

Palestine:

An introduction

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Chapter 1:

Palestine throughout history

Palestine has a long and vast history. First documented in ancient Egyptian tablets as Peleset over 3000 years ago, the region between the Mediterranean and the river Jordan has come to mean many different things to many different peoples.

Throughout the ages, Palestine has been home to dozens of cultures, kingdoms and empires. From Assyrian and Nabataean, to Persian and Roman—and many more—each influencing as well as being influenced by the rich cultural and civilizational *mélange* that defined the area. These ancient influences can still be felt today in the idioms, vocabulary and toponymy used by its native Palestinian population. Even Palestinian agricultural practices can be traced back to the Natufians—one of the peoples credited with inventing agriculture—who called Palestine and the fertile crescent their home, as far back as 9,000 BCE.

Before we continue, it is important to stress that when we talk about Palestine, we are not talking about a Palestinian nation state. For the vast majority of history, the concept of a nation state did not exist. Today the nation state is so ubiquitous that many have come to internalize it as natural. This is not the case, and we should be especially wary of imposing our modern conceptions on a context where they would be nonsensical. For example, the impulse to imagine our ancestors as some closed-off, well-defined, unchanging homogeneous group having exclusive ownership over a

territory that somehow corresponds to modern day borders has no basis in history. Unfortunately, this is the foundational myth of many reactionary ethno-nationalist ideologies.

As elsewhere, over the millennia kingdoms rose and fell, religions were founded, wars both holy and unholy were waged, and peoples lived, mixed, moved and died out. In other words, history happened.

This chapter does not aim to delve into the minutiae of this Palestinian history, indeed entire books could be—and have been—written on the subject. Rather the goal of this introduction is to describe the political context that lead up to the modern Palestinian question.

Palestine under the Ottoman empire

Following the decisive defeat of the Mamluks in the battle of Marj Dabiq (1516), the Levant laid open for the conquering Ottoman armies. A few months later they would enter Jerusalem and usher in one of the longest chapters of Palestinian history, lasting over 400 years.

Jerusalem held an important place in Ottoman eyes due to its religious and historic significance. From the onset of their rule, sweeping and majestic construction projects were carried out which would become staples of Jerusalemite architecture and topography, such as the striking walls of Jerusalem erected by Suleiman the magnificent.

Over its history, the Ottomans divided Palestine into various political configurations and divisions. The last of which came in 1887, where Palestine was divided into 3 districts (Sanjaks): Jerusalem, Nablus

and Acre. The Sanjak of Jerusalem was of such importance to the Ottomans that it would be governed directly by Constantinople (later Istanbul).

The population of these three at the time would amount to approximately 600,000, the vast majority of which were Sunni Muslim. Palestinian Christians made up around 10 percent of the population, while Jewish Palestinians numbered around 25,000, mainly situated in Jerusalem, Hebron, Safad and Tiberius.

The Ottoman Millet system and its various manifestations provided a certain degree of autonomy to minority religious and ethnic communities. While this system suffered from serious flaws, and its breadth and tolerance waxed and waned with different governors and social and economic circumstances, it was still superior to the outright persecution and pogroms which various religious groups on the European continent had to endure.

Relations between the numerous religious groups in Palestine were generally stable and peaceful, nurtured by more than a millennium of coexistence and shared adversity. For example, the inscription on the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem reads “There is no God but Allah, and Abraham is his friend” in a nod to Christian and Jewish Ottomans, who like Muslims, are considered to be part of an Abrahamic religious tradition. Palestinian Muslims, perhaps uniquely so, were also in the habit of celebrating religious festivals in honor of the prophets and holy men of Judaism such as Reuben, son of Jacob. This attitude was also extended towards Christian Palestinians, where the keys of the Holy Sepulcher remain traditionally

entrusted with a Muslim family to this day.

However, as with any empire, there were times of peace and prosperity, as well as times of hardship and war. Towards the end of the life of the Ottoman empire, the latter was much more common than the former. With the advent of European-style nationalism and the weakening of the Ottoman state, the relations between the various ethnic groups and communities would fray. There were rebellions against Ottoman rule, and Palestine even managed to win autonomy for a good while under the leadership of Daher al-‘Umar, however, it would eventually be crushed by Constantinople. These tensions would later be exacerbated by the Young Turk Revolution and the increasing efforts to Turkify the various Ottoman provinces.

The empire would eventually collapse after its defeat in the first World War, and the various peoples who made up its population—some of whom had sided with the Allies against the Ottomans—looked towards independence and establishing their own nation states. This of course, would be thwarted, as the peoples fell from the domination of one empire to the domination of many others.

It was during the final few decades of this dramatic collapse that a certain Austro-Hungarian thinker, Theodor Herzl, was planting the seeds of a new political movement that would change Palestinian history forever.

The Zionist movement

Convened in the Swiss city of Basel in 1897, the first Zionist congress included over 200 delegates from all over Europe. The program of the con-

gress called for establishing a Jewish state in Palestine, and to begin coordinating the settlement of Zionists there. This, according to Herzl, the founder of political Zionism and president of the Zionist congress, would constitute a “solution for the Jewish question” and emancipate the Jewish people from persecution. While there were other Zionist and proto-Zionist movements preceding this which had settled in Palestine, such as Hibbat Zion, the Zionist congress was the first to organize and marshal the colonization efforts in a centralized and effective way.

Zionism, then, is a settler-colonial political movement that calls for establishing a Jewish nation-state in Palestine with a Jewish majority. The issue here, of course, is that Palestine was already inhabited. The question of what to do with the native Palestinian Arabs animated much of the early discussions of the Zionist movement, though the consensus was that they needed to be removed somehow, either by agreement or by force. Indeed, there was no way to establish a Jewish majority state in Palestine without seriously displacing most of the native population.

When we call Zionism settler-colonialism, we refer to a very specific phenomenon. Settler colonialism differs from classic colonialism, in that settler colonialism only initially and temporarily relies on an empire for their existence. In many situations, the colonists aren't even from the empire supporting them, and end up fighting the very sponsor that ensured their survival in the first place. Another difference is that settlers are not merely interested in the resources of these new lands, but also in the lands themselves, and to carve out a new homeland for themselves in the area.

Modern day Zionists might recoil at Zionism being called a colonial ideology, yet in the early days, the Zionist movement was astonishingly honest about its existence as a form of colonialism. For example, Herzl wrote in 1902 to infamous colonizer Cecil Rhodes, arguing that Britain recognized the importance of “colonial expansion”:

“You are being invited to help make history,” he wrote, “It doesn't involve Africa, but a piece of Asia Minor ; not Englishmen, but Jews . How, then, do I happen to turn to you since this is an out-of-the-way matter for you? How indeed? Because it is something colonial.”

Vladimir Jabotinsky, in his infamous Iron Wall (1923) stated that:

“A voluntary reconciliation with the Arabs is out of the question either now or in the future. If you wish to colonize a land in which people are already living, you must provide a garrison for the land, or find some rich man or benefactor who will provide a garrison on your behalf. Or else, or else, give up your colonization, for without an armed force which will render physically impossible any attempt to destroy or prevent this colonization, colonization is impossible, not difficult, not dangerous, but IMPOSSIBLE! . . . Zionism is a colonization adventure and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force. It is important . . . to speak Hebrew, but, unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot—or else I am through with playing at colonizing.”

These quotations are merely the tip of the iceberg, but lest you think we are cherry-picking and choosing out of context passages, we invite you to read their original writings. There are only so many mental gymnastics you can perform to try and find a different meaning to “Zionism is a colonization adventure.”

To drive this point even further, the first Zionist bank established was named the ‘Jewish Colonial Trust’ and the whole endeavor was supported by the ‘Palestine Jewish Colonization Association’ and the ‘Jewish Agency Colonization Department.’

It would only be a matter of time before the Zionist movement began sending settlers to Palestine and forming a foothold with the goal of taking over the entirety of Palestine. The Ottoman defeat in WWI and Palestine becoming a British mandate was the golden opportunity that would allow them to fulfill these aims. This will be discussed in depth in the next introductory chapter.

The mandate of Palestine

In the wake of its defeat in WWI, the Ottoman empire was dissolved and its regions carved up and divided among various European colonial powers. In the Levant, Palestine and Jordan fell under the mandate of the British, while Syria and Lebanon to that of the French. The British entered Jerusalem in 1917, and Palestine officially became a mandate in 1922.

