most important political milestones in the history of Palestinians during this phase.

Palestinians experienced the shock and trauma of the Nakba collectively. From the geographical unity that had once brought them together, they were deliberately fragmented. Their priority became the struggle for survival and securing a livelihood.

Despite the hardship and difficulties Palestinians faced, their hearts yearned towards their homeland, Palestine. Small clandestine movements began to take emerge among students and refugees, such as the Arab Nationalist Movement and the early seeds of Fatah, in response to the marginalization of the Palestinian cause or its internationalization as merely a "refugee" issue.



Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, U.S. President Bill Clinton, and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization Yasser Arafat during the signing of the Oslo Accords, Washington, 1993.

The Establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (1964)

The Arab Summit in Cairo, and under the influence of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, decided to establish the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the political representative of the Palestinian people.

This step aimed to shape a Palestinian political entity that brings together its dispersed people, although in its early stages it remained under the umbrella of Arab regimes.

The PLO began to emerge as a representative political, military and resistance body to secure the return of the Palestinian people to their homeland. Ahmad Shukeiri was assigned head of the organization from 1964 to 1967, followed by Yasser Arafat from 1968 until his death in 2004.

The Naksa of 1967

The Naksa is also known as the "June War" or as the "Six-Day War" from Israel's perspective. In 1967, Israel occupied what remained of Palestine: the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

The radical transformation that followed the Arab defeat in this war was the rise of "independent *fedayeen* (resistance fighters) action". Palestinian resistance factions, foremost among them Fatah and later the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, came to dominate the PLO. Armed struggle became the only means of restoring land and the Palestinian dignity, achieving the right of return and establishing the Palestinian state.

In parallel, the Israeli occupation launched its settler colonial project in the Occupied Palestinian territories in order to create demographic change that would reduce the number of Palestinians in favor of Jewish supremacy. This policy led to the confiscation of vast areas of Palestinian land for the construction of Israeli illegal settlements, restrictions on Palestinian urban development and daily life, and the use of all measures of suppression, persecution and land seizure.

The Battle of Karameh (1968)

This battle carries a particular symbolism, as it helped correct some of the mistakes by the Arabs in the June War of 1967. Palestinian *fedayeen* and forces from the Jordanian army jointly confronted an Israeli attack on the town of Karameh, east of the Jordanian River. The Israeli army's aim was to crush the *fedayeen*, but it suffered a resounding defeat.

Amid this heated Arab and Palestinian scene in 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine carried out a series of resistance operations on Jordanian territory, in an attempt to move the Palestinian cause from international silence to the center of global attention. These operations, however, placed Jordan in an extremely sensitive position, both domestically and internationally. Confrontations then escalated, and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser intervened by announcing a mediation effort that led to the Cairo Agreement, under which *fedayeen* action moved from Jordan to Lebanon.

Black September (1970)

The events of Black September in 1970 were a result of a passing moment. Rather, they were the result of accumulated and ongoing tensions between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the armed Palestinian factions that had used the Jordanian territory as a base for their movements and operations against Israel. After the Naksa of June 1967, Palestinian resistance action moved to Jordan. The armed Palestinian presence expanded, creating a charged atmosphere in Jordanian cities with major Palestinian communities.

International Recognition and Yasser Arafat's Speech (1974)

The Arab Summit held in Rabat, Morocco, recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people. Yasser Arafat then delivered his famous speech at the United Nations, in which he repeated his well-known phrase: "Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand."

What distinguished this moment was that the Palestinian cause moved from being a question of "borders" or "refugees" to an internationally recognized cause of "national liberation".

Land Day (1976)

As noted earlier, around 150,000 Palestinians remained inside the territories that became Israel in 1948. They were subjected to harassment in various areas of life, as well as discriminatory and racist policies. Palestinians in Israel declared the Land Day strike on 30 March 1976 to express their rejection of land confiscation policies that had continued since the Nakba, and to demand their full political and civil rights. On that day, six Palestinians were killed in the Galilee and the «Triangle» area; a Palestinian region inside Israel lying west of the 4 June 1967 border and adjacent to the north-western West Bank. Land Day became an annual commemoration across Palestine and beyond, expressing rejection towards policies of oppression and suppression.

