COMMENTARY | POLITICS

Reimagining Palestine After One Year of Genocide

By: Yara Hawari · October, 2024

After a year of enduring relentless violence and devastation, Palestinians stand at a pivotal moment. This commentary reflects on the immense losses for the Palestinian people since October 2023 and the emerging opportunities to work towards a future free of settler colonial oppression. It argues that now is the time for the movement to shift from a reactive stance to one that defines its own priorities. As part of this transition, this commentary outlines three necessary steps: moving beyond a reliance on international law, deepening connections in the Global South, and dedicating resources to exploring radical visions of a liberated future.[1]

Taking Stock: A Year of Inconceivable Devastation

Over the last year, Palestine has been irrevocably changed in ways that, for many of us, were once inconceivable. Since the beginning of the genocide, the Israeli regime has killed over 50,000 Palestinians in Gaza—an estimate provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Health that includes over 6,000 unidentified bodies in the ministry's possession and an additional 10,000 assumed to be still buried under the rubble. Devastatingly, some will never be retrieved. Meanwhile, a July 2024 article in the Lancet medical journal on the importance of accounting for Gaza's fatalities argued that a conservative estimate of total deaths in conflict scenarios equated to "four indirect deaths per one direct death." By this calculation, Israel's

genocide has likely resulted in the loss of over 250,000 Palestinian lives since October 2023.

In addition, Gaza is now home to more than 42 million tonnes of rubble. These ruins include many people's destroyed homes, businesses, and essential public infrastructure. Relentless Israeli bombing has also released hundreds of thousands of tonnes of toxic dust into the air, with long-lasting and deadly consequences. 80% of schools and universities have been damaged or destroyed, and, for the first time since the Nakba, Palestinian children in Gaza did not begin school this year.

Concurrently, the Israeli regime and its settler community stole a record amount of land across the West Bank over the past twelve months. This theft has been accompanied by increasing violence against Palestinian bodies: Over 700 have been killed, 5,000 injured, and thousands more arrested, bringing the number of Palestinian political prisoners to nearly 10,000.

Further north, in Lebanon, the Israeli regime has expanded its assault and displaced over one million people in the space of days and killed over 1,800, including Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. Israeli bombardments have continued to target neighborhoods and Palestinian refugee camps from the sky, while colonial forces began a ground invasion in early October 2024.

Amid this brute violence, the issue of complicity has never been starker. Allied regimes, including the US and Germany, have continued their unabated support for Israel with increased military aid packages and weapons sales. Most of the Israeli regime's diplomatic and trade relationships also remain intact, not only in the West but across the Arab World as well. These collaborations are done in flagrant violation of international law, which requires third states to do everything in their power to prevent genocide and not to aid and abet war crimes. At the same time, media coverage of the genocide across mainstream Western

outlets reveals a pattern of deeply rooted Palestinian dehumanization.

Thus, while pundits and policymakers alike have frequently portrayed Israel as an unstoppable force over this past year, it is anything but. On the contrary, Israel's most powerful allies have not only failed to take any material steps to pressure the colonial state to end its ongoing and ever-expanding violence across the region, but they have been active and willing accomplices. Depictions of Israel's incessant persistence accordingly only obscure the complicity and inaction of other nations that continue to enable such brazenness.

Notably, the road to Israel's genocide in Gaza and the escalation of its aggression elsewhere was, in large part, paved by increasing Arab normalization. While Israel has long positioned itself as a lone democracy surrounded by hostile enemies on all sides, this description is unequivocally false, historically and currently. Indeed, since its establishment in 1948, the Israeli state has enjoyed both covert and public relations with various Arab regimes. These relationships have expanded over security and intelligence cooperation in the last decade, culminating in the 2020 Abraham Accords. The formalized relationships between Israel and several Arab states have led to a sharp divide across the region—one that Israel exploits to fuel the racist notion of two opposing axes in Southwest Asia: that which is aligned with Western "civilized" values, and that which Netanyahu recently described as "the curse."

