

Ya Ghazze Habibti—Gaza, My Love

Understanding the Genocide in Palestine

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After slaughtering more than 42,000 Palestinians, including 16,500 children, the Israeli military is now invading Lebanon and threatening to go to war with Iran. In the following in-depth account, an anarchist from occupied Palestine reviews the history of Zionist colonialism and Palestinian resistance, makes the case for an anti-colonial understanding of the situation, and explores what it means to act in solidarity with Palestinians.

Ya Ghazze Habibti

Ya Ghazze habibti, oh Gaza my love. Gaza, which Napoleon, one of its many occupiers, called the outpost of Africa, the door to Asia. This is because he passed through it on his way north and, upon defeat, passed through it again on his way back to Africa.

Gaza, which has always been a central point for passing empires, trade routes, occupations, and cultures, owing to its geographic location along the coast line of the Mediterranean. Gaza, through which passed the Via Maris, connecting Egypt to Turkey and Europe. Gaza, through which the Greeks, the Romans, the Rashidun Caliphate, the Crusaders, the Mamluks, the Ottomans, the British, the Egyptians, and Zionist forces pressed their claims—writing its story as a history of occupations, wars, atrocities, and resistance.

Gaza my love, which was always a battleground, yet always stood still. Gaza, which buries 41,000¹ of its inhabitants, commemorating a year of an ongoing war of annihilation, facing a scale of destruction that has already exceeded the bombing of Dresden by the allied forces during the Second World War, and a daily death rate that is higher than any other conflict in the 21st century.

Almost a year into the genocide, some things should be clear. The destruction of Hamas is incidental damage. The chief goal is the mass slaughter of children, targeting Gaza's future. Of the 41,000 deaths reported thus far, about 16,500 are children.

But Gaza is not helpless. The people of Gaza fight, and their courage and resilience are an inspiration for the entire world and generations to come.

Before we discuss the present situation, it is important to review the history. For those of us who grew up and live in the entity, the belly of the colonial beast, it feels like history began in October 7. This is the only narrative Israelis are getting. But things don't just happen in a vacuum—and similar things have happened before, in similar wars of decolonization and liberation. A little historical background will enable us to zoom out and understand these events as part of long-term processes.

Then we can talk about possible futures.

A History of Conquest, a History of Resistance

Gaza has a long history of occupations and resistance, but our current understanding of the “Gaza Strip” as a rectangle on the map in the south of Palestine does not derive from the natural features of the land—it is an artificial, modern creation. The Mamluks in the 13th century were the first to use the term *Quta'a Ghazze* (Gaza Strip), but they were referring to the entire south

¹ According to official statistics from Gaza's Ministry of Health. In addition to that number, more than 10,000 are missing, and it is unknown how many more are still buried under the rubble. It's important to remember that Israel systematically destroyed Gaza's health care system, bringing it to near collapse, and since then, the numbers are stuck at around 40,000. Other estimates state a much higher number.

of Palestine, all the way to the modern-day West Bank. The Gaza Strip as we know it was created in 1948.

We cannot understand what is known as the Gaza Strip without discussing the Zionist attack on Palestine in 1948, the massive ethnic cleansing campaign known as the Nakba. Without this context, it's impossible to understand why most Gazans are not originally from Gaza, and why 80% of the population are refugees. Gaza is an artificial strip of land that became a vast refugee camp after the massive ethnic cleansing campaign conducted by Zionist militias. Out of the nearly 800,000 refugees expelled from their villages, many escaped to nearby countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank. Those who tried to cross into Egypt found a closed border; unlike other neighboring countries, Egypt did not accept refugees, similar to what the Egyptian government does today. This is how the Gaza Strip emerged: as a Zionist means to control demographics and population.

Many of the Kibbutzim and towns that were attacked on October 7 were built on the ruins of communities that existed there before. Bedouin tribes and other residents from 11 villages around Gaza were expelled to the Gaza Strip, and their lands, which were classified as "abandoned," were expropriated by the state and turned into military training grounds and settlements. Towns and kibbutzim were built on them to prevent attempts to return. The deportation order, documented by historians as Order Number 40, included an order to burn the villages and leave no remains. We can assume that some of the fighters who attacked these settlements on October 7, 2023 were second- or third-generation refugees who were seeing the ancestral lands of their parents or grandparents on the other side of the blockade for the first time.

By the end of these expulsions, in 1950, the population of Gaza had tripled as a result of the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees. There was no infrastructure to receive so many refugees, and until 1950, there was no aid organization like UNRWA in place to assist refugees. Despite that, historians tell of incredible solidarity from Gaza's locals, who in time of crisis chose to share what little resources they had with the refugees, keeping them alive. By the decision of the United Nations, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was established in 1950 and began the task of building refugee camps and schools and organizing aid for the huge number of refugees who, until then, had slept in local schools, mosques, fields, and private homes of locals that opened their doors for them.

The newly-arrived refugees in what would become the Gaza Strip created a looming threat for the Zionist colonial project. Some claim that Gaza has been under siege since 2007—but in reality, Gaza was under siege from the very beginning, passing through various stages of siege over time. The establishment of the Gaza Strip was a calculated decision by David Ben Gurion, the architect of the Nakba and Israel's first Prime Minister, to give up a piece of Palestine in order to build a huge refugee camp for expelled people fleeing south. In addition to controlling the demographics of the rest of Palestine, the isolation of the strip served another purpose. Its geographical distance from the West Bank, from the Palestinians that remained in the territories occupied in 1948, and from the rest of the Arab world helped to fragment the fabric of Palestinian society. This was a calculated colonial strategy to carve up the land into isolated ghettos—into what were called Bantustans in South Africa—in order to drive a wedge between different classes of occupied people.

By 1967, Israel had solved its original demographic issues but created new geographic ones. The expansionist appetite had risen again and the Gaza Strip was occupied along with the West Bank, Golan Heights, and Sinai Peninsula. Israel later returned the Sinai to Egypt, but the rest

of the newly occupied territories posed a significant challenge for the Jewish state, as it was not clear that a simple repeat of 1948 was possible. A new model of ethnic cleansing was called for. The conditions had changed, rendering it more difficult to justify physically expelling people from their land; the next best thing was simply to lock them in place.

The top priority was to prevent by all means the emergence of a situation in which settlers would mix with the natives, so Israel constructed two open-air prisons: one in the West Bank and a more tightly controlled one in the Gaza Strip. Unlike the territories occupied in 1948, these new territories were never officially annexed to Israel. The population never received citizenship. They were denied any rights; their villages were surrounded with checkpoints, walls, and settlements; and military rule was put in place. Indeed, ethnic cleansing and military rule have often gone together throughout history.

Another thing that goes together historically with ethnic cleansing and military rule is resistance. The outbreak of the first intifada from the Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza in 1987 set off revolutionary waves throughout the region. This was not solely due to the intensity of the insurrection, but also because it signaled a turning point at which Palestinians took matters into their hands and fought for their own liberation.

In many ways, the Palestinian Liberation Organization had already been doing this starting in the 1960s, taking away the Arab states' role as "liberators" and shifting the focus to revolutionary Arab guerrillas and Palestinian diaspora communities, mainly in Jordan and later in Lebanon. But the first intifada in Palestine broke out spontaneously. It was not under the control of any particular militarized party or organization; it was led by a network of grassroots groups and organizations that came together under the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU), a network of coordination between the various regional committees, organizations, and parties involved in the uprising.

The fact that the uprising broke out in Gaza is significant. It is not surprising that it began in a refugee camp. Among Palestinians, the camp is the lowest class; it is also the most revolutionary, always the front line of both popular resistance and armed struggle. It is where guerrillas traditionally organized and strongholds of resistance were formed. Due to its centrality in the struggle, it is also where many of the most horrifying atrocities have been committed and the harshest repression inflicted. Refugee camps in Lebanon were hotbeds for revolutionaries during the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s and '80s; that was also where Lebanese fascists perpetrated the Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982, under the watchful eyes of the IDF.

To this day, refugee camps such as those in Jenin and Balata in the West Bank remain a hotspot for armed resistance, with many factions, such as the Lion's Den and Balata Brigade, that insist on remaining unaffiliated with any major faction of Palestinian politics, beyond the control of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The youth in these camps have defended their homes against Israeli raids time and time again, and have paid dearly for doing so. Since October 7, 2023, the refugee camps in Gaza have been a central target for the genocidal forces.

The first intifada articulated the refugee camp as the leading force in the Palestinian revolution. It also showed how explosive the situation was.

The outbreak of the intifada came as a complete surprise to both Israel and the PLO. Israel never imagined the Palestinians would revolt, and the PLO never imagined they would do it outside of their control. Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO and its biggest political party, Fatah, saw the uncontrollable and horizontal nature of the intifada as a threat and sought a way to bring

it under the control of his organization. This, alongside Israeli and US interference, led Fatah to compromise on their positions and seek peace negotiations with Israel.

This sequence of events, the details of which are beyond the scope of this article, led to the signing of the Oslo Accords, the migration of the PLO to Palestine, the creation of the Palestinian Authority, and the subsequent management of the occupation by Israel's loyal subcontractor. Among other things, the Oslo Accords involved giving up of 80% of the land in return for the promise of a "two-state solution" and the recognition of Israel. It also meant the division of the West Bank into three areas: area A, comprising 18% of the West Bank, which would be under the control of the PA; area B, 22% of the West Bank, which would be under the civil government of the PA and the security control of Israel; and area C, 60% of the West Bank, which was placed under "temporary" Israeli control.

