COMMENTARY | POLITICS

# The Palestinian Struggle: From Genocide to Global Realignment

By: Tareq Baconi · December, 2024

This commentary is based on an episode of Rethinking Palestine, Al-Shabaka's podcast series, which aired on October 31, 2024. The discussion may be listened to in full here.

## Introduction: Reorienting the Struggle

For Palestinians, a return to the conditions prior to October 7 is unthinkable. This past year has been one of the bloodiest in Palestinian history, with a death toll surpassing even that of the Nakba. The devastation we have endured will irrevocably shape our politics, intellectual frameworks, and approaches to resistance. It will also transform how we relate to each other and envision our collective path forward. Any meaningful discourse on Palestinian liberation must now center the reality of the ongoing genocide.

While this recognition is already beginning to shape our collective consciousness, we remain in the midst of witnessing genocide and dedicating energies toward stopping it. Our struggle will require a profound reorientation once the immediate violence ceases and a ceasefire is reached. The enormity of this experience has fundamentally altered us—as a society, as Palestinians, and as humans—and these changes will inevitably influence the trajectory of our resistance.

Moreover, the events of this past year have exposed structural realities that extend

far beyond Palestine. They have underscored the profound limitations of the post-World War II international order, laid bare the hypocrisies and racism of Western liberal democracies, and shattered the illusion that we have arrived at a place of multilateral governance. For Palestinians and our allies committed to a more just and equitable world, grappling with these revelations and the urgent questions they raise is essential.

Indeed, Western liberal democracies have not only tolerated the violence but have actively armed and endorsed it. This complicity forces a reckoning with global structures of power and governance. For these reasons and more, there is no possibility of returning to the pre-October 7 world—not for Palestinians and not on a global scale. The task before us is to navigate this transformed reality, confronting the challenges and opportunities it presents as we continue our struggle for justice and liberation.

## Zionism in Context: Dehumanization and Israeli Invincibility

To critically analyze Zionism, avoiding the trap of exceptionalism is vital. Historically, genocidal regimes have committed atrocities of appalling magnitude. What we are witnessing today in Gaza is a particularly egregious example of such violence, amplified by its immediate visibility through live media. This real-time exposure challenges the long-held assumption that widespread awareness of past atrocities would have prompted decisive international intervention. Instead, the persistent inaction of the global community highlights a troubling historical continuity of complicity and neglect.

Israel's dehumanization of Palestinians must be situated within this broader historical pattern of systemic brutality. The extreme levels of violence in Gaza—including the bombing of refugee camps and the burning of hospital patients alive—reveal the depth of dehumanization that enables such acts. These

atrocities suggest that Israeli forces perceive Palestinians not as fellow human beings but as something less than human. Such entrenched beliefs facilitate the sustained enactment of this cruelty, day after day, on a staggering scale.

This dynamic also intersects with the myth of Israel's invincibility. Hamas's October 7 attack shattered the perception of Israel as an unchallengeable military power and apartheid regime. However, Israel's subsequent genocidal campaign has only been possible through unwavering support from the US. This dependency underscores a fundamental truth: Israel has always functioned as a settler colony reliant upon imperial backing. Its violence and occupation are sustained not by inherent strength but by the material and political support of hegemonic powers.

Israel is, therefore, far from invincible. Mechanisms to hold its leaders accountable for decades of Zionist atrocities and settler-colonial violence exist but remain underutilized and unenforced. The failure to act stems from a deeper Western dehumanization of Palestinians and Arabs more broadly. In the liberal imagination of many Western states, Israel represents a bulwark of "civilization" against perceived "barbarism." This narrative, rooted in Zionist ideology and white supremacist frameworks, continues to shape US foreign policy and its steadfast support for Israel.

The dehumanization of Palestinians is not confined to Israel; it extends through the global systems that enable and justify these atrocities. Thus, when addressing the question of Israel's indomitability, the answer is unequivocal: it is, in fact, stoppable. The true barrier lies not in capability but in the absence of political will. For nations such as the US, Israel serves both ideological and—allegedly—strategic purposes, perpetuating a cycle of impunity that enables the ongoing erasure of Palestinian lives.