A different picture is evident at the grassroots level, where the popular mobilization of millions worldwide demonstrates the massive disconnect between government policy and the people. Indeed, it has been made abundantly clear that there is an ever-growing consensus for support of the Palestinian struggle for liberation from Zionist settler colonialism. Cities the world over have seen consistent demonstrations, vigils, sit-ins, and civil disobedience in outrage over the ongoing genocide. University campuses have also been sites of confrontation,

where students and faculty have called on administrations to cut ties with complicit institutions and divest from complicit investments.

Closer to Palestine, countries across the region have also seen consistent popular mobilization—often in defiance of local authorities. In Jordan, for example, the streets have been awash with protests in solidarity with Palestinians and against the country's complicity with the Israeli regime, stemming from the 1994 Wadi Araba peace agreement and extending to economic ties with Israel and military support from the US. In Egypt, small but powerful demonstrations have similarly taken place, with protestors condemning the government's direct involvement in Gaza's siege. Increasingly, people throughout the Arab world are making the direct link between the US's imperial presence in the region, rising authoritarianism, and the oppression of the Palestinian people.

What Next? Envisioning A Liberated Future

Taking stock of this unfathomable devastation is a challenge on its own, particularly as both Israel's genocide in Gaza and attack on Lebanon persist, and as the region seems on the brink of an even wider war. Beyond the past and present, however, lies an even greater but necessary task: to think beyond this current moment to a time when Zionist settler colonial oppression is no longer a feature of Palestinian life, and to envision ways to bridge the gap between the present and this radically different future.

Plenty of obstacles stand in the way of this practice. The continuum of tragedies and violence that Palestinians face on a daily basis is perhaps among the greatest impediments to future visioning, with those in Gaza continuing to bear the brunt of Zionist settler colonial violence. Inevitably, fundamental survival takes priority for many, and dedicating thought to visions of a liberated Palestinian future seems like an impossible, if privileged, task.

Another barrier to this effort is that the parameters of what is both possible and feasible for a Palestinian future have long been shaped by those whose policies and values are antithetical to Palestinian liberation. Indeed, for over the last two decades, Palestinians have been told to imagine their futures within the framework of the two-state solution, where their collective and individual rights are diminished, and a truncated form of autonomy is disguised as sovereignty. On its part, the Palestinian leadership capitulated to these parameters in return for scraps of power, transforming what was an anti-colonial liberatory struggle into a state-building project. For many third states, the narrative of the two-state solution has been a convenient smokescreen that has effectively enabled the continued colonization of Palestinian land.

In early 2020, a renewed call to action emerged among Palestinians and allies that emphasized the urgent need to imagine liberation and begin crafting a path toward a radically different future. Following the traditions and scholarships of other Indigenous peoples facing colonial erasure, these efforts and works sought to create space for carving out a blueprint of a future free of colonial domination. Since then, Palestinians have had to weather a global pandemic, the crushing of popular and unifying movements, and the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Yet the task to imagine remains as urgent as ever. The past year necessitates a reordering of movement priorities to return to the practice of future visioning. Bearing in mind that this effort is a long-term commitment without the fruit of short-term gains, the steps below reflect directions that may help open possibilities for the Palestinian imaginary:

Decenter International Law

In the last two decades, significant segments of Palestinian civil society and the wider solidarity movement have placed international law at the center of their

work. Yet, for many, the ongoing genocide in Gaza has had a profound impact on the perceived power of the international legal regime and made clear its deep institutional biases.

Israel has systematically violated the provisions of the Geneva Conventions related to warfare and occupation, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has found the state to be committing plausible acts of genocide in Gaza over the past year. Still, not only have the US, the UK, and others played down and disregarded these violations, but they have also actively blocked attempts to hold Israel accountable for them through available legal channels. Hence, the Gaza genocide has only underscored what many have long known—that international law requires the political will of states to enforce it and invoke accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, Western hegemony at the UN means that the lives of some are considered more valuable than others. This was demonstrated par excellence with the international response to Ukraine amid Russia's invasion compared to that toward Gaza.