This also led to security coordination between the newly-formed PA and Israel, which meant that Palestinians were suppressed, jailed, beaten, and executed by Palestinian cops and jailers rather than Israelis. At the same time, the PLO "abandoned terrorism" and armed resistance, dedicating itself to peace negotiations and "nonviolent solutions." The last part of the agreement, the creation of a Palestinian state, was never implemented.

The accords served as a textbook counterinsurgency tactic. The goal was to crush the uprising, domesticate or isolate the revolutionary wings within the PLO, remove troublesome areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from Israeli management, and at the same time, impose the role of cop on the PA while giving the rising masses false hope.

But not everyone was duped. The Oslo Accords did manage to end the first intifada, but they also signaled a fragmentation within Palestinian society, including within the PLO itself, dividing those who favored peace agreements against those who remained committed to the original goals of the Palestinian revolution—refusal to acknowledge the Israeli state, liberation from the river to the sea, and commitment to armed and popular resistance. These two camps were to define Palestinian society and struggle for years to come.

In the midst of the uprising, a few men from the local Gaza chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Egypt-based religious social movement, met in a house in Shati refugee camp in the Gaza Strip on December 9, 1988. This was to have significant implications for the future of the Palestinian resistance. Under the spiritual leadership of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a refugee from the village Al-Jura, near Majdal Askalan (known today as the Israeli city Ashkelon), the group decided to split off and start a new movement, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Harakat alMuqawama alIslamiya)—as an acronym, HAMAS. A few months later, the nascent organization released its charter, in which it presents Islamic revival and jihad as a form of anti-colonialism and lays out its political and religious philosophy regarding the connection it sees between Islam and Palestinian liberation. Despite affirming that Islamic rule would allow "Muslims, Jews, and Christians to live together in peace and harmony," the rest of the text is full of antisemitism and conspiracy theories, articulating the movement's understanding of Zionism, Israel, and Judaism at that time.

A decade earlier, in 1976, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin had applied for a permit from the Israeli authorities to establish the Islamic Association, which was to be an umbrella organization that would provide legal and administrative cover for the Muslim Brotherhood's social, religious, educational, and medical services within the Gaza Strip. Israel approved the license. This is one of the sources of the myth that Israel "founded" Hamas. In fact, Israel had nothing to do with "inventing" Hamas; as an occupying authority, it merely granted a permit to one of the institutions

of the Muslim Brotherhood about a decade before Hamas existed. There are couple of ways to explain why this happened.

Israel had a policy of noninterference with social Islamic organizations. But it is also helpful to understand the social dynamics at that time. The 1970s were the height of Palestinian revolutionary leftism; secular and Marxist-Leninist organizations were the dominant forces in the armed resistance. Religion, on the other hand, was seen as a private matter, and Israel had an interest in enabling the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic movements that could function as a counterforce to weaken the nationalist movement and create social division.

The creation of Hamas, a decade later, while building on the charitable and social infrastructure of the Brotherhood, redefined Islam as a political movement tied with anti-colonial resistance, taking inspiration from many political parties in the Arab world that combined Islam with nationalism. They drew on the legacies of legendary figures such as Izz Ad-Din Al-Qassam, a spiritual leader and militant active in Palestine in the 1920s and '30s, who pioneered defining Islamic Jihad as anti-colonialism and organized guerrilla fighting against the French, the British and the Zionists. Hamas's armed wing, the Al-Qassam brigade, bears his name.

Hamas was active in the uprising from the start, clashing with Israeli forces but also with other Palestinian factions that they perceived to be collaborationist. Several factors enabled Hamas to position itself as the leader of the resistance camp, including the PLO's implicit acceptance of partitioning the land of historic Palestine into two states and abandonment of the revolutionary path, which caused the Palestinian national movement to fragment into the "resistance camp" and the "negotiation camp." At the same time, geopolitical processes including the fall of the Soviet Union and the defeat of the Palestinian left in Lebanon were shifting the context. The intifada first erupted out of the refugee camps of Gaza, Hamas's home territory and main base of support.

Fast forward to the year 2000. After negotiations failed to deliver and the Palestinian state that was promised in 1999 never came, a second, bitterer, and more militarized intifada erupted, triggered by a provocative visit by Ariel Sharon—then-leader of the opposition Likud party—to the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem. While the first intifada was popular and decentralized, the second intifada began similarly but quickly fell under the leadership of armed militarized factions, popularizing practices such as suicide bombings and other kinds of deadly armed attacks against Israeli forces and citizens.

Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO and the president of the Palestinian Authority, proved to be quite a pragmatist. To the dismay of Israel and international patrons, he refused to denounce armed attacks, often even encouraged them, and more than once, the police forces of the PA found themselves exchanging gunfire with Israeli forces. He appeared to view the "peace process" and the state-building project merely as tools for Palestinian liberation, worth pursuing as long as they worked, but was prepared to abandon them and change course as needed. In response, in 2002, Israel laid siege to the Mukataa, the Palestinian parliament building in Ramallah, trapping him until his eventual death two years later in 2004.

In his place, Mahmoud Abbas came to power—a Fatah party member with US support. To ensure that Arafat's pragmatism would not recur, the US and other international donors initiated efforts to "professionalize" the PA. These led to a significant structural shift, resulting in an extensive security sector reform with US support and training, the tightening of security coordination with Israel, the de-politicization of the PA and a large part of the Palestinian public, and

the appointment of Salam Fayyad as Prime Minister—a neoliberal American-educated economist accused of purging the PA’s institutions of overly critical voices.

In her book *Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine*, Palestinian anti-authoritarian author Dana El-Kurd details how such aggressive methods of international intervention are used to insulate the PA from its constituency, the Palestinian public, making it answer to international donors instead—especially the US and European Union. They make threats of sanctions and cuts in aid whenever the PA strays from path laid by its masters, the global Western powers. The creation of the PA and involvement in its management were crucial for the US in order to impose its priorities in the region. Palestinians have never been permitted to manage their own affairs in a way that isn’t approved by the United States.

This was visible following Hamas’s electoral victory in 2006. Hamas managed to capitalize on the discontent that followed the failure of the Oslo Accords, the PA’s policies, and corruption and feelings of frustration, gaining 76 of the 132 seats of the legislative council and winning the right to form a government. The resistance camp was at the height of its popularity, as one year before, in 2005, Israel had initiated the Disengagement Plan, evicting all 21 Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip along with the Israeli military, following five straight years of armed uprising. Although Israel continued to control Gaza’s border, airspace, and maritime space, this was still seen as a significant achievement of the armed struggle, which managed to force land capitulations from Israel while the “negotiations” and the “peace process” remained stuck.

In fact, few voted for Hamas for religious or ideological reasons. By building guerrilla infrastructure during the 1990s and the second intifada, Hamas had simply managed to position themselves as a leading force for the national cause, the most significant alternative to Fatah.

Shocked by Hamas’s victory, the United States and Israel quickly moved to initiate what amounted to a coup. They put intense pressure on the new government to “moderate” its views—for example, to accept the US-led “peace process,” the two-state “solution,” and not to threaten Western influence in the region. The “Quartet on the Middle East,” an international body composed of the US, the EU, the UN, and Russia, which was assigned to manage the “solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” according to the “peace process,” conditioned aid to the Hamas government on three demands: acknowledging the accords signed between the PLO and Israel, denouncing “terror,” and officially recognizing Israel. Following Hamas’s refusal, the government was isolated, all aid stopped, and economic sanctions imposed.

The Gaza civil war of 2007 saw armed street fighting over the Gaza Strip between the armed wings of Hamas and Fatah. The battle resulted in a victory for Hamas and the subsequent taking over of the Gaza Strip. In defeat, Mahmoud Abbas declared the dissolution of the government, fired Ismail Haniyeh (the Hamas prime minister), and declared a state of emergency. Instead, Salam Fayyad, a more “moderate” Fatah politician approved by the US and Israel, was appointed PM. Abbas also outlawed Hamas’s armed wing. No elections have been held since.

The events of 2007 created a new situation in Palestinian governance, in which Palestinians were under two Palestinian Authorities—the PA under Fatah rule in the West Bank, and Hamas in Gaza. This benefited Israel, further fragmenting Palestinian society and dividing Gaza from the West Bank and the rest of Palestine. Starting in 2007, Israel intensified its siege of Gaza as a collective punishment for electing Hamas, fully isolating it from the world—basically turning the world’s largest refugee camp into the world’s largest open-air prison. The strip was fully fenced from all sides (including the Egyptian border), tighter control was imposed on its maritime and

air space, movement outside and inside was highly restricted, and Israel decided which goods were permitted to enter.