Palestine was considered a ‘Class A’ mandate, meaning that it possessed sufficiently advanced infrastructure and administrative capabilities as to be considered provisionally independent, though

it would still be under the control of the allied forces until it was deemed ready for full independence. This, of course, would never come to pass.

The mandate of Palestine provided a golden opportunity for the Zionist movement to achieve its aims. The British were far more responsive to Zionist goals than the Ottomans were, and had earlier produced the Balfour Declaration promising the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine:

“His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.”

Despite the lofty words of Lord Balfour, a colonial empire massacring people all over the globe is not animated by altruism. The British had no genuine sympathy for the plight of the historically oppressed Jewish people; Rather, they saw in the Zionist movement a mechanism through which British interests in the Levant and Suez could be realized.

Emboldened by the Balfour Declaration and supportive British governors, the Zionist movement ramped up its colonization efforts and established a provisional proto-state within a state in Palestine, called the Yishuv. While the Yishuv’s relationship with the British had its ups and downs, the British provided the Zionists with explicit as

well as tacit sponsorship which would allow them to thrive. Meanwhile, they would harshly repress any Palestinian movement or organization while turning a blind eye to Zionist expansion, which by the end of the mandate enabled the conquest and mass destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages and neighborhoods.

These are the circumstances and events which would ultimately culminate in the establishment of Israel through the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the erasure of their society. The next chapter will focus on Zionist aspirations, partition, the final years of the mandate of Palestine, the war of 1948, and the Nakba, the original sin of Israel's genesis.

Chapter 2: The mandate years and the Nakba

As we learned in the previous chapter, the fall of the Ottoman empire, the birth of the Zionist movement, and the declaration of Palestine as a British mandate, all contributed to birthing the Palestinian question. Even before Palestine was officially declared a mandate in 1922, British policies and preferential treatment of the Zionist colonists helped create a volatile political climate.

While Zionist settlement in Palestine predates the mandate years, the newly found British sponsorship, whether tacit or explicit, provided the perfect cover for the Zionist movement to ramp up its colonization efforts. For all intents and purposes the Jewish Yishuv became a proto-state

within an existing nation. Aiming to establish an exclusive Jewish ethnocracy, the Yishuv had to contend with the fact that the entirety of the land was inhabited by the native population. This is where the settler “logic of elimination” came into play. Coined by scholar Patrick Wolfe, this means that the settlers needed to develop not only moral justifications for the removal of the natives, but also the practical means to ensure its success. This could take the form of ethnic cleansing, genocide, or other gruesome tools of ethnocide.

If you're at all familiar with Zionist talking points, you can see this logic of elimination in motion. “A land without a people for a people without a land,” “there is no such thing as a Palestinian,” “Israel made the desert bloom,” and many other talking points illustrate this perfectly. The settlers would never admit that the Palestinians constituted a people, but rather viewed them as disconnected communities at best, and wandering rootless vagabonds at worst. Such arguments would form the basis for legitimizing the dispossession of the natives. This is hardly unique to Zionist settler-colonialism. For example, you can immediately see how denying the existence of Palestinians resembles the Terra Nullius argument used by colonists all over the world.

Historically, Palestine has always been a place of refuge for many populations fleeing war and famine; it is home to Palestinians of diverse origins, such as Armenian, Bosnian and even Indian Palestinians. They all came to Palestine for different reasons, and to this day form an integral part of its society. The issue was never with the idea of Zionists moving to Palestine, but rather that from the onset, the Zionist movement was not interested in

coexistence. There is ample evidence—recorded by the Zionist pioneers themselves—that the native Palestinian population was welcoming of the first Zionist settlers. They worked side by side, and the Palestinians even taught them how to work the land, despite Zionists seeing the Palestinians as inferior and uncivilized. Only after it became clear that these settlers did not come to live in Palestine as equals, but to become its landlords, as the Jewish National Fund Chairman Menachem Ussishkin said, did Zionism come to be perceived as a threat. For example, Zionist leadership went out of its way to sanction settlers employing or working with Palestinians, calling Palestinian labor an “illness” and forming a segregated trade union that banned non-Jewish members.

Consequently, as with every colonial situation, there was resistance by the native population; in this context, some of this resistance was aimed at the British and some at the Zionist settlers themselves. A prominent example of this is the 1936 revolt.

As colonial overlords, the British were exceptional record-keepers. Backed by empirical data, they compiled report after report in an attempt to monitor the tensions erupting all over Palestine. These reports showed that the distrust between the Palestinian and Zionist populations intensified after the British military administration of Palestine and the issuance of the Balfour declaration. The Haycraft report, for example, concluded that despite Zionist accusations the actions of the Palestinians were not at all motivated by antisemitism, but rather by the British military administration favoring the Zionist settlers to the detriment of the Palestinians. The Shaw report stated that there had been no such tension for nearly a century prior.

By the end of the mandate, in spite of the Zionist efforts to purchase as much land as possible and maximize the number of European Zionist settlers, they barely controlled 5-6% of the land in mandatory Palestine and constituted only a third of the population. This population had only just arrived, and did not amount to a clear majority in any region of Palestine. This population distribution would make establishing an exclusivist Zionist state in Palestine impossible. It is under these circumstances that calls for partitioning Palestine into an Arab-Palestinian and Zionist-Jewish states started to gain traction in some circles.

The partition of Palestine

When partition is brought up it is not surprising that most tend to think of the 1947 United Nations General Assembly resolution. This resolution recommended the partition of Palestine into an Arab-Palestinian state and a Zionist-Jewish state at the end of the British mandate. This was seen by some as a solution to the escalating tensions and violence during the mandate years.

However, this was not the first partition scheme to be presented. In 1919, for example, the World Zionist Organization put forward a ‘partition’ plan, which included all the territory which would become mandatory Palestine, as well as parts of Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan. At the time, the Jewish population of this proposed state would not have even reached 2-3% of the total population. Naturally, such a colonial proposal would be unjust regardless of the population disparity, but it is an indication of the entitlement of the Zionist movement in wanting to establish an ethnic state in an area they had no claim to, and where they were so utterly outnumbered.

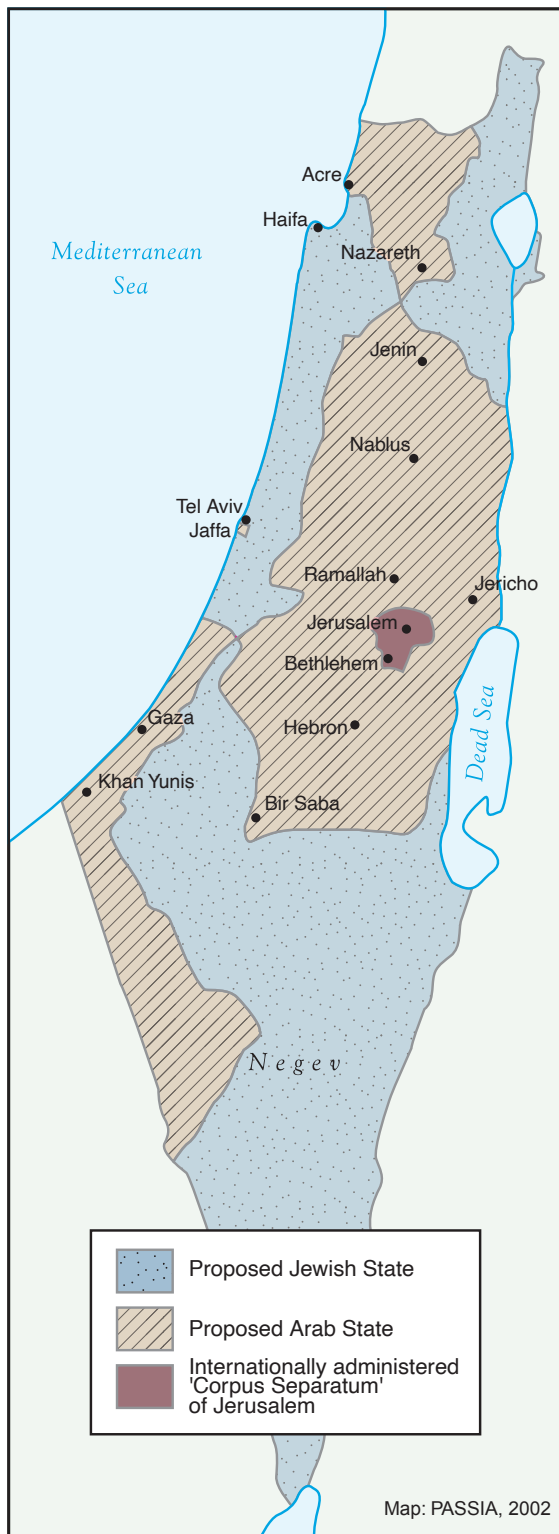
The bulk of the Zionist population arrived in Palestine during the 4th and 5th Zionist immigration waves—Aliyot—between 1924-1939. That means that the majority of those demanding partition of the land had barely been living there for 20 years at the most. To make matters worse, the UN partition plan allotted approximately 56% of the land of mandatory Palestine to the Zionist state, including most of the fertile coastal region.