The Departure from Beirut (1982)

After the events of Black September in Jordan in 1970, the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and most of its armed factions moved to Lebanon. Palestinians in Lebanon, particularly in the camps and in southern Lebanon, found a new base from which to launch *fedayeen* action against the Israeli occupation. Once again, this Palestinian military presence created a "state within a state", raising concern among many Lebanese parties, particularly Christian forces, which viewed it as a threat to Lebanese sovereignty and to Lebanon's sectarian balance.

The Lebanese political scene in relation to the Palestinian presence took shape around two currents:

- The Lebanese National Movement, led by Kamal Jumblatt, along with leftist and nationalist parties, saw its alliance with the PLO as a driving force for its political project, which aimed to change Lebanon's sector
- The Lebanese right-wing forces, led by the Kataeb Party and other Lebanese parties, viewed the Palestinian presence as an existential threat. They sought to disarm the Palestinian factions and take control of the camps, considering Lebanese sovereignty to be the priority.

What had been expected then took place. The first spark of the Lebanese Civil War was ignited by the Ain El-Remmaneh bus incident on 13 April 1975. After an attempted assassination of Pierre Gemayel, leader of the Lebanese Kataeb Party, a bus carrying Palestinian passengers in the Christian-majority area of Ain el-Remmaneh came under heavy fire, killing many of them. This incident detonated the existing tensions in Lebanese society and turned the political conflict into a wide-scale armed confrontation.

As the circle of violence expanded, the Palestinian factions found themselves drawn into the fighting, not only because of direct clashes with right-wing militias, but also because of their close alliance with the Lebanese National Movement. It became difficult to separate the internal Lebanese conflict from the Palestinian-Lebanese conflict.

As the war continued, Palestinian camps became military targets. The Tel al-Zaatar and Jisr al-Basha camps were subjected to sieges and incursions, pushing the Palestinian factions to fully engage in defending their presence and positions. The war gradually turned into something resembling a long-term “war of attrition”, in which Palestinian organizations participated with their full military weight.

The Israeli Government exploited these conditions and invaded Lebanon in 1982 with the aim of eliminating the infrastructure of the PLO, which had been based in Lebanon, particularly West Beirut. The intense Israeli bombardment of Beirut caused a large number of civilian casualties and widespread destruction across most of its neighborhoods. This generated significant international pressure to reach a settlement that would end the siege and prevent a full-scale, devastating confrontation inside the city.

The US Government sent its envoy, Philip Habib, to negotiate an agreement for the evacuation of Palestinian fighters from Beirut. This represented the only available option to avoid the continuation of Israeli bombardment, which threatened to destroy the city.

The agreement resulted in PLO fighters and Palestinian leadership leaving Beirut peacefully, within a given time and with security guarantees.

The departure of the PLO and its fighters from Beirut plunged the national movement into political and military disorientation. However, the struggle gradually began to shift from the “outside”, the diaspora, to the “inside”, the occupied land, specifically the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The First Intifada

“The Intifada of Stones”

(1987)

The spark of the Intifada began in Jabalia in the Gaza Strip, before spreading across all of Palestine. It was marked by broad national participation and civil disobedience.

In reality, the Intifada restored the status of Palestinians within Palestinian centers of decision-making. This was reflected in widespread civil disobedience, including commercial strikes, school closures and refusal to pay taxes to the occupation. Alongside this, self-sufficiency became clearly visible, as “popular committees” were established to secure food, provide alternative education through secret national schools during the closure of educational institutions, and deliver health services while the occupation-imposed sieges on camps and cities.

There was also a significant emergence of “resistance literature”, poetry and folk songs that directly documented the Palestinian conditions. This meant documenting revolutionary action from the grassroots. As a result, the occupation was no longer acceptable, simply because it provided cheap workplaces for Palestinians. Rather, the Intifada made the occupation costly in economic, security and political terms before the world. The Intifada ended the illusions of integration or acceptance of the status quo. In doing so, it exposed an occupation that had tried to present itself with the propaganda of a humane and civilized state, when in fact this was nothing more than a major deception and attempts of historical fabrication.



Israel was humiliated before global public opinion, paving the way for Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic tracks and the start of secret, then public negotiations, that led to the Oslo Accords. It also led to growing recognition of Palestinians by international governments and institutions, recognizing the existence of a "nation", away from the title of "refugees" in need of temporary humanitarian solutions.

Palestinians were no longer waiting for liberation to come from abroad. Instead, they took the initiative and launched their revolution, the Intifada of Stones, from within their own land.

The Declaration of Independence in Algeria (1988)

During this declaration, the Palestine National Council declared the symbolic establishment of the "State of Palestine" and accepted United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish drafted and read out the Declaration of Independence in Algiers, and the text was adopted as a foundational document for the Palestinian state and its formation.