Those who equate Hamas with ISIS, Al-Qaeda, or the Taliban would be surprised to hear that during sixteen years ruling Gaza, Hamas never implemented Sharia law. It was an authoritarian and conservative government; it was highly repressive, especially to women, queer people, and political dissidents; yet there were constant internal debates and arguments, elections, and representative bodies. The organizational structure has been detailed in depth; suffice it to say that while it was an hierarchical organization, the system of Majlis Al-Shura (General Consultative councils), composed of elected members from local council groups, with representatives from Gaza, the West Bank, leaders in exile, and prisoners in Israeli jails, does represent a somewhat democratic top-down model of governance.

Not only does Hamas not resemble Salafi jihadism, they were its mortal enemies. Salafi cells that tried to mobilize in Gaza were violently repressed. Hamas have no intention of establishing a pan-Islamic caliphate; they were always more nationalist than religious, limiting their activities to the geography of Palestine. All of this is not to vindicate them—we should remain critical—but I believe that we must be fair and accurate in our criticism, understanding nuance and context, so as to avoid spreading Islamophobic nonsense that throws all Islamist organizations into one basket.

Israel appeared to be fine with Hamas taking over. This served the purpose of further dividing the Palestinians, putting a governing body in control in Gaza to manage it, and providing a justification for Israeli attacks. It portrayed itself as fighting a jihadist Islamic-fundamentalist terror organization in the many airstrikes that followed.

Palestinian historian Tareq Baconi details in his book *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance* how Israel initiated the strategy of “mowing the lawn” in Gaza. It would bomb Gaza every once in a while, just enough to damage Hamas’s military capabilities and massacre hundreds or thousands of Palestinians—keeping Gaza in check, but leaving Hamas in power. Israel conducted five major military operations in Gaza up to 2023 and a few smaller ones. This strategy of keeping Gaza in a frozen state—always under crisis management, one step away from collapse, isolated from the world, and without a long term plan—was to explode in Israel’s face on October 7, 2023. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

From Hamas’s side, there are many ways to explain why they decided to take part in electoral politics. It seems that Hamas saw government something like how Arafat saw it—as a tool of resistance, one of many tools with which to pursue liberation. Like Arafat, they were to discover the tensions and contradictions within this approach. As the head of the resistance camp, the leaders of the revolutionary government, Hamas often found itself as a pacifying force. Several times, they had to restrict other militant factions in Gaza, like the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, that were interfering with their ceasefires. They also didn’t participate in some military clashes with Israel, like the 2022 escalation with between Israel and the PIJ. Some now interpret this as a deceiving tactic, duping Israel to believe that they weren’t interested in escalation in order to surprise them on October 7, but I don’t buy it. It might be true to some extent, but there is no denying that many times, Hamas were in fact deterred, and had to walk a tightrope between maintaining a militant stance and restricting other armed factions in order to keep escalations from getting out of control.

The transition from social movement and guerrilla formation to governing body wasn’t so obvious. Al-Qassam, the armed wing, despite securing a great deal of autonomy from the gov-

erning bodies, still found itself having to deal with the growing tension between resistance and government. This is not new in the Palestinian movement. In his book *The Palestine Question*, Edward Said detailed this dilemma within the PLO in its revolutionary days, when revolution and the state-building project often clashed. When it finally came time to move forward to a state, they completely betrayed their people, sold out the revolution, and capitulated to the disciplining powers of the world order. But Hamas took a different approach.

After taking over Gaza in 2007, Hamas had the choice whether to repeat the PA's path in the West Bank, selling out the resistance and becoming collaborators with the occupation, or to maintain their defiant stance. They chose the latter. Neither Israel nor the international powers were able to fully domesticate them, and they maintained their commitment to decolonization, resistance, and armed struggle—at least in principle, and sometimes in practice. We could see this during the 2021 escalation, the Unity Intifada. While Sheikh Jarrah, a Palestinian neighborhood in Jerusalem, was threatened with eviction, Jerusalem was burning and an uprising was spreading all over Palestine; Hamas declared an ultimatum for the Israeli forces to withdraw from Sheikh Jarrah and the Al-Aqsa compound, followed by a barrage of rockets fired into Israeli cities.

This was one of the few instances in which Hamas broke out of the cage that was built for them. The rocket attack against Israel was not used to ease the siege, negotiate about conditions in Gaza, respond to the assassination of one of its militants, or press any other matter within their immediate circle of concern as a governing or military body; rather, it was an act in solidarity with a neighborhood in Jerusalem and in response to Israeli raids on the Al-Aqsa compound. This positioned them once again as a leading front in the resistance, representing Gaza's participation in the unity uprising and acting on issues that concern all Palestinians.

The contradictions between armed struggle and popular struggle are a constant subject of debate among Palestinians. Some critics accused Hamas of sidelining the popular struggle that erupted during the uprising by shifting the focus to armed struggle. The reality is more complicated. Hamas is much more than its armed wing; it is an entire movement that experiments with many different methods of struggle, evaluating each strategy according to the results. Hamas has a lot of experience with popular resistance—for example, during the 2018-2019 Marches of Return, in which Gaza residents marched unarmed toward the fence, inspired in part by the civil rights movement in the US, demanding an end to the siege and to be permitted to return to their homes on the other side. This was not a Hamas initiative—it was organized by grassroots activists and civilians in Gaza—but Hamas, as a governing body, had to permit the marches, participated in them, and was involved with some of the funding. Israel's response was to massacre 223 protesters, including 46 children, by sniper fire. The world did nothing. By contrast, the events of 2021 proved that Palestine only becomes an international issue when Israeli citizens pay a price.

In view of this, I want to propose one way to see October 7. No one outside Hamas knows exactly what led them to decide to initiate such an attack. There are many theories, and I'll add my own. Hamas might have reached the conclusion that the "resistance government" was no longer working, that it was in fact actually an obstacle, and decided to return to its origins as a guerrilla formation and social movement. They might have tried to do this many times before, as we can see from the many reconciliation attempts with Fatah; they showed a willingness to relinquish control over Gaza and work toward elections time and time again. Baconi's *Hamas Contained* details many such attempts and how they were derailed by Israel and the US. Perhaps they thought it was time for something extreme to force them back to the path of resistance, a

kind of a government suicide. They have made it clear since October that they are willing to give up governing Gaza, but won't disarm—another indication that they are attempting to return to their origins.

For the revolution to live, the government must die.

Ghetto Uprising

Then October 7 happened.

A year has passed and it's still not known exactly what happened that day. This is what we know for certain so far.

In the early hours of October 7, 2023, Hamas, alongside other militant factions in Gaza, launched *Tufun Al-Aqsa*, the Al-Aqsa flood operation, a coordinated surprise attack against Israel. Thousands of rockets were fired into Israel and thousands of militants breached the siege, broke the fence, occupied military bases, and infiltrated Israeli settlements.

The attack caught Israel off guard; it took hours for the army to respond. According to witnesses, there were three main waves breaching the Gaza fence, which was open for hours. The first wave to break the fence involved Hamas and the other chief armed formations in Gaza, including PIJ, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. The second wave was comprised of smaller and less organized armed groups, including probably a few Salafi jihadists. The third wave included unarmed civilians, journalists, bloggers, and curious passersby.

There is no denying that some of the participants committed atrocities against Israelis. Plenty of evidence, in some cases from the GoPro cameras of Palestinian fighters themselves, shows them shooting indiscriminately into Israeli settlements, killing civilians, and taking hostages to the Gaza Strip. A massacre also took place at the (now infamous) Nova music festival.

At the same time, a barrage of lies, made-up atrocities, and propaganda circulated. Israeli rescue teams, military officials, Sara Netanyahu, and Joe Biden spread debunked stories about beheadings, killings of children, sexual violence, and other things that never happened. This inflamed the situation and served to justify the genocide.

Some Israelis were reportedly killed by Israeli fire. The Hannibal Directive is an Israeli army policy aimed to prevent kidnapping by any means, including striking Israeli civilians and forces. The reasoning is that the political price for releasing kidnapped Israeli soldiers or civilians via agreements is too high—as it has repeatedly resulted in the release of many Palestinian prisoners in exchange—so it's better to attack even at the risk of harming the kidnapped. On October 7, Israeli forces deliberately shelled military bases, Israeli settlements, and cars presumed to be carrying Israeli hostages back to Gaza.

By the end of the day, about 1140 Israelis were killed, 3400 were wounded, and 251 were taken captive. Initially, corporate media reported much higher estimates.

Even a year later, Israelis seem unable to comprehend this attack. For them, it came out of nowhere. They perceive it as a “second Holocaust” (a very popular narrative in Israel), an inexplicable and irrational attack by barbaric jihadist forces seeking to kill Jews for no reason.

But it is a gross mischaracterization to think of October 7 as an isolated event that occurred in a vacuum. Practically all of those who are twenty years old or younger in Gaza have spent their entire lives in a reality of siege, bombings, and massacres, raised by relatives who still remember

the events of 1948 and how they were expelled from where the Kibbutzim are now. From the Haitian Revolution and Nat Turner's slave rebellion to Oran massacre in Algeria, every decolonial war of liberation, every slave revolt, every ghetto uprising has always involved atrocities, often targeting civilians. We cannot demand of Palestinians a purity that we do not demand from any other historical struggle for liberation. We can grieve the atrocities, but we cannot condemn a ghetto uprising, we cannot condemn a slave revolt. We must always understand everything in context with an analysis of power relations.