The Palestinians, of course, rejected this. They were being asked to give away most of their land to a minority of recently arrived settlers. The rejection of this ridiculous premise is still cited today as the Palestinians being intransigent and refusing peace. This is often negatively contrasted with the claim that the Yishuv agreed to the 1947 partition plan, which is portrayed as a showing of good will and a readiness to coexist with their Palestinian neighbors. While this may seem true on the surface, a cursory glance at internal Yishuv meetings paints an entirely different picture. Partition as a concept was entirely rejected by the Yishuv, and any acceptance in public was tactical in order for the newly created Jewish state to gather its strength before expanding.

While addressing the Zionist Executive, Ben Gurion, leader of the Yishuv and Israel's first Prime Minister, reemphasized that any acceptance of partition would be temporary:

“After the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the state, we will abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine.”

This was not a one-time occurrence, and neither was it only espoused by Ben Gurion. Internal



debates and letters illustrate this time and time again. Even in letters to his family, Ben Gurion wrote that “A Jewish state is not the end but the beginning” detailing that settling the rest of Palestine depended on creating an “elite army.” As a matter of fact, he was quite explicit:

“I don’t regard a state in part of Palestine as the final aim of Zionism, but as a mean toward that aim.”

Chaim Weizmann, prominent Zionist leader and first President of Israel, expected that “partition might be only a temporary arrangement for the next twenty to twenty-five years.” So even ignoring the moral question of requiring the natives to formally green-light their own colonization, had the Palestinians agreed to partition, they most likely still would not have had an independent state today. Despite what was announced in public, internal Zionist discussions make it abundantly clear that this would have never been allowed.

However, the problems with the United Nations partition plan go even deeper than this. To be clear, the resolution did not partition Palestine. It was in fact a partition *plan*, which was to be seen as a *recommendation*, and that the issue should be transferred to the Security Council. The resolution does not obligate the people of Palestine to accept it, especially considering the non-binding nature of UNGA resolutions.

For its part, the Security Council attempted to find a resolution based on the UNGA recommendation, but could not arrive at a consensus. Many concluded that the plan could not be enforced. Israel was unilaterally declared a state by Zionist

leadership while the Security Council was still trying to arrive at a conclusion. The plan was never implemented.

However, there is an argument that although the plan never came to fruition, the UNGA recommendation to partition Palestine to establish a Jewish state conferred the legal authority to create such a state. As a matter of fact, this can be seen in the declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel.

This argument falls flat on its face when we take into account that the United Nations, both its General Assembly as well as its Security Council, do not have the jurisdiction to impose political solutions, especially without the consent of those it affects. There is nothing in the UN charter that confers such authority to the United Nations. Indeed, this was brought up during the discussions on the matter. Furthermore, not only would this be outside the scope of the United Nations’ power, it would as a matter of fact run counter to its mandate. This issue was raised by the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine itself:

“With regard to the principle of self-determination, although international recognition was extended to this principle at the end of the First World War and it was adhered to with regard to the other Arab territories, at the time of the creation of the A’ Mandates, it was not applied to Palestine, obviously because of the intention to make possible the creation of the Jewish National Home there. Actually, it may well be said that the Jewish National Home and the sui generis Mandate for Palestine run counter to that principle.”

This is a direct admission that the creation of a Zionist national home in Palestine runs counter to the principle of self-determination for Palestinians already living there. The United Nations needed to twist itself into a knot and make an exception to their own charter to recommend the partition of Palestine. However, even if it had been within their power to do so, and had it not ran counter to their charter, the UN still had no right to force the Palestinians to tear their homeland in half.

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine

The demographic realities in Palestine had always troubled the Zionist movement. Despite their consistent sloganeering of “A land without a people for a people without a land,” they were acutely aware of the reality on the ground. Even from its earliest days, Zionist leaders spoke about removing the native population to make room for the colonists who would utilize the land in much more “civilized” and “advanced” ways. Towards the end of the mandate, it would become clear that there would be no voluntary exodus of the native Palestinians.

It is within this context that Plan D (Tochnit Dalet) was developed by the Haganah high command. Although it was adopted in May 1948, the origins of this plan go back a few years earlier. Yigael Yadin reportedly started working on it in 1944. This plan entailed the expansion of the borders of the Zionist state, well beyond partition, and any Palestinian village within these borders that resisted would be destroyed and have its inhabitants expelled. This included cities that were supposed to be part of the Arab Palestinian state after partition, such as Nazareth, Acre and Lydda.

Ben Zohar, Ben Gurion’s biographer, wrote that:

“In internal discussions, in instructions to his men, the Old Man [Ben-Gurion] demonstrated a clear position: it would be better that as few a number as possible of Arabs would remain in the territory of the [Jewish] state.”

Although it could be argued that Plan D did not outline the exact villages and cities to be ethnically cleansed in an explicit way, it was clear that the various Yishuv forces were operating with its instructions in mind.

It is important to stress that the ethnic cleansing of Palestine began *before* the 1948 war, and before even a single regular Arab soldier set foot in Palestine. This is important to understand because many still erroneously argue that the Nakba—Arabic for catastrophe—was a byproduct of the Arab war on the fledgling Israeli state. Approximately 300,000 Palestinians had been expelled through ethnic cleansing campaigns before the onset of war or the end of the mandate. These campaigns were accompanied by massacres and war crimes, even against villages that were neutral and had non-aggression pacts with the Zionist Yishuv. The ethnic cleansing of the village of Deir Yassin demonstrates this perfectly.

For many reasons, the Arab states, mainly Transjordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, were not interested in a war. However, after the monstrous ethnic cleansing campaigns against the Palestinians, they finally reluctantly intervened. However, an aspect that is often ignored is the inter-Arab rivalries and disunity that were among the chief causes for

the intervention in 1948. Barely coming out from under colonialism themselves, their actions during the war showed that they never really joined the war with eliminationist intent, as the popular narrative goes. The Jordanians were more interested in acquiring the West Bank as a stepping stone to their real ambition, which was greater Syria. As a matter of fact, there is ample evidence of collusion between the Israelis and Jordanians during the 1948 war, with deals under the table pretty much gifting parts of the West Bank to Transjordan in return for not interfering in other areas.

The Egyptians joined in an attempt to counter the Hashemite power-play that could change the balance of power in the region. For these reasons, the Arab armies generally intervened in the territories of the mandate destined to be part of the Palestinian Arab state according to the 1947 partition plan, and with very few exceptions, stayed away from the area designated to be part of the Zionist-Jewish state. Yes, support for Palestine and Palestinians played a large role in the legitimization of such interventions, but they were never the real reason behind them. As per usual when it comes to international relations, interests are always at the center of any maneuver regardless of the espoused noble and altruistic motivations.

Despite their propaganda and rhetoric, the Arab states sought different secret opportunities to avoid and end the war with Israel. Some offers went as far as to agree to absorb all Palestinian refugees. These were all rejected by Israel with the goal of maximizing its land-grabs. For example, when it became clear that Israel would ignore all negotiations regarding partition and unilaterally declare its independence, there were enormous ef-

forts behind the scenes aimed at avoiding war, not to mention ending it early when it did eventually break out. These efforts were heavily sponsored by the United States, who asked in March 1948 that all military activities be ceased, and asked the Yishuv to postpone any declaration of statehood and to give time for negotiations. Outside of Abdallah of Transjordan, the Arab states accepted this initiative by the United States. However, it was rejected by Ben Gurion, who knew that any peaceful implementation of the partition plan meant that the refugees he had expelled earlier would have a chance to return, not to mention that war would offer him a chance to conquer the lands he coveted outside the partition plan.