This declaration also amounted to the "official acceptance" of the -Ten Point Program- and the political two state solution; meaning recognition of the State of Israel in exchange for recognition of a Palestinian state on the June 1967 borders. This paved the way for the Madrid Peace Conference and later the Oslo Accords.

The Madrid Conference (1991): The Official Beginning of Negotiations

The conference was held in October 1991 through a US-Soviet initiative after the Second Gulf War. It aimed to end the Arab-Israeli conflict through politics and direct negotiations.

The significance of the conference for Palestinians lay in Israel's recognition of the Palestinian side. For the first time, Israel sat at the same table with a Palestinian delegation, although that delegation was part of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation and was subject to strict conditions that officially excluded members of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The conference enabled Palestinian leadership to emerge internally from Palestine. Skilled political leaders and negotiators, such as Haidar Abdel-Shafi, Faisal Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi, came to the forefront, reflecting the maturity of the national movement inside the occupied land and its readiness to confront the occupation politically.

The conference was based on the principle of "land for peace". It opened negotiation tracks between Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan-Palestine, in addition to committees concerned with shared issues such as water resources, refugees and the environment.

The “Interim” Oslo Accords (1993-1994)

The “interim” Oslo Accords, officially known as the “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements”, are considered the most controversial political turning point in the contemporary Palestinian history. The Accords moved the conflict from the spectrum of a “national liberation movement” in the diaspora to a “national authority” on the ground, causing a profound shock in Palestinian political and social consciousness.

The Oslo Accords were developed secretly while the Madrid Conference negotiations were taking place, through Norwegian mediation and under US supervision.

The motive behind these negotiations was the desire of the PLO leadership in Tunis, to return to the Palestinian land and bypass the Palestinian delegation that had emerged in Madrid. Israel also had a desire to find a Palestinian partner who would end the burden of the First Intifada.

What, then, were the foundations of this agreement?

- The PLO: It recognized Israel’s right to exist and renounced “terrorism” (armed struggle).
- Israel: It recognized the PLO as the “representative of the Palestinian people” and started a negotiation process with the PLO. This recognition is considered unequal, as the occupying state did not recognize, in that text, the Palestinians’ right to an independent state.

One consequence of implementing the interim agreement was the subsequent agreements; particularly Oslo II in 1995, in which the West Bank was fragmented into complex administrative and security areas;

Area A: Full Palestinian control, both security and administrative, including the major cities.

Area B: Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control.

Area C: Comprising around %60 of the West Bank and including the areas where illegal Israeli settlements and natural resources are located, under full Israeli control,

Oslo was described as a “gradual interim” agreement, as core issues such as the issue of the refugees, were postponed to final status negotiations to be held after five years. (Final status issues were: Jerusalem, refugees and the right of return, settlements, borders and water, and security).

One of the most significant outcomes of this agreement was that postponing urgent issues allowed Israel to change facts on the ground, while expanding its settler colonial project. Some Palestinians considered this a trap, while others saw “Oslo” as the beginning of an actual Palestinian state, or a state «on the way».

The “Palestinian Authority” from Oslo until the Death of President Arafat

The period from the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 until the death of President Yasser Arafat in 2004 is considered one of the most complex and transformative stages in contemporary Palestinian history. It marked the transition from a “revolution in the diaspora” to an “authority on the ground”.

Arafat was received by a large number of people upon his return to Gaza and Jericho in 1994, as he began forming the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, the security services and the ministries in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Attempts to Consolidate the Legitimacy of the Authority

The first elections were held in 1996, in which Arafat was elected President of the Palestinian National Authority. The Palestinian Legislative Council was also formed, giving the Authority a legal and democratic character.

However, the peace process began to deteriorate after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 and the rise of the Israeli rightwing, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, to power in 1996. Netanyahu adopted a hardline political position against any political agreement with the Palestinians. Internally, the Palestinian Authority faced criticism due to its shift to the concept of the “state” from the concept of the “revolution”. Especially from opposition Palestinian factions not represented in the PLO, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. This reflected serious political divisions.

Towards Confrontation and the Al-Aqsa Intifada of 2000

The Camp David Summit of July 2000 ended with the failure of final-status negotiations between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, under the sponsorship of US President Bill Clinton, over the issues of Jerusalem, refugees and borders.