## Rules-Based Order Laid Bare: Protection for Some, Not All

We are living through a moment of paradigmatic rupture—a fundamental shift in the framework we believed governed our world. Yet, this rupture is not without continuity. For example, Palestinians have long recognized the limitations of international law. For decades, it has been clear that this legal system, embedded with colonialist assumptions, has excused colonialism, failed to address Indigenous rights and reparations, and inadequately protected the rights of minorities. International law, as it stands, is rooted in a colonialist "rules-based order." Palestinians have accordingly understood the need to approach international law not as an impartial arbiter of justice but as a terrain of political struggle —engaging with it strategically, opportunistically, and instrumentally.

The events since October 7—and even earlier, with the international response to the war in Ukraine—have underscored just how deeply flawed this system is. The façade of legality, rights, and justice upheld by Western powers has been irreparably exposed. The so-called rules-based international order has long been co-opted by hegemonic powers to serve their interests, from the Iraq War to Ukraine. In this context, the Global South increasingly recognizes the hypocrisy of Western claims to uphold justice and legality, reducing such assertions to little more than cynical power plays.

In the case of Israel, the erosion of international legal norms has been deliberate and systematic. For years, the Zionist regime has cultivated legal precedents to legitimize practices such as extrajudicial executions, euphemistically termed "targeted assassinations." These precedents paved the way for similar practices on a global scale, such as the Obama administration's unprecedented use of extrajudicial killings in Afghanistan. This systematic degradation of international norms has normalized indiscriminate violence, including the bombing of civilian areas under the guise of "security operations."

This erosion did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, it reflects a premeditated and

systematic dismantling of the principles meant to protect rights and uphold legality on an international scale. Today, Israel has become a rogue state—a pariah actively documenting and celebrating its genocidal actions. The horrors unfolding in Gaza are spilling over into neighboring regions, including Lebanon, and serve as a dire warning for what unchecked impunity and systemic apartheid can foster.

This moment demands urgent reflection: What will international governance look like after this genocide? What mechanisms exist to prevent other rogue states from replicating these atrocities? How can we safeguard vulnerable populations against genocide, apartheid, and the normalization of impunity? These questions are not solely about Palestine—they are global in scope. Palestine, however, provides a critical lens through which to interrogate and reimagine international law. It challenges us to confront the colonialist underpinnings of the "rules-based order" and envision a system rooted in genuine justice, accountability, and the protection of all, not just the powerful. If we are to move forward, we must center Palestine in the broader project of decolonizing international law and dismantling systems of global hegemony.

## Situating Palestine in the Arab World

Palestinian liberation has always been deeply intertwined with the broader region, reflecting its Arab depth and the interconnected struggles across Southwest Asia and North Africa. However, engaging with this regional dimension requires grappling with the legacies of the postcolonial order. Many regimes in the Arab world emerged after independence as authoritarian structures, often aligned with Western powers and deeply complicit in maintaining oppressive systems. These regimes are profoundly neocolonial in nature: unrepresentative of their populations, anti-democratic, and often perpetuating widespread social and economic inequities.

The uprisings of 2010 and 2011 revealed the deep popular dissatisfaction with these regimes and their inability to meet even the most basic aspirations for dignity, livelihood, and justice. These systems are not only failing their people but have historically instrumentalized the Palestinian cause to bolster their legitimacy. By co-opting Palestine as a rhetorical tool, these regimes have deflected attention from their repressive nature while providing little meaningful solidarity or support for Palestinian liberation. This dynamic persists today, as states like Jordan and Egypt engage with Palestine only insofar as it intersects with their existential concerns, such as managing the consequences of Israel's ongoing ethnic cleansing. Their actions remain constrained by domestic priorities and external dependencies rather than a principled commitment to Palestinian self-determination.

The intersection of settler colonialism and authoritarianism creates a mutually reinforcing structure of oppression in the region. Palestinians, Arabs, and non-Arabs alike are subjected to these dual systems, which serve foreign interests and suppress genuine movements for sovereignty, dignity, and democratic governance. Israel, with extensive US military, financial, and diplomatic backing, is exploiting this environment to consolidate its position as a regional power. Its actions extend beyond Palestine, manifesting in attacks on Lebanon and the destabilization of neighboring states, all while promoting a vision of the "New Middle East" that aligns with its interests.