This followed a long series of Zionist rejection of overtures by the native Palestinians. In 1928, for example, the Palestinian leadership voted to allow Zionist settlers equal representation in the future bodies of the state, despite them being a minority who had barely just arrived. This was faced with Zionist rejection. Even after this, in 1947 the Palestinians suggested the formation of a unitary state for all those living between the river and the sea to replace the mandate to no avail. There were many attempts at co-existence, but this simply would not have benefited the Zionist leadership who never intended to come to Palestine to live as equals.

By the end of the war, 800,000 Palestinians would be ethnically cleansed from approximately 530 villages and communities. Israel would be established on the rubble of these villages, and their settlers would come to call the emptied abodes that once housed Palestinian families home. To this day, these 800,000 and their descendants are still scattered all over the world in refugee camps,

and Israel refuses their right to return home. The ethnic cleansing operations continued well into the 1950s, years after the end of the war.

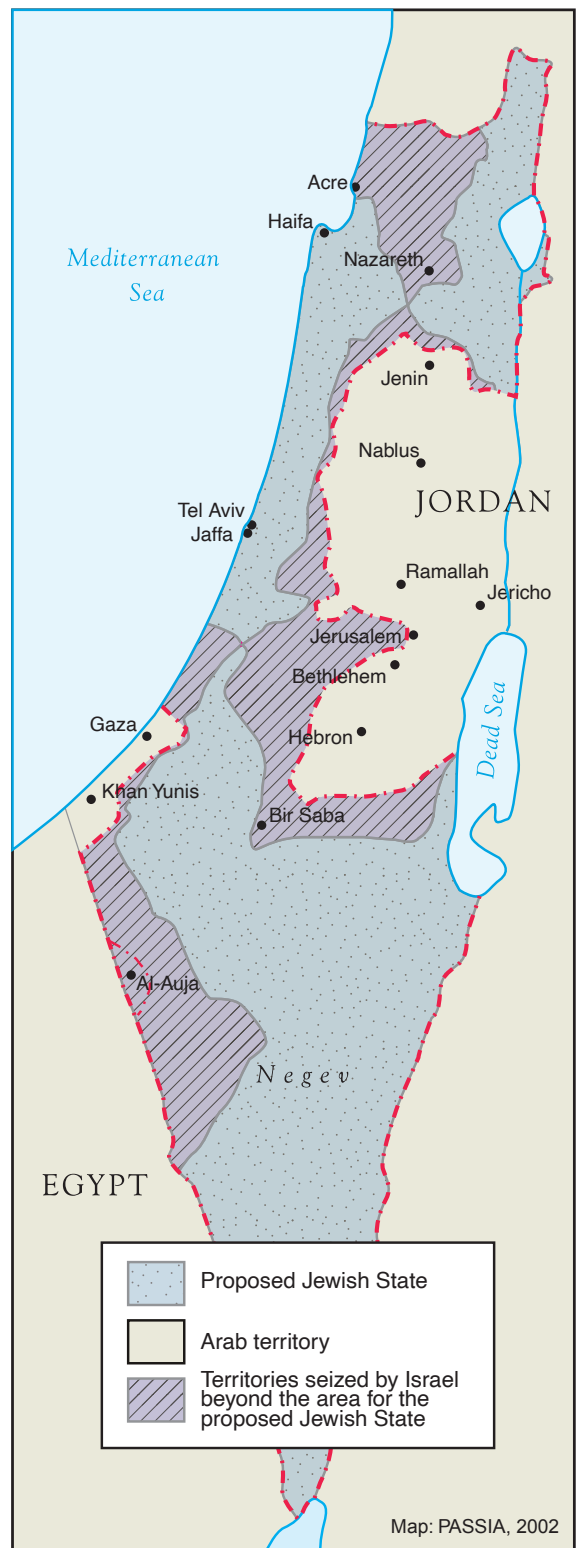
The post-war armistice line would come to be known as the green line, and it marked the de facto borders of the Israeli state, though official borders have never been declared. The areas that Israel did not conquer, i.e. the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would come to be ruled by Jordan and Egypt respectively. It is estimated that around 80% of the Palestinian population within the green line were expelled. The remaining 20% would live under martial law for decades to come, and have their communities turned into segregated, heavily controlled enclaves surrounded by barbed wire.

These early years would prove formative to the discriminatory regime of laws that govern Israel to this very day. This period will be discussed in the next part of our introduction series.

Chapter 3: From Nakba to Naksa

In mid May 1948, the state of Israel was officially established on the ruins of Palestine. Having ethnically cleansed approximately 80% of the Palestinians in its newly acquired territory, the following years would consolidate Zionist control of the land and pave the way for discriminatory ethno-racial laws and policies that would institutionalize the theft of everything Palestinian.

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine would not stop after the war; Palestinians in the Naqab, as well as



those close to the ceasefire lines, would continue to face mass expulsions into the 1950s. In the same period, Israel issued the infamous Absentee's Property Law. This law was instrumental in systematically seizing the property of all the refugees it had created, including their homes, farms, land and even the contents of their bank accounts. Through this law, the state took control of everything remaining behind when the refugees fled, and if not "contested" or "claimed," they would then become the property of the state, free to be utilized in any way it saw fit. Given the fact that any refugee attempting to return was shot, you can see how this law served merely as a fig leaf to legitimize what can only be described as naked theft.

This in conjunction with the Land Acquisitions Law allowed for the mass transfer of the entire Palestinian economy to the Israeli state. Practically overnight, the state gained control of over 739,750 agricultural acres, the vast majority of which were of excellent quality as well as 73,000 houses, 7,800 workshops and 6 million pounds. This dropped the cost of settling a Zionist family in Palestine from 8,000\$ to 1,500\$, effectively subsidizing the creation of the Israeli state and kickstarting its economy.

The following years, Israel would continue consolidating its control and preventing any refugees from returning, and would skirmish with Jordanian and Egyptian troops along the ceasefire lines. In 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of Egypt, would nationalize the Suez Canal in a move that threatened the interests of many a colonial power. This would form the basis for a tripartite attack on Egypt by France, Britain and Israel. The British were enraged at Nasser's reclamation of Egyptian strategic and economic assets as well as the threat

this posed to their route to India, while France wanted to defeat Nasser due to his support for the Algerian freedom fighters resisting French colonial rule and genocide. As for Israel, this was a chance to defeat its biggest threat in the region. On the eve of the Sinai campaign, Ben Gurion frankly admitted that he:

"..always feared that a personality might arise such as arose among the Arab rulers in the seventh century or like [Kemal Atatürk] who arose in Turkey after its defeat in the First World War. He raised their spirits, changed their character, and turned them into a fighting nation. There was and still is a danger that Nasser is this man."

This would also be a chance to acquire some of the territories Israel did not conquer in 1948. While this aggression would be a military success, it would ultimately become a political defeat, as the three countries were pushed into withdrawing their forces after world outcry and threats from the United States. This only strengthened Nasser's position and cemented him as the most popular leader across the Arab world.