The political scene witnessed severe tension, leading to the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the Al-Aqsa Intifada, in 2000 after Ariel Sharon's stormed into the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. The political scene shifted once again from negotiation to armed confrontation. Confrontations between Palestinians and the occupation expanded to include Palestinian communities inside Israel, also referred to in Palestinian discourse as the 1948 areas «Historical Palestine». 13 Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in the Galilee, the «Triangle Area» and Nazareth. The Israeli Government launched a military operation under the pretext of eradicating the "*fedayeen* operations" carried out by Palestinian factions inside Israel. The Israeli operation became known as "Operation Defensive Shield" in 2002. During it, Israel reoccupied West Bank cities and destroyed large parts of the Palestinian Authority's infrastructure, including security headquarters and service institutions.

collapse of the "Oslo option" and the emergence of an entirely new political reality on the ground, as Oslo excluded Palestinians of 1948, from the settlement process and the final-status equation.

2002-2006

The occupation army besieged President Arafat in his headquarters, the Muqata'a, in Ramallah from 2002 until his death in 2004, and considered him unsuitable as a party to negotiate.

The Arafat period was an attempt to build the nucleus of a state under an ongoing military occupation, an extremely unusual situation. The Palestinian Authority (PA) succeeded in building institutional, educational, health and cultural structures, but failed to achieve final political independence. This phase ended with the-

The Palestinian Authority over two Decades: (2005-2025)

The presidential elections of January 2005 resulted in Mahmoud Abbas winning around %62 of the vote. He carried a political program focused on a peaceful solution and the "doctrine of popular resistance" instead of armed struggle.

The Unilateral Withdrawal from the Gaza Strip

The Israeli Government, headed by Sharon, approved a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, dismantled Israeli settlements there, while imposing a siege on the Strip and tightening its control over it.

Internal Political Division and the Failure to Address It

Legislative Council elections were held in the areas of the Palestinian Authority, including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in 2006. The Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, achieved a major victory. Some elections-supporting countries rejected the elections' results and imposed a financial blockade on the PA. Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and all ministers affiliated with Hamas movement were then dismissed, leading to the emergence of the Palestinian political division of 2007. Palestinian geography and politics were divided between an authority in the West Bank and another in Gaza. This division remains in place to this day despite repeated reconciliation attempts, including the reconciliation meetings in Mecca, Cairo and Beijing, which all produced no results.

Internationalizing the Palestinian Cause

President Mahmoud Abbas turned his attention to seeking full membership in the United Nations and full recognition of the State of Palestine. In 2012, Palestine obtained the status of a "non-member observer State" at the United Nations by an overwhelming majority vote. Palestine subsequently joined the UNESCO and was acceded to the International Criminal Court in 2015. In theory, this opened the way for legal action against Israeli illegal settlement activity and Israeli violations against Palestinians and their occupied land. However, Israel was not prosecuted under international law for the following reasons:

The International Court of Justice and the United Nations lack an enforcement mechanism capable of preventing settlement activity or stopping it on the ground without the political will of Member States. A number of Member States, foremost among them the United States, provide full support to Israel through the constant exercise of the veto right. In addition, Israel refuses to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention on the grounds that are defined as the Palestinian territories, where Israel sees these territories as disputed territories rather than occupied territories. This political justification against legal definition prevent the implementation of international law. It is worth noting here that even Palestine's accession to the International Criminal Court did not enable it to prosecute Israeli officials. It should also be noted that the State of Palestine later received official recognition from most countries around the world, although this recognition has remained largely symbolic to this day.

A Closed Palestinian and International Horizon

Any Attempts to hold legislative and presidential elections in Palestine since the beginning of the division have failed. As a result, parliamentary and democratic life has been halted, along with any practices of freedom of expression that could have accompanied it.

Trump's first presidential term (2017-2021) in the US administration witnessed severe tension with the Palestinian Authority after the US embassy was moved to Jerusalem following the US recognition of Jerusalem as the "unified" capital of Israel. President Abbas then announced the severing of all political relations with Washington and rejected the US plan known as the "Deal of the Century", in its entirety. The deal provided the greenlight for an escalation of illegal settlement activity in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The Israeli Wars on Gaza

Since the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the Gaza Strip has witnessed a series of Israeli military assaults and wars that have turned it into one of the most areas faced with destruction and killing in the world. Israel's objectives during this stage were to weaken the military capabilities of the Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip, particularly the Hamas tunnels and the arms manufacturing and supply chain. Israel also sought to rebuild its deterrence (defense as the Israeli Officials call it), which had eroded as Hamas grew stronger in Gaza.