The attack that took place on October 7, 2023 was followed by a genocide that has been ongoing for a year now. As of the end of September 2024, well over 41,000 people in Gaza are reported dead, although the real number is probably a lot higher. More than 95,000 have been injured. About 1.9 million people are internally displaced, some of whom have been uprooted more than ten times. More than half (60% according to Al-Jazeera) of Gaza's residential buildings, 80% of commercial facilities, and 85% of school buildings have been damaged or destroyed; 17 of 36 hospitals remain partially functional; 65% of the arable land is damaged.

The current war of annihilation differs from the previous rounds of escalations and massacres—and not just in scale. Israel is no longer pursuing a policy of “mowing the lawn.” Gaza, the open-air prison, blew up. Consequently, the entire population had to pay. Indeed, the Israeli authorities made it clear from the beginning that their intention is genocide.

All those years, while Israel had thought it was damaging its military capacities, Hamas was digging a complex network of tunnels below Gaza, getting armed, and preparing for the ultimate fight. Gaza is unfit for guerrilla warfare in the traditional sense, as it is a mostly flat strip of land without mountains or forests that fighters can escape to. The narrow alleyways of the refugee camps could be useful in some stages of the fighting, and they were, but Israel made it clear that those would be the first places to be targeted, as in Lebanon and the West Bank. The network of tunnels, which stretches across the entire strip all the way to the Sinai Peninsula on the other side of the Egyptian border, was necessary to allow fighters to attack and escape, reappear in another place, hide, rest, store weapons, and hide captives. During the years of siege, the tunnels were also crucial for Gaza's economy: in addition to weapons, they were also used to bypass the Israeli siege in order to smuggle in basic necessities.

Was Hamas not aware that the Israeli reaction would be so deadly? It's impossible to say for certain what their calculations were. We can assume that they knew that the attack would result in a bloodbath—maybe not on this scale, but they must have known that Israel would respond severely. According to the equation that Israel created in 2014, for example, after Palestinian militants kidnapped and killed three Israeli settlers in the West Bank, Israel killed about 2200 people in Gaza, the worst massacre in Gaza until 2023. So what would be the price for 1140 Israeli casualties, then?

Should we conclude that Hamas doesn't care about Gazans' lives? The answer is more complicated.

We can begin by saying that blaming the resistance for the violence of the occupier makes as much sense as blaming the Kurdish fighters for the Dersim massacre or the occupation of Afrin, or blaming the rebels of the Warsaw ghetto for the Nazi repression. A settler colony's drive is always to acquire more land while diminishing the number of natives. Throughout all the years of Zionist colonization, Zionists have always presented their atrocities as responses to previous attacks—but the actual goal was always ethnic cleansing. The Gaza Strip itself was built as a solution for ethnic cleansing, a locked ghetto to control demographics, and Israel has been

killing people there and in Palestine as a whole ever since. To expect people not to fight, to be helpless victims, was never realistic.

According to Hamas themselves, in the document *Our Narrative... Operation Al-Aqsa Flood*, published after October 7, they ask—what did the world expect Palestinians to do? After 75 years of suffering under a brutal occupation, after all initiatives for liberation failed, the disastrous results of the so-called “peace process” that Oslo promised, and the silence of the so-called international community, were they really supposed to die in peace? They note that the Palestinian battle for liberation from occupation and colonialism did not start on October 7, but 105 years ago, against 30 years of British colonial rule and 75 years of Zionist occupation. Ten of thousands of Palestinians were killed between 2000 and 2023; all of those deaths took place with American support, and every kind of protest, including peaceful initiatives such as the marches of return in 2018, has been brutally repressed. In light of murderous aggression with full impunity, the document asks,

“What was expected from the Palestinian people after all of that? To keep waiting and to keep counting on the helpless UN! Or to take the initiative in defending the Palestinian people, lands, rights and sanctities; knowing that the defense act is a right enshrined in international laws, norms, and conventions.”

A similar narrative was expressed by Basem Naim, a senior member of Hamas’s political bureau, speaking on October 7.

“If we have to choose, why choose to be the good victims, the peaceful victims? If we have to die, we have to die in dignity. Standing, fighting, fighting back, and standing as dignified martyrs.”

We can also consult Palestinian revolutionary and martyr Bassel Al-Araj. Writing in 2014, just ahead of the Israeli military ground invasion of Gaza on July 17, he made several points²

1. The Palestinian resistance consists of guerrilla formations whose strategies follow the logic of guerrilla warfare or hybrid warfare, which Arabs and Muslims have become masters of through our experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza. War is never based on the logic of conventional wars and the defense of fixed points and borders; on the contrary, you draw the enemy into an ambush. You do not stick to a fixed position to defend it; instead, you perform maneuvers, movement, withdrawal, and attack from the flanks and the rear. So, never measure it against conventional wars.
2. The enemy will spread photos and videos of their invasion into Gaza, occupation of residential buildings, or presence in public areas and well-known landmarks. This is part of the psychological warfare in guerrilla wars; you allow your enemy to move as they wish so that they fall into your trap and you strike them. You determine the location and timing of the battle. So, you may see photos from Al-Katiba Square, Al-Saraya, Al-Rimal, or Omar Al-Mukhtar Street, but do not let this weaken your resolve. The battle is judged by its overall results, and this is merely a show.

² Translated by Resistance News Network.

3. Never spread the occupation's propaganda, and do not contribute to instilling a sense of defeat. This must be focused on, for soon, we will start talking about a massive invasion in Beit Lahia and Al-Nusseirat, for example. Never spread panic; be supportive of the resistance and do not spread any news broadcast by the occupation (forget about the ethics and impartiality of journalism; just as the Zionist journalist is a fighter, so are you).
4. The enemy may broadcast images of prisoners, most likely civilians, but the goal is to suggest the rapid collapse of the resistance. Do not believe them.
5. The enemy will carry out tactical, qualitative operations to assassinate some symbols [of resistance], and all of this is part of psychological warfare. Those who have died and those who will die will never affect the resistance's system and cohesion because the structure and formations of the resistance are not centralized but horizontal and widespread. Their goal is to influence the resistance's support base and the families of the resistance fighters, as they are the only ones who can affect the men of the resistance.
6. Our direct human and material losses will be much greater than the enemy's, which is natural in guerrilla wars that rely on willpower, the human element, and the extent of patience and endurance. We are far more capable of bearing the costs, so there is no need to compare or be alarmed by the magnitude of the numbers.
7. Today's wars are no longer just wars and clashes between armies but rather are struggles between societies. Let us be like a solid structure and play a game of biting fingers with the enemy, our society against their society.

Finally, every Palestinian (in the broad sense, meaning anyone who sees Palestine as a part of their struggle, regardless of their secondary identities), every Palestinian is on the front lines of the battle for Palestine, so be careful not to fail in your duty.

One last note before we move forward. In the book *Blessed is the Flame*, the author Serafinski reviews ghetto uprisings and concentration camp resistance under the Nazi occupation from an anarcho-nihilist perspective. The book shows that despite the repressive and paralyzing conditions in concentration camps, acts of resistance such as sabotage, mutual aid, and uprisings still occurred, often despite severe consequences and very low chances of success. The motivation behind many of these acts was the desire to rebel as an end in itself. Serafinski builds on the idea that *jouissance*, or enjoyment—the creativity and life of the act or rebellion itself—is worthwhile in its own right, independent of its consequences. Examples show that in the direst situations, people choose not to be passively led to the slaughter, but engage in desperate, wild acts of resistance, escaping established logic, morality, and fields of discourse. Against impossible conditions, they choose impossible action. This is reminiscent of Bassel's understanding of romance as the reason for war.

And people often do what is within their range of capabilities, not what is the most "right." This is something we have to accept.

"What really counts is the strength we feel every time we don't bow our heads, every time we destroy the false idols of civilization, every time our eyes meet those of our

comrades along illegal paths, every time that our hands set fire to the symbols of Power. In those moments we don't ask ourselves: 'Will we win? Will we lose?' In those moments, we just fight."

-“A Conversation Between Anarchists,” Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire

“Even your observations and criticism of the paradoxes of the 2014 war were that it made most of society a passive audience awaiting death. You objected to a death that is not surrounded by a romantic narrative. You know that the balance of power between nations is determined by the ‘potential energy’ and ‘kinetic energy’ (a crushing energy). And you know that potential energy—and its function in war—is to transform into a crushing force. I believe that the possibility of creating romantic narratives around martyrdom and heroism is one of the most important elements of potential energy, in which we outperform our enemy.”

“Why We Go to War,” Bassel Al-Araj

The Fighting since, and Other Fronts

People in Gaza have not been helpless victims since October 7. Yes, Gaza is devastated by the genocide, but the resistance is fighting like hell, despite incredible odds. As of mid-September 2024, Israel has reported 789 of its soldiers and security forces dead. Other reports indicate at least 10,000 killed or wounded. About 1000 Israeli soldiers enter the Defense Ministry Rehabilitation Department every month, according to the Israeli Ministry of Defense. Incredible footage circulated online by guerrilla forces shows them popping out of tunnels, blowing up tanks, sniping at and ambushing Israeli soldiers, and blowing up buildings with soldiers inside. The Israeli military admitted that many tanks have been damaged during fighting.