The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was created in the aftermath of the 1956 war on Egypt to secure peace, and patrol both sides of the border between Egypt and Israel. Despite being the aggressor, Israel refused to cooperate with the UN force, and rejected the idea of any peace-keeping force on their side of the border, while Egypt accepted the UN force and cooperated with them. Not only did Israel refuse to cooperate with UNEF, but over its decade-long existence Israeli troops "regularly patrolled alongside the line and

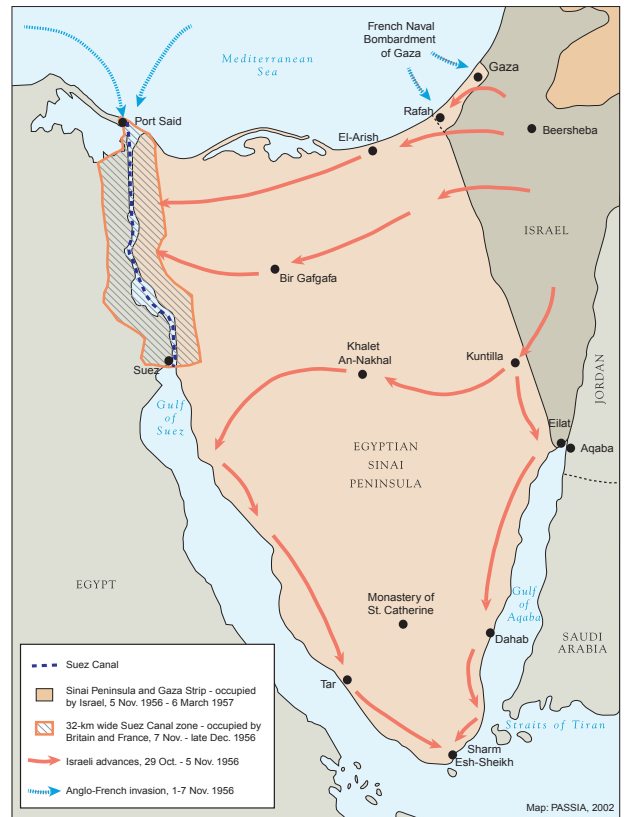
now and again created provocations by violating it.” This, however, was only the tip of the iceberg of Israeli provocations towards its neighbors after 1956. These would lay down the groundwork for Israel’s next war on its neighbors.

During these years of rising tensions, the Palestinian refugees did not sit idly by awaiting a savior. They started organizing themselves in their tent cities, and fought back with the goal of returning home. In this context, Palestinian leadership would slip away from the traditional urban and clan elites to those willing to pick up a rifle. It no longer mattered what your status was prior to the forced exodus, what was of worth now was how you would struggle to reclaim your stolen home.

A few years later in 1964, and with sponsorship from the Arab League, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) would emerge from this new refugee-led leadership. With the goals of liberating Palestine and allowing the refugees to return home, the PLO would come to be the official representative and voice for the entirety of the Palestinian people, both in Palestine and in the diaspora. The creation of the PLO in 1964 is why many erroneously believe that Palestinian identity was “invented” in the 1960s. Needless to say, as with all freedom movements at the time, the PLO as well as all Palestinian resistance groups were designated as “terrorists” by Israel and its imperialist allies. Meanwhile, the PLO would be embraced as an ally to liberation movements across the global south.

The war of 1967

On the morning of June the 5th 1967, Israel launched a sneak attack on Egypt decimating its air



force. Thus, began the 1967 war, which would last less than a week and enable Israel to finally conquer the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Egyptian Sinai desert and the Syrian Golan heights. Israel claims to this day that these strikes were preemptive self-defense, citing a number of concerns, such as Nasser’s forces in Sinai, the closing of the straits of Tiran and the situation in the Syrian Golan heights. As per usual, these claims should not be taken at face value, as even the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian villages which had signed non-aggression pacts with the Yishuv was framed as self-defense.

The 1967 war did not materialize out of a vacuum, nor should it be understood as such. It constituted a continuation of Israel’s wars against the region to achieve maximum territorial expansion.

Particularly, this war would finish what began in 1956. Following the political defeat in the previous war, much of Israel's military actions were designed to goad Nasser and other Arab leaders into an attack, an example of this can be seen in the disproportionate Israeli assault on Samu in 1966, or the frequent unprovoked bombings of Syrian border positions. This is hardly our unique interpretation of events; at the time this was widely understood. For example the British ambassador in Israel explained that this tactic aimed to spawn a "deliberately contrived preventive war."

There is ample evidence to show that Israel was intent on provoking a war. This war would finally give them an opportunity to expand into territories not conquered in 1948, as Ben Gurion lamented. This becomes exceedingly clear once we examine the diplomatic record, and the numerous times Israel sabotaged any attempt at mediation or diplomacy to avert the outbreak of war.

For example, throughout much of the crisis of 1967 Egypt expressed its willingness to resurrect and expand the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission (EIMAC), which was officially rejected by Israel in May. In the same month, the UN secretary-General personally attempted to avert an escalation by traveling to Cairo to mediate between the Egyptians and Israelis. Once again, Egypt agreed to the proposal in an attempt to lower tensions. Israel rejected the proposal. Brian Urquhart, who was a senior UN official at the time, wrote in his memoir that "Israel, no doubt having decided on military action, turned down [UN General Secretary] U Thant's ideas."

There were many other attempts at averting an escalation, for instance, the United States also

tried its hand at mediation. High ranking American diplomats and politicians met with Nasser in late May in a meeting that was deemed a "breakthrough in the crisis." In this meeting Nasser showed flexibility and a willingness to include the World Court to arbitrate in some of the issues. However, what was most promising was that Nasser agreed to send his vice-president to Washington within a week in an attempt to reach a diplomatic settlement for the crisis.

You may be wondering why you've never heard of such a meeting, or what its results were. That is because two days before the meeting, Israel decided to launch its surprise attack, torpedoing all efforts to reach a non-violent diplomatic solution to the crisis.

This shocked even the Americans, Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State at the time wrote that:

"They attacked on a Monday, knowing that on Wednesday the Egyptian vice-president would arrive in Washington to talk about re-opening the Strait of Tiran. We might not have succeeded in getting Egypt to reopen the strait, but it was a real possibility."

Following the diplomatic chain of events at the time leaves no shadow of a doubt that Israel was purposely seeking war. It rebuffed all attempts at mediation and even deceived and humiliated its ally, the United States, by allowing it to continue with the charade of diplomacy when Israel knew it was going to attack anyway. On the other hand, this shows Nasser to have been far more flexible, and amenable to diplomatic solutions than many suggest. Yet until this day, Israel is portrayed as

being forced into a defensive war, while Nasser is portrayed as a warmonger.

In his memoir, U Thant, the UN Secretary General at the time wrote that “if only Israel had agreed to permit UNEF to be stationed on its side of the border, even for a short duration, the course of history could have been different. Diplomatic efforts to avert the pending catastrophe might have prevailed; war might have been averted.” This was further confirmed by Odd Bull, chief of staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) at the time, who stated that:

“it is quite possible that the 1967 war could have been avoided had Israel acceded to the Secretary-General’s request.”

The revisionism surrounding the 1967 war is one of Israel’s most significant propaganda achievements. Suddenly, reality is flipped on its head, and the powerful aggressor becomes an underdog fighting to stave off extermination, though no such threat really existed. Israeli Minister Mordecai Bentov frankly admitted a few years after the war that:

“This entire story about the danger of extermination was invented and exaggerated after the fact to justify the annexation of new Arab territories.”

Following this war, Israel would come to control the entirety of what was once mandatory Palestine. The Jordanians and Egyptians were pushed out of the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively, and these areas were now subjected to Israeli military occupation. In addition to this, the Syrian Golan Heights as well as the Sinai Peninsula were seized by Israel.



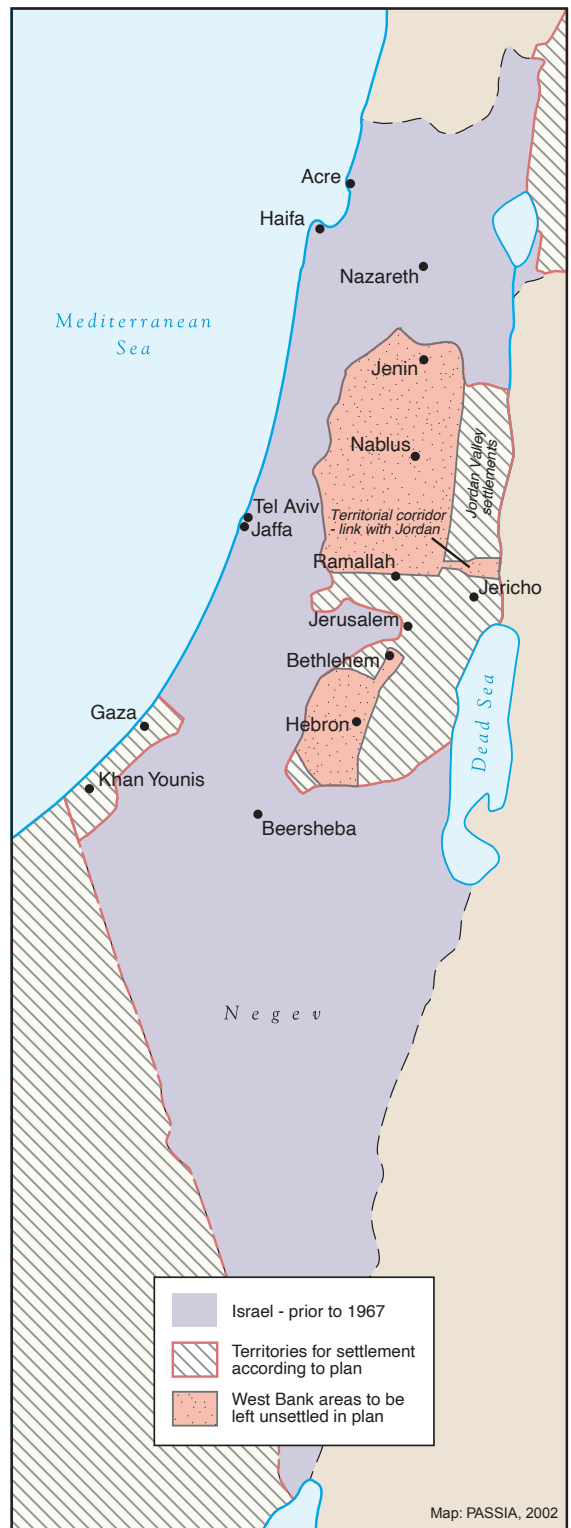
Similar to the 1948 war, the 1967 war provided cover for more ethnic cleansing campaigns. By the end of the war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be ethnically cleansed from various areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Over 100,000 Syrians would also be ethnically cleansed from the Golan Heights, and their villages and communities demolished and erased. This defeat would come to be known as the Naksa, Arabic for setback. It would also crush the spirits of the Palestinians and the wider Arab population in general.