In addition, Israel declared that it wanted to end Hamas's existence as a military and political force and replace it with another administration of its choosing, fully excluding the Palestinian Authority. This would mean reimposing Israeli "security" control for a long period after the end of any military operations, effectively amounting to security sovereignty just as in the West Bank. Israel's interest in entrenching the state of Palestinian division between the West Bank and Gaza should also not be overlooked. For this reason, Israel's use of systematic destruction prevents any normal life form, from taking shape, thereby accumulating incentives for voluntary migration after the failure of forced displacement.

Israel carried out five major military assaults and operations between 2008 and 2022 with the aim of destroying Hamas's infrastructure and uprooting its power. It also bombed refugee camps in the Strip, as well as civilian and military centers, under the pretext of destroying Hamas' military tunnels containing weapons depots and rockets. These operations resulted in the killing of hundreds of Palestinians, the injury of thousands and the destruction of buildings, residential towers, institutions and

infrastructure. Israel also tightened its siege on the Strip and controlled all materials and essential goods entering, in an effort to subdue Hamas. Yet none of this led to the surrender of Hamas or any other Palestinian resistance movements in the Strip.

The 5 operations were:

"Operation Cast Lead" (Palestinian name: Battle of al-Furqan) (2009/2008): This lasted around twenty-three days under the pretext of responding to rockets fired from Gaza towards Israel. Israel caused massive destruction to infrastructure, and hundreds of Palestinians were martyred.

"Operation Pillar of Defense" (Palestinian name: Hijareh As-Sijjil) (2012): This lasted around one week after Israel assassinated Ahmad al-Jaabari, commander of the al-Qassam Brigades in Gaza.

"Operation Protective Edge" (Palestinian name: Al-Asf Al-Maakool) (2014): This lasted fifty-one days. Its central aim was to destroy the tunnels and stop rocket barrages from Gaza towards Israel. Its outcomes included hundreds of Palestinians killed and further destruction of infrastructure, including residential towers and blocks, and commercial and industrial facilities.

“Operation Guardian of the Walls” (Palestinian name: Saif Al-Quds) (May 2021): This is also known among Palestinians as the “Dignity Uprising”. Its background lies in the events that took place in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in occupied Jerusalem, after Israel put forward a plan to uproot, expel and disperse the neighborhood’s residents and turn it into a settlement outpost. All Palestinian arenas rose up, including Palestinians of 1948 in support of Jerusalem and in rejection of the Israeli Government policies. Israel then bombed various areas of the Gaza Strip, and Israeli settlements were subjected to intense rocket fire in response. The government also carried out a series of raids and arrests against the Palestinians of 1948, while allowing groups of extremist settlers to enter Arab neighborhoods in mixed cities to intimidate and terrorize Palestinians. Palestinians confronted them in Haifa, Jaffa, Lydd, Ramla and Acre.

“Operation Breaking Dawn” (Palestinian name: Wihdet As-Sahat) (2022): This lasted only three days and targeted the Islamic Jihad Movement in the Gaza Strip.

The Shift Marked by Operation Al-Aqsa Flood (7 October 2023)

The events of 7 October 2023 cannot be understood as an incident detached from the political and humanitarian context that preceded them in the Gaza Strip. Since the Israeli siege was imposed on the Strip in 2007, Gaza has lived under continuous strangulation, including restrictions on movement, control over crossings, the deterioration of daily living conditions, and repeated wars and military assaults that caused widespread damage to its social, economic and urban fabric. Additionally, the issue of Palestinian prisoners and the repressive and escalatory measures they faced, as well as the “madness” and terror of settlers and their attacks in the West Bank, and the continuous incursions into Al-Aqsa Mosque and across the West Bank, particularly under the Israeli right-wing government and its statements and policies, were among the factors that heightened tensions and confrontations.

In this context, the 7th of October came as a qualitative shift in the course of the conflict, not as an event isolated from a long history of siege, colonialism and suppression. Palestinian resistance formations in Gaza, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, were able to cross the border fence separating the Gaza Strip from Israel and carry out an operation unprecedented in the history of the settler colonial conflict. This included attacks on Israeli military sites and settlements, and taking captive of Israel prisoners, including military soldiers, who were brought into the Gaza Strip.

