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Dismantle it and let them fall

Bassel al-Araj

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12 October 2020

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Bassel al-Araj was a Palestinian intellectual and activist. Israeli forces killed him on 6 March 2017 during a home raid in al-Bireh, near Ramallah, the seat of the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank. His death made him an icon of Palestinian resistance, and his slaying generated widespread outrage among Palestinians and calls for an end to PA “security coordination” with Israel. In 2018, al-Araj’s writings were collected in a book titled after a line in his will, I Have Found My Answers. Al-Araj wrote the following piece from the book in December 2012.

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7. Begging

We started to beg for anything, for what is worth having and what is not, especially after Arab states started giving large sums to the PLO and major countries started paying despite themselves just to pacify the revolutionaries. This affected the independent decision-making ability of Palestinians that Yasser Arafat fought his whole life to protect without giving in. So to end the begging, dismantle it and let them fall.

8. The legitimization of gangs

After Oslo, settlers were given the legitimacy to be on our lands. But the worst is perhaps yet to come, where dreaming of Acre will be a crime, owning Ghassan Kanafani's story *Return to Haifa* will be against the policy of the state and the horse of Mahmoud Darwish, which was left behind, will become an illegal migrant.

Is it any wonder that PA leader Mahmoud Abbas insists he does not want to undermine Israel's legitimacy? What I find most strange is Abbas' constant apologies for our people's struggles. So dismantle it and let them fall.

In order to determine everything it would take to dismantle it and let them fall, I would need all 20 years of negotiations and the number of words spoken by Saeb Erekat at the Herzliya Conference, but these eight points are enough to create a charge sheet against those who must fall.

We will become like the ancient Israelites roaming in the desert without shelter, if we remain in this condition between profiteers.

I was writing an article with the title, "Why the Palestinian Authority must be dismantled" when a friend of mine shared with me the program of the Israeli Herzliya Conference taking place that year.

I was surprised to learn that senior Palestinian Authority figure Saeb Erekat, along with Prince Hasan of Jordan, were taking part. I decided to change the title to "Dismantle it and let them fall."

So why must we abolish the PA and bring down its leaders?

1. The Harkis

During the Algerian war of independence, many Algerians – at least 150,000 – joined the French army and secret police, and fought against the revolution. These so-called Harkis have a share of the blood of a million martyrs on their hands. The majority of them belonged to the class that benefited from the French occupation.

The situation in Palestine has many of the same features of what was happening in Algeria shortly before the revolution.

It is no secret that there is a comprador class directly benefiting from the existence of the occupation, and the current situation gives great privileges to that small fraction of society. Let us avoid taking up arms against one another. Let us dismantle it and let them fall.

2. The state is the death of the revolution

Following the success of the Cuban revolution, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro disagreed over this dialectic. Guevara believed that revolutionaries needed to be freed from the burden of the state so they could export the revolution. Castro disagreed. But the reality is that Guevara was right and Castro was wrong.

Their disagreement concerned a state with all the attributes of a state. So what about half a state? Guevara's analysis can be applied

to the Palestinian question as well: After the 1993 Oslo accords were signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the obligations and duties of the state became a burden on the back of the revolution, at the expense of liberation.

And after the Zionists fled Gaza in 2005, Hamas was incorporated into the Palestinian Authority and became constrained by a truce that was constantly renewed in deference to its governmental responsibilities and duties. So that we may be free of this burden, dismantle it and let them fall.

3. Corruption

There is a lot to be said, but I will focus here on political corruption, as it is the most widespread form of corruption, found wherever you look, from the top of the pyramid all the way to the bottom.

From the Palestinian Authority to the legislature, all the way down to the national level, through parties and factions, the institutions of the Palestine Liberation Organization, public organizations and trade union groups — all have lost their legitimacy.

According to the Basic Law, we must wait for elections in order to choose alternatives, so we became hostages to Hamas' anger over [Fatah leader] Sakher Habash spouting blasphemies or Habash's anger for someone being 30 minutes tardy.

When they agreed on anything, it was to strip 41.8 percent of refugees (according to 2008 UNRWA statistics) of their rights to elect representatives in the national council, in order to maintain the stability of the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan.

And they removed 1.4 million Palestinian citizens of Israel from their agenda. So to end this corruption, dismantle it and let them fall.

4. A contractor from within

The Oslo accords transferred all the burdens and duties of the occupation to the PLO without restoring any rights, making it the cheapest occupation in history. Let us get rid of those burdens. Dismantle it and let them fall.

5. The culture of Oslo

When I hear stories from elders about the culture and morals of Palestinian society during the first intifada, I'm genuinely shocked. It's as if they are talking about a totally different world.

When I look at this society, I see it overrun by consumerism and individualism, a lack of morals and principles, the spread of feelings of inferiority and colonized thinking.

Joining a political party has become about reaping the benefits, not about offering sacrifices and struggle. When I see all this I realize that in order to rid ourselves of this shame we must dismantle it and let them fall.

6. Security coordination

I cannot say that I know what security coordination with Israel is because I haven't read any official document describing what occurs during those meetings (which violates the most basic principle of good governance, transparency). But it is enough for me to cite Issa Qaraqe [the PA minister for prisoners affairs at the time] in his article on the end of security coordination. Dismantle it and let them fall.