The Allon colonization plan

After decades of perfecting colonial control mechanisms for Palestinians inside the green line, Israel was more than equipped to impose an effective military governing system on the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In 1966, Israel would end its martial law regulations for Palestinian villages inside the green line only to impose them once again in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after its victory in 1967.

The geographic distribution of settlements today is eerily similar to this plan. The military occupation of the West Bank—including East Jerusalem—and the Gaza Strip persist to this day. This new status quo allowed Israel to pursue its goals of colonizing the rest of the territory that made up mandatory Palestine. It is in this context that the Allon plan emerged. Named after its creator, Yigal Allon, this plan would see Israel permanently seizing control of vast territories of the West Bank through multiple methods, such as through military installations as well as settlements. The large Palestinian population centers would then either be given some form of nominal autonomy, or have their control transferred to the Jordanian monarchy.

It was according to this plan that the colonial settlement enterprise in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was birthed. Settlements are colonies built on land under Israeli occupation outside the green line, and are open only to Jewish Israelis. Initially, Israel constructed settlements in all the territories it seized in the 1967 war, including the Sinai and Golan heights. For reasons which we will discuss in the next chapters, the settlements in the Gaza Strip and Sinai were dismantled over time. However, in the West Bank and Golan Heights, this has only wors-



ened. There are over 200 settlements and outposts dotting the entirety of these areas. These settlements are home to over 600,000 settlers, living on stolen and occupied territory. According to international law, these settlements are absolutely illegal, and their existence is a stark violation of the Geneva conventions and other international norms.

If you were to look at the distribution of these settlements all across the West Bank, you will notice that there is a striking resemblance between their positions and the territory outlined in the Allon plan to be permanently seized by Israel. This is by design, and Israeli policy since the 60s has been to change the facts on the ground as much as possible so as to enable the theft of these lands. This colonization drive persists to this very day through various annexations and land confiscations, and did not even stop during times of peace negotiations. As a matter of fact, it accelerated during times of negotiations because the Israelis knew that the Palestinians would not want to jeopardize the negotiations they so desperately needed to establish a state. In addition to the settlements, the West Bank is dissected by military firing ranges, nature reserves and many other legalistic schemes to deny Palestinians access. This dissection is so severe, that the West Bank has jokingly come to be known as the West Bank archipelago, where small pockets of Palestinians are surrounded by Israeli controlled zones. This will be further elaborated upon in the next chapter.

The war of 1973 and Camp David

Despite the death of Nasser, Egypt remained determined to take back the territories it lost in the 1967 war. With the help of Syria, who had also lost its Golan Heights, they put together a plan

to retake control of their occupied areas. This came in the form of the 1973 war, which was a gamechanger in the region.

In the first hours of the war, Egypt under the leadership of Anwar Sadat, was able to cross the Suez Canal and overwhelm the Bar Lev line, which was constructed by Israel to fend off any Egyptian attack. On the northern front, the Syrians were able to advance well into the occupied Golan heights. These early military victories were ultimately reversed as Israel strengthened its position with the aid of the United States. While the Arab forces would be repulsed, the war served as a warning sign to Israel that it cannot forever guarantee that it would always be a victor in war.

This laid the groundwork for the 1978 Camp David accords with Egypt, where the Sinai would be returned to Egypt (with certain stipulations), in exchange for peace, normalization and the Egyptian recognition of Israel. Furthermore, the fledgling Israeli colonies in the Sinai would be dismantled. Egypt would be the first Arab state to officially recognize Israel, and would begin to reorient itself towards the United States and the West Bloc.

Among the various clauses and provisions of the Camp David accords was the condition that the rights of the Palestinian people were to be recognized, and that some form of autonomy would be granted to the Palestinians. While vague and non-committal, this would eventually pave the way for the secret negotiations between the PLO and Israel. The Syrians, however, would not fare as well. The Syrian Golan Heights remain occupied to this day, and the state of war between Syria and Israel has technically never ended. Israel has used this as

a pretext to illegally annex the Golan heights, and colonize it in a manner similar to the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

This new status quo, and the perceived shift in the balance of power would ultimately culminate in the Palestinian Intifada and the Oslo accords, which would for the first time allow the PLO leadership to return to Palestine in an endeavor to establish a Palestinian state. This will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Two Intifadas and two states

Twenty years after the extension of Israeli colonialism to the rest of Palestine, the people of the West Bank and Gaza Strip came to live under unbearable repression, sustained through Israel's military and civil administration in these newly occupied areas. Civil and political freedoms were non-existent, and Palestinians were faced with daily humiliation and violence. Things as simple as dressing in the colors of the Palestinian flag were enough to net you savage beatings and jail time. Land expropriation was rampant, as well as collective punishment and deliberate de-development strategies designed to shrink the Palestinian economy with every year. For all intents and purposes, their lives were run by a foreign military dictatorship that saw them as inferior in every way.

Furthermore, Palestinians were reduced to cheap and exploited labor in Israel, where it is estimat-

ed that around 35-40% of the entire Palestinian work force worked within the green line. This concentrated repression and exploitation created a volatile climate which could explode provided the right trigger. This trigger arrived on the 9th of December 1987, when an Israel Defense Force (IDF) truck crashed into a Palestinian vehicle, killing 4 workers, 3 of which were from the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, an event which Palestinians widely saw as deliberate. Naturally, Israel denied all such accusations.

This would set off wide-scale protests, civil disobedience, boycotts, and other forms of resistance against Israel that would come to be known as the Intifada, which means to "shake off." Palestinians would burn Israeli products, refuse to pay taxes to the civil administration, and organized themselves into popular committees to act as an alternative to the civil administration and provide services and promote Palestinian self-reliance. These committees were popularly led and decentralized in nature, which made them almost impossible to stamp out despite Israel's best efforts.

As is to be expected, Israel responded with extreme violence, deploying tens of thousands of soldiers all over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It utilized what came to be known as the "iron fist" policy, which instructed soldiers to break the arms and legs of protestors. However, as harsh as its response was, it was also incoherent and panicked, and often contradictory. It brutally repressed demonstrations and assassinated Intifada leaders, which backfired and brought more Palestinians to the street. It destroyed local farms and businesses to force Palestinians to purchase Israeli products, and closed down educational institutions which would only increase youth

mobilization in support of the Intifada. Moreover, these measures generated immense sympathy and solidarity with the Palestinians, and seriously challenged the ‘progressive’ image Israel always tried to project internationally.

The Intifada would have long-lasting effects on Palestinians, and is still fondly remembered to this day. It would seriously challenge Israeli control over Palestine, and would reignite the fire within Palestinians for resistance, which had been dampened by years of military defeat and the normalization of Egypt. It would also prove that Palestinians could be the masters of their own destiny, and could struggle for their liberation in a collective and self-organized matter without support from abroad. It would also put to rest the fantasy that Jerusalem was a united city after capturing its eastern part in the 1967 war, as Palestinians in East Jerusalem were among the vanguard of the movement. In short, it was successful in making the Israeli occupation as taxing as possible, in resources as well as in morale and international standing.