Israel treated this event as an opportunity to launch a full-on war on the Gaza Strip. The war went beyond confrontation with armed Palestinian factions and expanded into the deliberate targeting of Palestinian society and civilian infrastructure on a broad scale. It was a war with a clear intention of genocide, affecting the population, homes, hospitals, schools, universities, water and electricity networks, and all infrastructure of daily life. This war led to the killing of tens of thousands of Palestinians, the injury of a far greater numbers, the displacement of the majority of the Strip's population. This war, like nothing seen before, included a widespread and unprecedented destruction of urban and service infrastructure, where estimated statistics indicate that around %81 of buildings in the Gaza Strip had been damaged.

The scale of killing, destruction, displacement and starvation pushed the global public opinion to reconsider the image of Israel and the nature of its colonial project. Gaza moved the Palestinian cause, to a prominent place in political debates in capitals around the world. Large demonstrations took place in Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa and the United States, demanding an end to the genocide war and siege on Gaza, and for Israel to be held accountable for its actions. American and European universities also witnessed broad waves of student solidarity, many of which faced official suppression, administrative restrictions, arrests, indictments and smear campaigns. This revealed the widening gap between Western government positions supporting Israel and shifts in their nations' public opinion.

The Legal Track in International Courts Concerning the Genocide in Gaza

In the face of international silence and the inability of the global political system to stop the war and genocide committed by the Zionist entity in the Gaza Strip, South Africa took the issue to the international judicial track. On 29 December 2023, South Africa filed a case before the International Court of Justice against Israel, accusing it of violating the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This track was not merely a separate legal procedure. Rather, it expressed an attempt to break the state of impunity and place the responsibility of the "Israeli state" before the highest judicial body of the United Nations, particularly in light of the continued mass killing, forced displacement, starvation and destruction of the foundations of life in the Gaza Strip.

In parallel, another track moved before the International Criminal Court, where five states submitted a referral in November 2023 under Article 14 of the Rome Statute, with the aim of supporting and expanding the investigation of the situation in Palestine that has been ongoing for several years. These moves also coincided with a highly significant legal development in July 2024, when the International Court of Justice affirmed, in its advisory opinion on the legal consequences of Israel's policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful, and that the policies of settlement, annexation and expansion of control in the West Bank violate international law and infringe upon the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

Hence, the International Criminal Court moved towards prosecuting individual Israeli and Hamas leaders through arrest warrants, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, while the International Court of Justice ruled on state responsibility; ordering Israel to prevent genocidal harm in Gaza and declaring Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territory unlawful.

Legal accountability was therefore no longer confined to war crimes in Gaza alone, but expanded to include the broader structure of the Israeli occupation.

At the political and diplomatic levels, the war on Gaza contributed to reopening the question of recognition of the Palestinian state. Several Western states recognized the State of Palestine in 2025, bringing the number of states recognizing Palestine to 157 out of 193. The growing international recognition of Palestine was therefore not detached from the scenes of genocide and destruction in Gaza, but came in part as a result of the national and political pressure imposed by the war.

The war also revived various forms of cross-border solidarity, including aid convoys and attempts to break the naval blockade on Gaza. International initiatives and convoys, such as the Global Sumud Flotilla, sought to deliver aid and draw attention to the ongoing siege imposed on the Strip. However, Israel continued to intercept these convoys and prevent them from reaching Gaza, violating international law in international waters. These initiatives reflected the fact that Gaza was no longer merely a local or regional issue, but had become a global test of the positions of states and societies on justice, international law and peoples' right to life and freedom.

Despite the announcement of US President Donald Trump's ceasefire plan in October 2025, this did not open an actual path towards ending the war, lifting the siege or seriously rebuilding Gaza. The agreement remains fragile, and its later phases were accompanied by continued Israeli violations, ongoing bombardment and killing, and the imposition of military zones and restricted areas inside the Strip. Israel continued to expand the areas under its military control prohibiting zones inside Gaza, reaching around 59% of the total area of the Strip. This kept residents under conditions of displacement, fear, and a shrinking space for daily life.

Thus, the shift after the 7th October was not the move from military operations to another. It was a shift from the logic of "managing the conflict" to the logic of "settling the conflict" through large-scale destruction, displacement, re-engineering the Palestinian population space, and proposing new political and security arrangements for governance and reconstruction. Nevertheless, despite the enormous destruction Israel caused, this war also expanded the global presence of the Palestinian cause, exposed the lies of the Israeli narrative in front of the international public opinion, and most importantly pushed the question of Palestine back to the center of global eye.

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