In the city of Khan Yunis, for example, which Israel has repeatedly invaded, so far, every attempt to defeat the guerrilla forces has failed. In many of the cities, refugee camps and stronghold of resistance where the IDF announcing that they “dismantled the local brigade,” guerrilla forces immediately reappear and regroup following their withdrawal.

In the West Bank, the IDF has conducted several incursions into towns and refugee camps, inflicting mass destruction on its infrastructure, killing at least 719 and injuring more than 5700 as of September 2024. Armed resistance, though nowhere near as intense as in Gaza, has claimed the lives of 12 Israeli soldiers and left 27 injured. Several militants in the West Bank have also conducted armed actions against Israeli settlers in the West Bank as well as inside Israeli borders.

Settler violence against Palestinians has intensified significantly since October, with more than 800 attacks and pogroms, killing at least 31 Palestinians, injuring more than 500, and damaging around 80 houses, almost 12,000 trees, and 450 vehicles, according to the UN. About 850 Palestinians were forced to leave their houses as a result of settler and military violence. Settlers also blocked humanitarian aid entering Gaza from Jordan, Egypt, and Israeli ports.

Inside the occupied Interior, also known as 1948 occupied Palestine, or “Israel,” Palestinian communities have found themselves facing a fascist dictatorship. Protesting the genocide was impossible during the first few months, as police violently repressed demonstrations, attacked activists, raided their homes, and jailed people, sometimes for months, for shouting slogans or

holding signs. In October and November 2023 alone, Adallah, a legal center for Palestinian citizens in Israel, documented 251 arrests, interrogations, and “warning calls” in response to actions like participating in a demonstration, posting on social media, and expressing opinions in universities and workplaces. Many Palestinian students were expelled from universities; many workers were fired. In some places, this repression eased over time—but in others, especially “mixed” cities like Haifa, protesting the genocide is still impossible.

So far, despite isolated armed groups in the West Bank defending their communities from Israeli raids and conducting armed attacks on nearby settlements and checkpoints, not to mention some attempts in the Interior to organize protests, there is no popular uprising, like the Unity Intifada that broke out in 2021 during the previous major assault on Gaza. Israeli repression has proved to be effective in pushing many people into silence and paralyzing street movements. This might change, as repression can also lead to escalation, but for now, we can’t rely on an uprising inside Palestine to stop the genocide.

The situation inside prisons has become inhumane. Palestinian “security prisoners” face torture, violence, and sexual abuse from Israeli guards. The torture camp Sde Teiman rose to world infamy following leaks from whistleblowers and testimony from released prisoners revealing a routine of abuse, beatings, physical and psychological torture, sexual violence and rape, medical neglect, and amputations of body parts. Conditions in “security” prisons all across the country have deteriorated, with the far-right Minister of National Security Itamar Ben-Gvir giving orders to reduce the rights of prisoners to the bare minimum. They are confined to dark, overcrowded cells, hand- and leg-cuffed to each other, sleeping on beds without mattresses or on the floor, on a bare-minimum diet. Thousands of new prisoners have been arrested over the past year; under the sadistic management of Ben-Gvir, repression, incarceration, and concentration and torture camps are set to expand. About 60 Palestinian prisoners have died in Israeli prisons since October 2023.

The front of those in exile has been active. Palestinian refugees have managed to mobilize mass demonstrations in many places. In nearby countries, there has been a significant street movement of thousands in support of Palestine. In Amman, Jordan, people have clashed several times with police and security forces outside the Israeli embassy, demanding that their country drop its relationships with Israel and the United States. Mass mobilizations have also occurred in Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Bahrain, and all over the refugee camps and cities of the Middle East, North Africa, and the Arab and Muslim world, often despite repression from their reactionary governments, which fear that the mass mobilizations might turn against them.

In the “West,” a solidarity movement sprang up in the cities of Europe and North America. Much has been said about the inspiring mobilizations on campuses and the various blockades, marches, and acts of sabotage. Those in the imperial core have a particular responsibility to take action like this. We can only hope such movements will grow.

Germany, the country with the largest Palestinian diaspora community in Europe (around 300,000), became a unique battleground. The German state has been hostile toward Palestinian liberation for many years, cracking down on marches, censoring speech and slogans, banning solidarity events, and, in some cases, banning national symbols such as the Keffiyeh and the Palestinian flag. In Germany, anti-Palestinian racism and support for genocide is shared by the state, the police and repressive agencies, the far-right, and Islamophobic, anti-Arab, colonial, and pro-apartheid elements in the “anti-fascist” scene.

Nonetheless, Palestinians and their supporters are still resisting. Germany is fully complicit in the genocide, supporting it both materially and rhetorically, providing weapons to Israel and going as far as backing Israel in its genocide case at the International Court of Justice. We can only hope the movement there will continue to break the walls of fear and find ways to escalate.

As for the so-called Axis of Resistance—some armed militant groups in the Middle East declared a solidarity front with Gaza. In Iraq, Syria, and Jordan, American bases were targeted. For months, Iran, despite attempting to monopolize “resistance,” chiefly acted as a pacifying force, repeatedly ordering groups to reduce attacks in order to avoid entering into direct confrontation with Israel and the US. Iran attacked Israel with a major missile attack on April 2024, but this was mainly symbolic, as it was announced in advance and caused no significant damage.

Shortly before the publication of this article, in response to the assassination of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Iran initiated a second direct attack on Israel. On October 2, 2024, 180 rockets fell on Israel. Again, most of the missiles were intercepted by Israel, the US, and allied regimes such as Jordan. Some mild damage was caused to military bases and a Mossad facility. At this time, the only known victim of this attack is a Palestinian from Gaza staying in the West Bank city of Jericho.

The Houthi movement, a Shia Islamist organization in control of a large part of Yemen as part of the ongoing Yemeni civil war, which some describe as an Iranian “proxy” and part of the “Axis” although quite independent, have been firing missiles at Israel and attacking commercial ships at the Red Sea, considering any Israel-linked ship as a target. They have reportedly caused a huge impact on the global economy and a significant damage to international trade, damaging commercial vessels and forcing many more to reroute around South Africa, greatly extending their journey.

In south Lebanon, Hezbollah engaged in daily rocket and UAV clashes with Israel, though initially, these were largely restricted to military bases close to the border and a few northern Israeli communities. In response, Israel bombed villages and communities in south Lebanon and attacked Dahieh, a suburb of Beirut where some Hezbollah operatives live, killing civilians as well. The situation has been escalating; as of the beginning of October 2024, Israel has invaded south Lebanon, following many escalations.³

In the fog of war, the world order is marching forward. The US sees the genocide and escalation in the Middle East as an opportunity to enhance its power in the region. Israel Channel 12 reported on October 2023 that “two hundred and forty-four US transport planes and 20 ships have delivered more than 10,000 tons of armaments and military equipment to Israel since the start of the war [sic].” That month also saw special US military aid to Israel reaching 14.3 billion dollars.

In the Persian Gulf, the Mediterranean Sea, and the many US bases in surrounding countries including Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, the US has deployed several fighter squadrons as well as a THAAD battery and several Patriot anti-missile batteries. They seek to deter any attack on Israel by regional powers, but they are also actively participating in the fighting—like the US-led international coalition to strike the Houthis in Yemen and the Red Sea and the militias in Iraq and Syria.

³ This front has escalated and currently the future for people in Lebanon is uncertain. On September 23, an IDF attack on Lebanon killed at least 570 people. On September 27, Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s leader, was assassinated, and millions in Lebanon are uprooted from their homes. Now Israel is invading south Lebanon.

The US has also directly intervened in Israeli decision-making in order to influence the course of war. President Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin participated in Israeli government and war cabinet meetings, exerting significant pressure to implement their post-war vision. After realizing the American vision might be harder to initiate as long as Netanyahu is in charge, Americans also met with opposition leaders and Israeli civil society organizations.

In that vision, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are united under a “reformed” (meaning American-controlled) Palestinian Authority, and a “two-state solution” is implemented, following a series of normalization agreements with local regimes, in order to “integrate Israel into the region,” ensure its safety, and build a strong pro-American bloc to increase American influence and isolate competing quasi-imperialist regional powers such as Iran and Russia.

This is nothing new. The US has been interfering in this region to maintain its hegemony for decades now. A neocolonial policy of supporting corrupt and reactionary puppet regimes that serve as local proxies in order to guarantee American control over resources is a long US tradition. Ilan Pappé tells us how, following the British withdrawal from Palestine in 1948, the US was in a dire need of a pro-Western regional power. The US decided to invest further in Israel following its military victory in 1967, a major blow to secular nationalist movements in the region.

The Oslo Accords constituted an international intervention in local Palestinian politics. Not only did they serve to break a popular uprising led by decentralized and horizontal networks of grassroots activist groups and parties—they established an authoritarian, collaborationist puppet regime for the colonized to govern themselves according to US, EU, and Israeli incentives. When that regime failed to serve its global sponsors, with Arafat thinking he had more room to maneuver than he was allowed, it was quickly abolished and replaced by more obedient actors. In 2006, when Palestinians voted for the wrong candidate in democratic elections, a coup was initiated and the entire population punished. Palestinians are not allowed to make decisions regarding their own destiny. They must be kept under tight control, as they tend to reveal unruly elements unfavorable for US hegemony.