While legal activists may make some gains from within the international legal regime for the Palestinian struggle, it is clear that the Palestinian people will achieve neither accountability nor liberation through UN resolutions. International law, therefore, must be decentered as a framework and considered merely one of many tactics in the resistance toolbox rather than the toolbox itself.

Reorient Around the Peoples of the Global South

For many in the Eastern Mediterranean and across the Global South, engaging with the Palestinian struggle has never been a theoretical or rhetorical exercise. Rather, this engagement has long been understood as praxis, with the liberation of Palestine as a necessary component for radical change worldwide.

During the Egyptian revolution, activists often said *the road to Jerusalem runs through Cairo*. Among them was Alaa Abd El Fattah, an Egyptian writer and

political prisoner. Abd El Fattah is of a generation of Egyptians raised on images of Palestinians resisting occupation during the Second Intifada. The student demonstrations in support of the Palestinian uprising eventually fed into the movement that would lead the Egyptian revolution in 2011. In 2021, Abd El Fattah wrote that, for him and many others of his generation, the roots of the revolution were in Palestine.

Abd El Fattah's insights reflect a notion commonly shared across the region: that Palestinian freedom is inherently tied to the freedom of all communities under authoritarian rule, whose regimes serve primarily colonial and imperial interests. To struggle for one is to struggle for the other. This connection in shared resistance extends beyond the Arab World to other communities of the Global South, from Algeria to South Africa to the native peoples of Turtle Island. The South African government, for example, brought the charge of genocide against the Israeli regime to the ICJ in December 2023. In April 2024, Nicaragua extended the legal battle and brought legal action against Germany for facilitating the genocide.

It is now a matter of urgency that we work proactively to re-anchor the Palestinian struggle to one that orients itself around a Global South framework. Doing so requires moving away from prioritizing solidarity efforts with people in positions of supremacist power and instead towards collective power-building with other colonized and marginalized communities.

Build the Infrastructure for Decolonial Imagining

For decolonial imagination to thrive at scale, Palestinian society requires infrastructure that accommodates and values such a collective process, alongside the prefigurative practice of experimenting with those future visions in the present.

A powerful Palestinian history of this praxis—of imagination and experimentation coming together—already exists. The 2021 Unity Intifada, for example,

demonstrated in real time what it looks like to overcome fragmentation and embody a version of unity that much of Palestinian society has long demanded. This was exemplified by the *Manifesto of Dignity and Hope*, which called for the singular goal of "reuniting Palestinian society in all of its different parts; reuniting our political will, and our means of struggle to confront Zionism throughout Palestine." In other words, the manifesto advocated for non-partition as the only framework to challenge colonial parameters of possibility.

Over the past year, protest camps across university campuses likewise illustrated the vital role of claimed spaces toward this effort. There, students demonstrated what decolonial, participatory knowledge sharing can and should look like, distinguishing themselves from the dominant knowledge paradigms rooted in white supremacy and indigenous erasure.

Today, it is imperative that the movement builds on these past achievements and dedicates resources to initiatives that enable radical thinking and prefigurative exploration. This can happen at various levels, from popular organizing to reenvisioning policy to new approaches in education. Doing so will serve to expand the collective understanding of what is possible, ready the ground for a liberated future, and sharpen the skills necessary to reach that end.

1. *To read this piece in French, please click here. Al-Shabaka is grateful for the efforts by human rights advocates to translate its pieces, but is not responsible for any change in meaning.*

Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network, is an independent, non-profit organization. Al-Shabaka convenes a multidisciplinary, global network of Palestinian analysts to produce critical policy analysis and collectively imagine a new policymaking paradigm for Palestine and Palestinians worldwide.

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