This vision includes regime change operations targeting Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and beyond, designed to eliminate resistance and solidify partnerships akin to those established through the Abraham Accords with the UAE and Bahrain. Such efforts, deeply rooted in arrogance, racism, and a top-down approach to remaking the region, reflect a continuation of colonial logic. These attempts are destined to fail, as history demonstrates the futility and destructiveness of externally imposed

regime change. Nevertheless, this remains the reality of Zionism's colonial project and its aspirations for regional dominance.

Understanding Palestinian liberation, therefore, requires situating it within this broader regional context. Decolonization in Palestine cannot be disentangled from the decolonization of the region. This process involves envisioning governance structures that prioritize the needs and aspirations of their people over foreign interests, fostering systems of dignity, and creating equitable access to employment, education, and healthcare while safeguarding political sovereignty and self-determination.

The path forward is undoubtedly challenging, given the formidable forces aligned against such transformation. As Egyptian activist and political prisoner Alaa Abdel Fattah has poignantly argued, "fix your own democracy," emphasizing to eager Western supporters that solidarity starts at home. The same can be said for Arab states. The struggles for democracy and dignity across the Arab world are deeply connected to the Palestinian cause. Both reinforce one another, and both are essential to imagining a future free from colonial and authoritarian oppression. Rebuilding this vision will require a reimagining of decolonization that not only addresses the immediate violence of Zionism but also dismantles the systemic structures that enable it to persist across the region.

## Global Realignment: From Popular Power to Political Power

When considering the Global South, it is crucial to avoid treating it as a monolithic entity. Even during the era of the Non-Aligned Movement, there was significant diversity and divergence among its member states. Today, the Global South is even more heterogeneous, necessitating a nuanced and strategic approach to engagement. For instance, South Africa's stance on Palestine differs markedly from that of India or Brazil, as each state operates within its unique historical, strategic, and political contexts. Understanding and navigating this complexity is

essential for building meaningful alliances and advancing shared goals.

At the same time, there are areas of convergence. Many states in the Global South share an interest in fostering a world order capable of addressing transnational crises, such as climate change and climate justice. These pressing challenges demand a collective rethinking of global governance beyond the framework of Western hegemony and US unipolarity. The shift toward multilateral governance is a priority for many Global South powers, even if their positions on Palestine are not fully aligned. These broader conversations are essential for Palestinians and their allies who seek a more equitable and just international system.

Western powers, however, struggle to recognize the scope of this global realignment. The self-conception of the US as the "world's policeman" has long been more myth than reality, masking its imperialist and destabilizing role. Still, Western states' inability to acknowledge the decline of US hegemony and their own roles in perpetuating global instability stresses their detachment from the shifting dynamics of power.

The rise of the Global South and growing demands for equity, justice, and autonomy mark a critical juncture in international relations—one that challenges the foundations of Western dominance. Palestine is central to these global shifts, but Palestinians face significant challenges in navigating this moment. While the Palestinian movement is experiencing unprecedented momentum through global grassroots support and solidarity, we must become more strategic in translating this popular power into political power. Questions of international law, foreign policy toward Global South actors, and global governance require deliberate and coordinated engagement. These are not merely abstract concerns but urgent, practical considerations for advancing the Palestinian cause on the world stage.

Today's strategic deficit is not incidental but the product of decades of systematic repression. The Israeli regime worked relentlessly to dismantle the revolutionary

leadership of the 1960s and 1970s—through co-optation, imprisonment, exile, and assassination—leaving a vacuum in institutional capacity and decolonial vision. Rebuilding this revolutionary infrastructure is an urgent priority. Without it, foreign interests and Western hegemony will continue to impose paradigms that marginalize Palestinian rights and reinforce settler-colonial oppression.

The critical question today is how to seize this moment—marked by the genocide in Gaza and the global attention it has drawn—to revitalize our revolutionary legacy. This is not a call to return to the past, as such a return is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, we must reimagine decolonization and revolutionary politics for our current era, defined by interconnected global challenges and shifting power structures. Resuscitating a decolonial project rooted in our history but oriented toward the future is our most urgent task. It is through this work that we can chart a path toward justice, liberation, and self-determination for Palestinians and all oppressed peoples.

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.

Al-Shabaka materials may be circulated with due attribution to Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network. The opinion of individual members of Al-Shabaka's policy network do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization as a whole.