In recent years, in what Noam Chomsky dubbed “the Reactionary International,” Israel has signed a series of agreements and normalization pacts—known as the Abraham Accords—with local dictatorships, monarchies, and repressive regimes. This took place under US mediation, in opposition to the will of the populations of those countries. The states to join the normalization treaty so far include the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. Saudi Arabia was reportedly also on its way to normalization with Israel, but the process froze following October 7.

The economic impact of these agreements includes formal investments and business relations between the countries, especially regarding hi-tech industries, and also military relations and weapons trade. According to Israel’s Ministry of Defense, the value of Israeli defense exports to the countries with which it normalized relations in 2020 reached \$791 million. Oil deals between the UAE and Israel threaten to inflict ecological disaster in the Red Sea and exacerbate concerns regarding climate change.

This entire trajectory, coupled with the “two-state solution” as an aftermath to the “conflict,” represents a pattern in the US involvement in the region. A proposal was even made to have “moderate” (meaning US-controlled) regimes from the region take control of Gaza in the aftermath of the genocide until a “reformed” Palestinian Authority (domesticated enough not to cause its international patrons any further troubles) could take their place as the sovereign.

The regional theater of conflict between the American reactionary authoritarian alliance and the Iranian reactionary authoritarian alliance resembles Cold War campist politics. If back then, people were limited to choosing between the American bourgeois model and the Soviet bourgeois model, today it appears that the choices for the peoples of the region are once again between American imperialism and reactionary, tyrannical, expansionist, and quasi-imperialist powers like Iran, Russia, Turkey, and to some extent China. These countries have their own visions for the region and their own alliances with other repressive regimes, all of which brutally crack down on revolutionary movements that interfere with their plans or steer away from their monopoly on “resistance.™”

It won't be easy to escape the trap of being caught between these two camps and the dark future both of them represent for the region. But we could start by focusing on grassroots struggles on the ground, instead of on states and their proxies. No government is going to save us from this hell.

Palestinians have been betrayed by their leadership over and over. The PLO sought to be the “sole representative of the Palestinian people,” only to crush the first intifada—which had broken out beyond its control and against its wishes—and plunge into the disaster of the Oslo Accords. They went on to become fully entangled with the US regional order, making it one of the most successful examples in the history of the domestication and neutralization of revolutionary movements. The Palestinian resistance as an uncontrollable and ungovernable force, beyond the control of various waves of “representation,” authorities, and mechanisms of pacification and manipulation, remains threatening to all those who compete to impose their preferred world orders and whatever forces seek to bind it to their own interests.

For years, regimes in the Arab world used the Palestinian cause as the only issue around which people were allowed to mobilize and protest; this enabled them to allow people to let off steam while silencing criticism of their own policies. They also used this issue to claim legitimacy, as it was always widely supported by the peoples of the region. Dana El-Kurd shows how the movements organizing around Palestine in those states became schools for activism for the participants, enabling them to eventually oppose their own governments as well. Many of the movements that went on to participate in the Arab Spring started with Palestine solidarity organizing.

Even so-called “radical” regimes masquerading as supporters of the resistance, such as the Syrian government, turned to impose siege and slaughter Palestinians as soon as the latter were perceived to threaten their interests or to join freedom movements, as in Yarmouk refugee camp in 2014. Whether “normalizing” regimes or “resistance” regimes, authoritarians have always treated the Palestinian cause as a tool of legitimacy, empty rhetoric to be thrown around to ensure stability, even though their policies were anti-Palestinian in practice. In moments of truth, whenever the situation is getting out of control, they reveal their true faces.

Today, many governments in the region are actively suppressing Palestine solidarity movements and opposition to the genocide, as they see that these movements might “get out of control” or threaten normalization efforts that they hope will boost their economies, militaries, and repressive capabilities. Our best way out of this mess might be a revolutionary alliance of freedom movements throughout the region, and hopefully the world—a Liberation International that would stand proudly against the reactionary international led by the US and the authoritarian international involving Iran.

Palestine is deeply connected to the Syrian revolution, the tragedy of Sudan, the revolutionary feminists of Iran, the Rojava revolution, the uprising in Lebanon, the many movements in the Middle East since the Arab Spring, and—more globally—the Stop Cop City and Black Lives Matter movements in the US, the anti-colonial struggles of Indigenous peoples everywhere, the anti-junta resistance in Myanmar, Ukrainian resistance to Russian imperialism, and all struggles for freedom and liberation. We draw inspiration, strength, and lessons from each other. A Palestinian victory in Gaza would send waves of freedom to the farthest corners of the earth, while an Israeli victory will embolden those pursuing violent and genocidal strategies everywhere, strengthen the grip of reactionary and authoritarian alliances over entire populations, and enable them to further crush movements of liberation, whether in the name of “stability” or of “resistance.” If we depend on each other, we had better start acting accordingly. Who knows how much time we have left.

“It is true that we go to war to seek romance, and perhaps I was ashamed of admitting this to myself. You know how much of a cliché this term has turned into. I used to run away from this romance whenever it tried to sweep me away, and I used to try and make sense of all those motives. We’re too arrogant to admit this reason but we all know that what draws us towards heroism and martyrdom is the same thing that we are so ashamed to admit: romance.” -Bassel Al-Araj.

Attempting to Clear the Fog

Anarchists have reacted to the genocide and the solidarity movement with several layers of cognitive dissonance. Some positions were confused or naïve, lacking nuance and understanding of the material conditions prevailing in different geographies and political contexts—for example, sloganeering “No war but class war” arguments calling for the “Israeli and Palestinian proletariat” to “unite” against “their common oppressors” and other class-reductionist nonsense. Other positions went all the way to Islamophobia and conspiracy theories: “Israel created Hamas,” “Hamas are just like ISIS.”

Hamas is the subject of the most significant cognitive dissonance. Anti-authoritarians want to support the Palestinian movement, like any other movement for freedom and liberation, but they can’t comprehend that Hamas is an organic and integral part of that movement, so they make up stories to the effect that Hamas is the invention of the occupier, that Palestinians don’t really support them, that we can somehow tell the story of the resistance without them. They wish to somehow separate Hamas from the broader cause. How much easier things would be if that were possible!

Hamas are in fact a national liberation movement dedicated to the liberation of Palestine. The idea of using the religious concept of jihad as anti-colonialist resistance and self-defense is not new; it goes all the way back to the struggle against the French in Syria in the 1920s, if not further. It has appeared in Algeria and many struggles since. It has nothing to do with the Salafi-jihadist brand, and a pan-Islamic transnational caliphate is not on the table. The Palestinian liberation movement is heterogeneous and diverse; it includes many ideologies and ideas we might disagree with. Hamas deserves criticism for its patriarchy, its homophobia, its reliance on reactionary forces such as Iran and the Assad regime, its brutal repression. Brave anti-authoritarian

Palestinian groups have already offered this, like Gaza Youth Breaks Out back in 2011. But our criticism should be fair and grounded in reality, not simply a litany of preconceived notions.

We also need to talk about the settlers. There are many different ways to analyze Israeli society. We can use the useful distinction that historian Ilan Pappé makes between the State of Israel and the State of Judea. In short, on one side, the liberal, secular, and “democratic” (Jewish democracy, for Jews only) wing of Jewish supremacy, apartheid, and settler colonialism, the one leading the anti-Netanyahu protests in Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities; on the other side, the more far-right, theocratic, and openly fascist wing, composed chiefly of West Bank Jewish pogromists and their allies. The anti-fascist author and journalist, David Sheen, offers another useful schema, dividing Israeli society into supremacist, opportunist, reformist, and humanist camps.

All of these analyses explore the internal debate within settler society over the best way to manage apartheid, settler colonialism, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. These social rifts are not new, but they have been exacerbated over the last few months. If we do not understand them, we might reach the wrong conclusions.

For example, some comrades cite the Anti-Netanyahu protests to pressure him to accept a ceasefire in order to strike a deal with the resistance to release hostages as evidence that many Israelis oppose the regime. Some people even present it as a mass anti-war movement. This is inaccurate. It fits the anarchist narrative because we are used to insisting on the distinction between people and states, and many Israelis really do oppose Netanyahu. But support for genocide is overwhelming across various political camps.

A huge sign in neon lights over protesters in Tel Aviv tells the whole story—bring back (the hostages), and go back (to Gaza). This is a brazen proposal to resume fighting as soon as the Israeli captives are released. This does not necessarily represent all the thousands of participants, but it does indicate the Zionist logic of these demonstrations—another manifestation of Jewish supremacy, maybe its liberal camp, but nonetheless, there is no concern for Palestinian lives there. Honest, genuine, anti-Zionist voices calling to end the genocide do exist in Israel, and they hold small demonstrations every once in a while, which are often repressed by police and attacked by fascists. They are a tiny, hated, and insignificant minority, with no hope of becoming a mass political power any time in the near future.