It is within this context that the PLO saw an opportunity to leverage this pressure. With international support from the United States and the Soviet Union, this would culminate in the Madrid Peace conference of 1991. This was an attempt to arrive at a negotiated settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Despite the PLO not officially being part of the Palestinian delegation due to Israeli objections, they were coordinating closely with said delegation. While the Madrid conference held symbolic importance to some, it had very little tangible effect on the ground. It was the secret Oslo negotiations simultaneously going on behind the scenes that would have a much more pronounced effect.

The Oslo accords

The Oslo accords were a result of the secret negotiations between the PLO and Israel. Negotiating directly, and sitting face to face for the first time, they agreed upon a declaration of principles that would lead to creating the Palestinian Authority as an interim government that would pave the way for a final settlement. Although these talks would kickstart what came to be known as the “peace” process and the two-state solution, they were mostly a declaration of principles which did not contain any concrete specificities for a resolution. As a matter of fact, the word “state” with regards to Palestinians was never mentioned once.

It was two years later, in what is referred to as Oslo II, taking place in the Egyptian city of Taba, that negotiations earnestly began. In these negotiations more concrete parameters were discussed, and the logistics as well as method for instating the Palestinian Authority on the ground were determined. It is also worth mentioning that during this period, Jordan would go on to sign the Wadi Araba peace treaty with Israel and officially normalize its ties, making it the second Arab country after Egypt to do so.

Originally, the interim Oslo agreement and the Palestinian Authority were meant to be of a transitional nature, only lasting 5 years leading up to the final settlement. Interestingly enough, the form of this final settlement was never concretely defined as resulting in a state for Palestinians. Oslo II resulted in dividing the West Bank into three areas, labeled A, B and C.

Areas A: These areas were to be under complete civil and security Palestinian (Palestinian Authority) control. This includes the major Palestinian cit-

ies and population centers. There should have been no Israeli presence in this area. This area makes up approximately 18% of the West Bank while containing 55% of the Palestinian population.

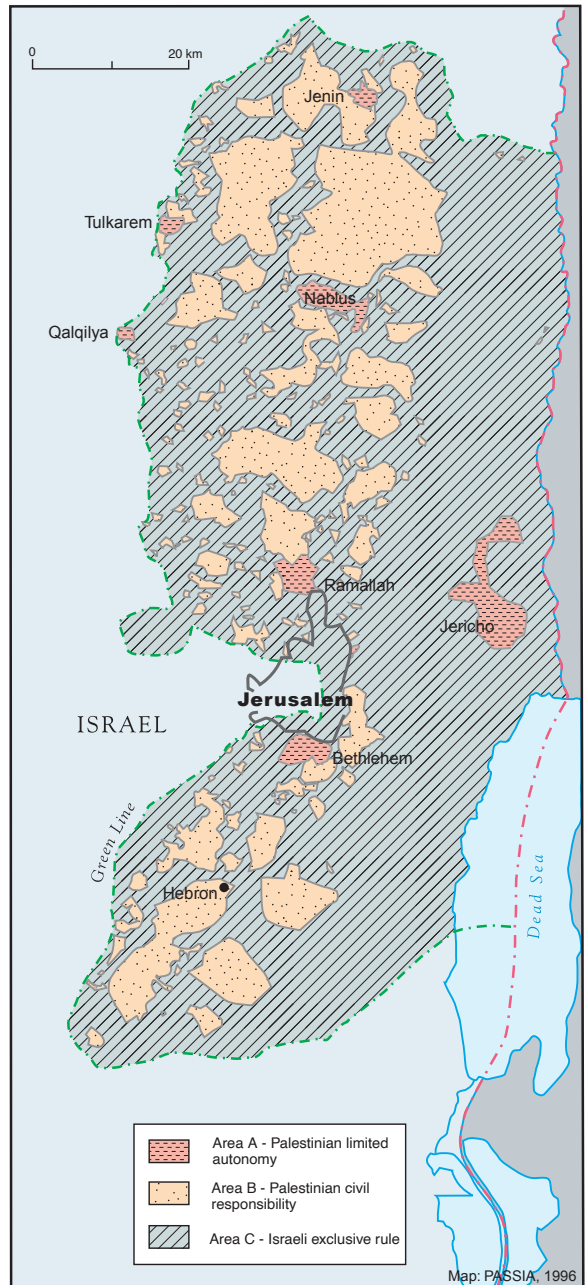
Areas B: These areas were to be under Palestinian civil control, but Israeli security control. Many Palestinian villages and smaller population centers fall within this area. Areas B constitute approximately 21% of the West Bank while containing 41% of the Palestinian population.

Areas C: These areas were to be under full Israeli civil and security control. Areas C constitute the majority of the West Bank making up approximately 61% of the land. It is in these areas where the majority of settlement activity takes place, as they are abundant in land and resources while containing a relatively small portion of the Palestinian population.

The labeling and designation of these areas continues to be an issue of importance to this day, as increasing numbers of Israeli officials call for the complete annexation of areas C to Israel. This means that Israel makes life as difficult as possible for Palestinians in areas C to encourage their exodus. Other issues of importance such as the use of water resources are heavily affected by which area you live in. Naturally if you are an illegal Israeli settler, such distinctions do not matter.

Today Israel barely distinguishes between these areas, as it is seen operating freely in Areas A, as well as retroactively recognizing new settlement outposts in Areas B.

In theory, then, the two-state solution calls for establishing two states, as the name implies. The Pal-



estian state would be erected in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. On the question of refugees, this topic was always

postponed for future negotiations. The Palestinian Authority insists that there will be a “just solution” to the refugee question, but internal documents reveal that they have basically given up on the matter. Not even a token amount of refugees would be permitted to return to their homes. Another issue is borders, where Israel has attempted to keep control of its illegal settlement blocs in the West Bank.

The Oslo accords came bundled with the Paris protocol, which dictated the economic policies the Palestinians were allowed to make, and directly tied the Palestinian economy to the Israeli one. In essence, what the Paris protocol achieved was a structured subordination of the Palestinian economy to the Israeli one, giving the Israeli market immense control and power over it. As a matter of fact, many aspects of the Oslo accord were just a reformulation of occupation policies with a civil face; domination and exploitation were simply rebranded as cooperation.

Setting aside the practical issues and stalemates in the negotiation, the two-state solution has many conceptual problems that make it unfitting as a mechanism through which a resolution can be found. To put it bluntly, Israel is not a normal state. It is a settler colony. We are not talking about two naturally occurring populations which have a land dispute. Israelis are descended from settlers that arrived from abroad with the goal of erecting an ethnocratic settler state in an area that was already home to the Palestinians.

Additionally, this approach is inadequate to right historical wrongs, as it focuses on the pre-1967 borders as a starting point, which are in themselves a product of this colonization, and not the root cause of it. It is thus preoccupied with finding

solutions to symptoms, rather than dare address the root cause, which is Zionist settler colonialism and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

This automatically means that Palestinians must relinquish any rights or hopes for their millions of refugees, and it also means that Palestinians must relinquish their rights to live in over 80% of the land they were ethnically cleansed from. Naturally, this promises that resource distribution, from water to fertile land, will be heavily stacked in Israel’s favor.

All of these shortcomings are often countered with the assertion that Palestinians must compromise to reach peace. Israeli control is treated as a *fait accompli* and that Palestinians must deal with it, rather than demand justice. This is the whole premise of the two-state solution, that Palestinians must compromise on their rights to be granted a small, powerless sham of a state in part of their homeland. Israel, of course was not asked to compromise on anything substantial. The only “compromise” asked of Israelis is to stop its illegal occupation of foreign lands, as well as stop its illegal settlement enterprise, which it should cease regardless of any negotiation with the Palestinians. This attitude basically boils down to “What’s mine is mine, and what’s yours is negotiable.”

