

al-shabaka executive summary

PALESTINIANS AND THE SYRIAN WAR: BETWEEN NEUTRALITY AND DISSENT

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The Palestinian experience in the Syrian war has been one of violence, misery, and double exile, and is a story in its own right. Yet it has also brought into high relief a fundamental dilemma affecting the Palestinians of Syria, namely that of being forced to maintain political neutrality, given their vulnerable position, or to support the regime, despite its direct role in their suffering.

- Though both Assad regimes have promoted the Palestinian cause rhetorically over more than four decades, their support on the ground has been variable at best. In the current war, the regime uses the Palestinian question to further its own interests, by, for instance, appealing to the international community through warnings of instability in Israel if it is eliminated.
- Hamas, the Palestinian Authority (PA), and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) have attempted to maintain neutrality regarding the Syrian war. This has been a divisive issue among Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in the diaspora, and in Syria. A number of Palestinian factions within Syria are explicitly allied with Bashar al-Assad.
- There are two ways for Palestinians to move beyond the false choice of neutrality versus regime support and work toward Palestinian – as well as Syrian – human rights: First, by recognizing that the Palestinians' experience in Syria requires an understanding of how living in Syria has shaped their identity; and second, by acknowledging that the Syrian war exposes the limits of Palestinian representative bodies and underscores the importance of strengthening and broadening solidarity networks.

Policy Recommendations:

1. The PLO and PA should rethink their stance of neutrality with regard to the Syrian regime's mass atrocities against its citizens as well as Palestinians in Syria.
2. Palestinian solidarity movements should reject the Syrian regime's appropriation of the Palestinian question and reiterate their commitment to human rights and justice everywhere.
3. Palestinian solidarity movements should amplify Palestinian-Syrian voices and defend their right to reparation and justice within Syria, as well as their right to return to their homes in Palestine.