The inconvenient truth is that when it’s time to commit a massacre, Israeli society puts aside all petty arguments, stops pretending to be a civil society in a “democratic state,” and unites for the task. Then it is revealed what Israel is in reality: a huge military base. There is no mass opposition to genocide. The mass protests against the judicial overhaul stopped for a few months following the shock of October 7, then reappeared in the form of protests for the release of hostages, renewing the discussion about genocide management. All the reservists’ threats to refuse to serve came to an end after October 7, 2023; they never really intended to follow through. Rebellion and protest in Israel are always limited to narrow Zionist narratives that explicitly delineate what is acceptable and what’s not. The fascist and liberal wings of Zionism might express it differently, but Jewish supremacy and the complete dehumanization of Palestinians are the common threads.

The situation was bad already, but the radical left has shrunk significantly since October 7, with the attacks shocking the Israeli society to its core, awakening settler anxieties and pushing many “leftists” into the warm hug of Jewish supremacy. We can expect this to continue. The reason for this is that the “Israeli left” is overwhelmingly predicated on the notion that “the end of occupation” (decolonization) would mean that they could continue their convenient settler lifestyle minus the guilt. For example, one of the main messages of the anti-occupation bloc

during the mass movement against the judicial overhaul that existed up until October 7 was that “the occupation” (which typically means the 1967 occupation) is an “obstacle to Israeli democracy,” and if only we could take care of that, the rest would be fine. It is not easy to find anyone who sees that the entire Israeli regime is illegitimate, that the occupation began in 1948 not 1967, that the land is stolen from the river to sea and decolonization means the radical transformation of power relations.

Alfredo Bonanno said, “The ideal solution, at least as far as all those who have the freedom of peoples at heart can see, would be generalized insurrection. In other words, an intifada starting from the Israeli people that is capable of destroying the institutions that govern them.” I like Bonanno and think that most of his observations are brilliant, but this particular analysis does not fit the reality on the ground. It’s part of a long tradition of Western thinkers who focus on settler society, as if it could be a meaningful vehicle for change. I strongly disagree. There is no historical precedent for societies of settlers or slave masters rebelling against their own privileges, and I don’t think Palestine would be the first to break from this trajectory.

There are settler-colonial societies, like the US, that managed to develop a proud tradition of race traitors after a long development. We saw this during the George Floyd uprising; French Algeria offers another example. I believe that this is theoretically possible for the settler society in Palestine, maybe in some point in the future, but probably not right now. Some Israelis went far beyond the “Israeli left” and fully betrayed “their” society, switched sides, and joined the Palestinian popular struggle, under Palestinian terms and leadership. Some even joined the armed struggle. These are very few, far from representing a significant phenomenon in Israeli society.

Those who want to express solidarity with the very few anti-Zionist Israelis should do so. It’s a good cause and they would appreciate it. But honestly, support for the Palestinian resistance is much more important right now. We should stand with the resistance against the violence of settler colonialism and genocide.

This might be inconvenient, but we must have this conversation. No one has to agree with me, I’m speaking from my own perspective and conditions, and this can be seen as my attempt to appeal to my camp of origin, the anti-Zionist Israeli radical left. In my opinion, the “Israeli Left” is a dead end. I have no reason to doubt the intentions of many of my former and current comrades in the “anti-occupation bloc” and “radical bloc” in Tel Aviv and other cities. They are honest, brave, rebellious souls; many of them really are in it for Palestinian lives, fighting to end the genocide.

But those who have managed to escape the cult of Zionism must now take another step forward. To them, I want to say that we must stop seeing ourselves as actors within Israeli society, trying to improve or reform it in order to save it from itself. It would be better to adopt Al-Araj’s framework of the liberation camp vs. the colonial camp,⁴ and Fanon’s understanding of the adoption of the resistance identity as a political choice rather than an issue of race or origin, and work to shed the settler identity completely.

⁴“I no longer see this as a conflict between Arabs and Jews, between Israeli and Palestinian. I have abandoned this duality, this naïve oversimplification of the conflict. I have become convinced of Ali Shariati and Frantz Fanon’s divisions of the world (into a colonial camp and a liberation camp). In each of the two camps, you will find people of all religions, languages, races, ethnicities, colors, and classes. In this conflict, for example, you will find people of our own skin standing rudely in the other camp, and at the same time you will find Jews standing in our camp.” -Bassel Al-Araj

This is what Palestinians have been calling on us to do for years. There is no reforming a sick society; it will not work to appeal to the interests of a system that is rotten to its core. There hasn't been a single second in the history of this state since its inception that wasn't predicated on intense violence and complete dehumanization. This is a call for desertion, full race treason and betrayal, switching sides, with all the risks, repression, torture, and death it might entail. This is not easy, but we have a rich global history to draw from. We can recall John Brown and his militia, or the French in Algeria switching sides and joining the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*, "National Liberation Front"). What those people understood, at crucial historical junctures, was that despite what liberal interpretations of "identity politics" tell us, when revolution calls, it's not about being a passive "ally" or checking your privileges, but throwing yourself into the struggle. Identity becomes a political choice, based on actions, rather than origins.

"The settler is not simply the man who must be killed. Many members of the mass of colonialists reveal themselves to be much, much nearer to the national struggle than certain sons of the nation."

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

Anxieties about decolonization are not coming out of nowhere. Nothing is promised to us. Not even liberation itself, to be honest. Some colonial projects have ended somewhat peacefully, with regime transition and reconciliation committees, as in South Africa; others have ended in a bloodbath, like in Algeria. Even the libertarian, confederalist example of Rojava hasn't been a smooth process. In none of these cases was it perfect. Liberation is always a messy and bloody process in real life.

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, in their essay *Decolonization is not a metaphor*, explain that decolonization is incommensurable with other social justice struggles—it is meant to be unsettling, as it would undoubtedly relieve the settlers—including workers—of their stolen resources. We must be honest about what we're saying. For example, in the debate about the phrase "from the river to sea," about whether it means democracy or the abolition of Israel—the simple answer is that it means both. Decolonization on Palestinian conditions—the abolition of Zionism, the return of the refugees, the end of military rule, and equal civil rights—will mean that Palestine goes back to what it was before Zionist colonization, a majority Arab land. I believe Jewish people would be welcome to stay—those who are willing to live equally with the rest of the people on the land, without a racist system of segregation and privilege based on ethnicity.

As for class reductionism, there's no material basis for "class solidarity" between "Palestinians and Israelis." Under settler colonialism, this is not the same class. Jews and Arabs are not equal, not even when they work in the same workplaces. As Frantz Fanon noted, in a colonial context, national oppression is primary and class oppression is secondary. Settler colonies do not simply exploit the labor power of the colonized or the land resources of the colony, like other kinds of colonialism; they are predicated on the complete erasure of the colonized through ethnic cleansing, genocide, or both.

According to historian Ilan Pappé, Zionism, like any other settler-colonial movement, requires the annihilation or expulsion of the native population in order to succeed. Many such movements were composed of European refugees escaping exclusion and persecution, looking for a place to build their own new Europe. Indigenous populations are always an obstacle to such utopian visions, and so the solution is typically a massive campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Similar settler-colonial projects, such as the US, Australia, South Africa, and Canada, also often found a religious justification for settling, used a superpower to gain a foothold in a foreign land, then looked for ways to get rid of both the empire that aided them and the majority of the Indigenous population.

Israel has made it pretty clear that wherever it engaged in massive ethnic cleansing camping, such as 1948, or during the current genocide in Gaza, its targets are not the Palestinian proletariat, but the Palestinians as a people. All classes and social groups are a target.

If even Marx recognized that the struggle for the eight-hour workday in the US couldn't really begin before the abolition of slavery, today's Western leftists should be able to reach the same conclusions regarding settler colonialism and apartheid. If we want to have a meaningful footing in the solidarity movement, we must acknowledge that some issues cannot be reduced to class.

Revolutionaries have already made this mistake before. Many male anarchists in the CNT (*Federación Anarquista Ibérica*, "National Confederation of Labor") during the Spanish revolution were dismissive of the women's organization *Mujeres Libres* ("Free Women"), proclaiming that gender repression was secondary to the class struggle, and that in any case the revolution would solve it. Today, we know that overthrowing capitalism won't simply abolish patriarchy. We could create a classless society that would still be sexist and oppressive to women and other genders. Some leftists see the Kibbutz movement as an example of libertarian socialist societies, ignoring the fact that the Kibbutzim are a racist and colonialist project for Jews only, built in the context of the Zionist land theft, often on the physical ruins of villages that were ethnically cleansed. Without a proper analysis of settler colonialism and an understanding of national oppression as a primary issue unto itself, any understanding of the situation in Palestine will remain an awkward attempt to import foreign worldviews and solutions into geographies with radically different problems.

Along with the commitment to free Palestine, I would like to suggest to comrades to allow Palestine to free them as well. It can work both ways. Don't participate in the movement just to preach, but also to listen. We should not give up our perspectives and critiques, but we must use this opportunity to enrich ourselves and broaden our horizons by learning from other liberation struggles, instead of simply trying to impose our preconceived notions on them. I would love to discuss sensitive subjects with my Palestinian comrades, such as the dependence of the armed resistance on reactionary elements like Iran and Assad's Syria⁵. But I must be able to do this as a comrade, from inside the struggle, after developing trusting relationships and accepting a Palestinian worldview, not as an annoying leftist critiquing from the outside. If all we do is

⁵ This is a touchy subject. Hamas initially supported the Syrian revolution back in 2012 and broke ties with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. This move severed the financial support that the movement received from Iran. A decade later, in a controversial statement, Hamas restored relations with Assad. The political chaos and shifting of alliances in the Middle East during the Arab Spring, the military coup against Mohamed Morsi in Egypt and the closing of Gaza's tunnels on the Egyptian side, and the normalization pacts between various local regimes with Israel all served to isolate Hamas and force it to "pick a side." In either case, I believe that, just as anarchists and anti-authoritarians in the West were able to understand the decision made by people in Rojava to accept American aid while facing the genocidal army of ISIS in Kobane, they can also understand the decisions made by Palestinians under difficult conditions. Until we have built a Liberation International that can offer actual material support to struggles on the ground, there will be a limit to how much we can criticize decisions made by those facing the threat of annihilation, caught between competing empires and regional orders. This doesn't mean we shouldn't criticize at all, but we should at least do so with nuance and context.

spend time with those like ourselves, it will show, and it will reflect badly on us. People notice this, and it will sabotage the relations of trust that we are trying to build within the movement.

Facing the Age of Genocide

The colonial world order has divided the world into the “civilized” part, the impenetrable Global North where liberal democracy prevails, and vast genocide fields filled with a surplus population to be exterminated, enslaved, robbed of resources, and forgotten. In a settler-colonial context, this process happens in the same territory, without the geographic distance between the colony and the metropolis. Ghettos, besieged cities, military rule, and a system of ethnic segregation are constructed, dividing the colonized into several classes of oppressed people, building mental barriers where physical ones are absent, and making sure to prevent any mingling of natives and settlers.

There are several ways in which the colonial order can get out of balance. One way is fascism, in which the colonial practices are brought *inside*, into the metropolis. In this case, genocidal and racializing practices that were previously reserved for the surplus population in the colonies are utilized against unwanted populations at home. But the colonial order can also go out of balance during uprisings. The natives, refusing to be confined to their place, break the supposedly impenetrable fortress of the colony—which turns out to be very much penetrable—and, as Fanon put it, they flood the forbidden cities, taking everything in their path.

Israel sought for decades to maintain a population of Westernized, liberal democratic settlers, experiencing home (Europe) away from home, after their original home became too dangerous for them. Other, non-European Jews were welcome to join, as long as they were Jewish and accepted Western hegemony. Concrete walls, isolated ghettos, and mental barriers were instilled in order to separate the settler society from the brutal daily violence necessary to maintain this order. There is no one way to do this. Strategies include cultural erasure (for example, Palestinians with citizenship become “Israeli Arabs”); massive ethnic cleansing campaigns when possible (like in 1948) and when not—small ones, like the Judaization⁶ of the Galilee, the Naqab, and neighborhoods in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa⁷; military rule⁸; conflict management, strict racial segregation, and counterinsurgency, as seen in the Oslo Accords, the separation wall in the West Bank, and the siege of Gaza; and genocide. Today it seems that conflict management, at least, has failed to deliver.

Israel has been humiliated more than once in the last few years. The state lost control during the uprising of 2021 and again on October 7, 2023. The Palestinians have proven time and time again to be an uncontrollable force, capable of threatening a nuclear superpower supported by the strongest empire in the world, despite that empire pouring billions of dollars into security

⁶ This is the official Israeli term.

⁷ Under neoliberal global capitalism, ethnic cleansing can be privatized as well. Judaization attempts can be under the management of settler organizations or real estate agents, thus allowing the issue to be presented as a simple real estate dispute. The involvement of American settler organizations in the attempts to evict Palestinian residents in east Jerusalem, and gentrification in Jaffa and certain neighborhoods in Haifa, is intrinsically linked to decades-long ethnic cleansing campaigns, under different faces, as colonial systems adapt to new opportunities and circumstances.

⁸ There was only half a year, in 1966, when Israel wasn’t imposing military rule on Palestinians. Internal communities of uprooted people inside what became Israel were under military rule until 1966; then Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza a year later and imposed military rule there.

apparatus, counterinsurgency, and advanced technology. Israelis have noticed that the state is incapable of delivering security despite its mighty power, and they are starting to panic. We can only expect that the punishment for rebelling will be crueler each time as pressure grows from shocked Israelis and the international powers to keep rebellious Palestinians under control.

It is entirely possible that as time passes, the genocide fields will expand, and more people will be treated as surplus population. There is no guarantee that we, the privileged citizens of civilization, will not eventually find ourselves on the wrong side of that wall. Racialized minorities know that already, and as for the rest of us—we shouldn't count on our whiteness, as Jews found out during the Second World War, Irish people experienced under British occupation, and Ukrainians are finding out today. Just as whiteness can be ascribed, it can also be taken away.

Whenever an empire brands a new demographic as surplus population, the borders around "civilization" shift. The more they succeed in trapping a growing part of the earth's population in a living hell, the bleaker and more uncertain our own future becomes. The more they succeed in crushing the rebellion of the undesirables, the more their success will inform other empires and competing world orders. Just as we are inspired by every slave revolt and ghetto uprising, regimes also take notes and inspiration from each other when it comes to repression. We are all deeply connected.

What should we do, those of us situated in this or that entity, citizens of the Global North, whether as settlers in the colony or the imperial core? It's hard for me to say. Situated in the occupied Interior, which, as I said, does not openly rebel at the moment, is it fair for me to advocate for things I don't do myself? We feel the need for an insurrection, but our communities are devastated and broken, people are paralyzed, and the wounds are still open from the last round of repression. I can't tell anyone what to do. All I can do is share my perspective. It's for you to analyze your conditions and see what fits.

Comrades in the imperial core of so-called North America have showed some amazing and inspiring resistance. Comrades in Europe have too. Sabotage, port blockades, marches, campus occupations—all of these are meaningful, and some have won significant achievements. I don't want to claim, as some do, that these actions have accomplished nothing so far. We don't know what the state of Gaza would be right now if not for these courageous actions. Movement building is important in itself. A whole new generation has been politicized and radicalized, and they will carry the struggles forward.

But one thing is certain. We didn't stop the genocide.

We need to focus. The genocide has been in progress for a year, and at this point, it shows no sign of slowing down or remaining confined to Gaza. I believe the time to escalate is now. The implications are enormous. Right now, Israel is committed to go to war with Lebanon and perhaps also with Iran. The worst-case scenario seems to be unfolding. This is going to make the situation spiral out of control even more; it could cause a full-blown regional war involving an unimaginable amount of death and destruction. We are facing a completely psychotic world order intent on causing the maximum amount of devastation to everything that stands in its way. We cannot remain passive spectators. We are involved and what happens will reflect on us.

From the looks of it, throughout the course of the occupations last semester, comrades in the US developed many insurrectionary elements to develop and expand. They also faced many cops—some in uniform, others concealed within the movement, like liberals, pacifists, professional "activists," and reformists. People need to find ways to deal with them. Don't fall for counterinsurgency tactics intended to pacify you, divide and fragment the movement, define for you

what is “acceptable” and “legitimate,” or delimit the boundaries of the protest. Be brave, uncontrollable, and ungovernable. The rest is up to you to analyze, as far as tactics go, but don’t let anyone confine you.

Also—ignore smear campaigns. They might become louder if the movement becomes more successful. I already saw Zionist media and propaganda depicting the protests as “antisemitic pogroms.” I shouldn’t have to spend a single moment explaining how ridiculous this is.

We all know that the repressive agencies of Israel and the US are training together, and share tips, tools and tactics on how to repress populations and movements of freedom. This should concern anyone involved in local struggles, such as Stop Cop City, Black Lives Matter, Indigenous solidarity, and support for migrants and refugees. We also know that Israel is exporting weapons and repressive technology everywhere. AI tools are being developed and used to automate identifying and killing “suspects.” And we know it goes the other way around—Israel is bombing Gaza (and now also Lebanon) with US weapons and full support. This is an American (and European) war as much as it is Israeli. The imperial core of the Global North is absolutely involved and is a belligerent part of the aggression, and this makes its citizens an active part as well.

It’s not entirely possible to physically join the armed struggle on the ground the way one can in Rojava or Ukraine, but there is no need to. People can come to Palestine to participate in the popular struggle, as brave American and European citizens already have; some of them have become martyrs themselves. This helps, but the resistance is asking for something else: turn your own cities in the imperial core into a battleground. Bring the war home. Open another front. Join the liberation camp, as Al-Araj puts it, and raise hell against the world order that allowed this to happen. They must feel consequences. I believe an uprising is still possible, here in the Interior as well, but it will require us to be brave, like Gazans are.

One last thing I want to ask—as I was writing this piece, the fighting on the fronts in Lebanon, Iran, and elsewhere escalated significantly. If a full-blown war erupts elsewhere, the attention of the world will shift and Gaza could be forgotten. People should fight for the lives of Lebanese people as well, but don’t stop talking about Gaza and acting for the sake of people there. The genocide there isn’t over. It might even accelerate once attention shifts away from it.

Raise your voice, raise the flag of revolution.

No voice is louder than the voice of the uprising.

“If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza
while looking heaven in the eye
awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—
and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh

not even to himself—
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale.”

—Refaat Alareer, (1979-2023), writer and poet. On December 6, 2023, he was murdered by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza along with his brother, his sister, and their children.

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