Yet despite all of this, Palestinians were willing to agree to these terms. The PLO was willing to give up on the Palestinian people’s historical rights in order to find peace and have a state. But none of this was sufficient for Israel. Even Rabin, the Israeli Prime Minister who signed the Oslo accords, who is considered a holy martyr for peace among the Israeli peace camp was not prepared to give the Palestinians a real state. He spoke of a sham “state-minus” with

no sovereignty, and the offers did not get better than that throughout the history of negotiations.

So even when Palestinians accepted the 1967 borders, an incredibly limited return of refugees, and other compromises, this was still not good enough for Israel that sought to shrink the Palestinian Bantustan even further. These arrangements seek to formalize the status quo with cosmetic changes. Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, promised that no sovereign Palestinian state will emerge, and in the case of any limited self-rule arrangement for the Palestinians, there will be a permanent IDF presence in the West Bank, as well as Israeli control of the borders and airspace. As it stands, Palestinian aspirations cannot exceed the ceiling of Israeli table scraps, and any rejection of this ridiculous premise is framed as irrational intransigence.

Needless to say, the Palestinian Authority, which was supposed to last only 5 years still exists to this day. No Palestinian state has materialized, and the Israeli matrix of control is more far-reaching than ever. Israeli intransigence and the stalemate in negotiations following the failed Camp David negotiations would erupt a second Intifada. This time, however, it would differ in character and organization from the first, and would become much more militarized over its course.

The Second Intifada

The stalemate in the negotiations, and the escalating settlement activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip combined together to create a climate of heightened tension. This tension would erupt into a conflagration at the end of September 2000. Triggered by the visit of Ariel Sharon to

the Aqsa mosque and the Noble Sanctuary, the second Intifada, also known as the Aqsa Intifada, would demolish much of what the Palestinian Authority had built over the last few years.

Ariel Sharon, known as the butcher of Sabra and Shatilla to Palestinians, visited al-Aqsa mosque escorted by hundreds of armed troops to make a statement that no matter what agreement would emerge, the Noble Sanctuary would forever remain under Israeli sovereignty and control. Being the third holiest site in Islam, and holding a very special importance for all Palestinians, this visit was deliberately designed to provoke a response from the Palestinians. It was thought that decisively crushing this response would give the Israelis a better position in the negotiations, and lower the political demands of the Palestinian Authority.

Similar to the first Intifada, Palestinians mobilized massive protests, civil disobedience actions, boycotts and other forms of resistance. However, unlike the first Intifada which took Israel by surprise, the repression was much more harsh and violent. Israel ruthlessly shot to kill, using live ammunition and savagely cracked down on Palestinians. What had initially erupted as a popular, mostly peaceful movement, was soon pushed by the harsh response to gradually become militarized. While popular resistance would continue, this time it would be accompanied by guerilla warfare, suicide bombings and other tactics.

Soon the same Ariel Sharon who provoked the Intifada would become Prime Minister, and with his extensive history of repressing Palestinians, he greatly escalated the violence. He would invade and reoccupy all Palestinian areas that were un-

der the control of the Palestinian Authority, including the large population centers such as Nablus and Ramallah. This was also used as a pretext to begin constructing Israel's infamous segregation wall, which has been widely condemned as illegal.

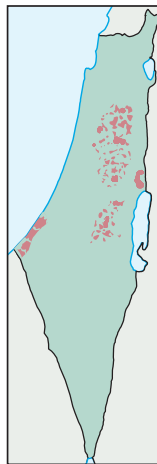
This would shake up the status quo considerably; the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be completely cut off from each other and the rest of Palestine. Much of the Palestinian Authority's security forces were decimated, and Israel retrenched its position to have a tighter grip on the occupied areas. Naturally, during this period there were many attempts at resuscitating the peace process or shifting the status quo, but they all ended in failure.

One of the major events that took place during the second Intifada was the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. While it is true that Israeli forces and settlers withdrew from within Gaza in 2005 due to heavy Palestinian resistance, this does not mean that all manifestations of the occupation were ended, as Israel continued to exert effective control over Gaza. This is confirmed by the United Nations, Amnesty International, the International Red Cross and countless other international organizations specialized in human rights and international humanitarian law.

But this claim that Gaza is unoccupied has been very useful for Israel, as it plays into the propaganda that Israel has sacrificed immensely for peace, a talking point unsubstantiated by actual history. As noble as Israelis make it sound, there were less

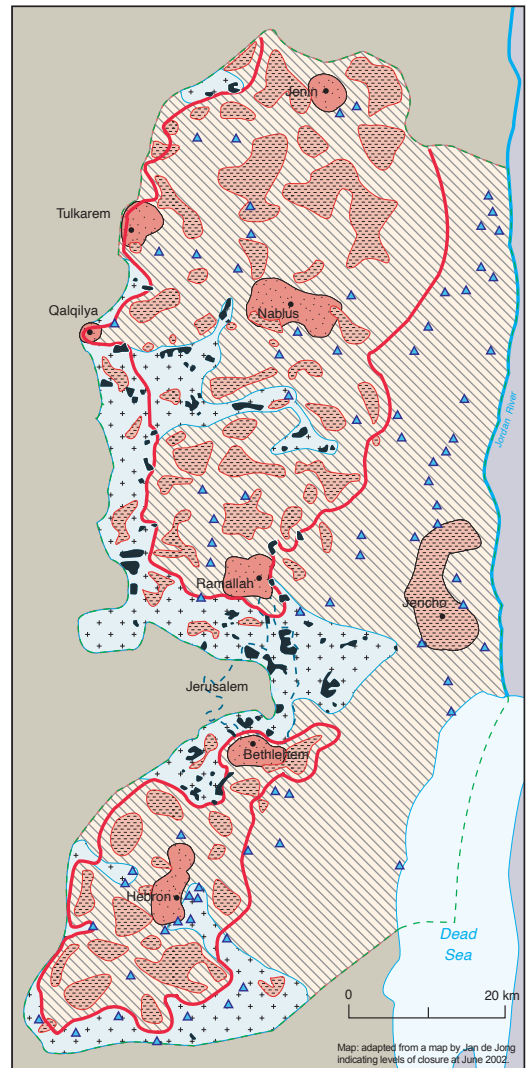
altruistic intentions behind the retreat from Gaza, articulated by Dov Weisglas, top aide to Ariel Sharon who was Prime Minister at the time:

"The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process, and when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem."



Small Map - Historic Palestine
 Area under total Israeli control, 2002
 Area under Israeli-imposed curfew or/and siege, 2002

Main Map - The West Bank
 Militarily occupied West Bank, 2002
 Palestinian towns and villages sealed by Israeli forces
 Palestinian urban centers reoccupied, sealed and under curfew
 Main settlement blocs
 Outer closure belt containing cantons
 Principal settlement
 Built-up area of urban 'anchor' settlement



Map: adapted from a map by Jan de Jong indicating levels of closure at June 2002.

Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed indefinitely from our agenda. And all this with authority and permission. All with a presidential blessing and the ratification of both houses of Congress.[...] The disengagement is actually formaldehyde, it supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians.”

And he was right. For example, whenever the Palestinian Authority criticized Israel for its intransigence or its new settlement and colonization projects in the West bank, Israel would retort that they gave up Gaza and sacrificed immensely for peace. This was an effective way for Israel to circumvent criticism of its violations of international law and shift the onus of compromise onto Palestinians. In this context, “compromise” came to mean acquiescence to the brazen colonization of the vast majority of the West Bank. Weisglas bragged that:

“That is exactly what happened, you know, the term ‘peace process’ is a bundle of concepts and commitments. The peace process is the establishment of a Palestinian state with all the security risks that entails. The peace process is the evacuation of settlements, it’s the return of refugees, it’s the partition of Jerusalem. And all that has now been frozen.... what I effectively agreed to with the Americans was that part of the settlements would not be dealt with at all, and the rest will not be dealt with until the Palestinians turn into Finns. That is the significance of what we did.”

Furthermore, Israel knew it was not really relinquishing control of the Gaza strip, but rather re-configuring how the occupation looked and functioned. They knew that the occupation, despite being in a new form, would still elicit resistance from those inside the strip. Israel could then use this resistance as proof that “relinquishing” land in return for peace with the Palestinians was an impossible task, because Palestinians would continue to attack it no matter what. This has served as a major argument for why Israel should not withdraw from any inch of the West Bank to this very day.

By the end of the second Intifada and due to its militarized nature, nearly 5,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Israelis would be killed. It shifted the status quo in Palestine, and undid much of the work accomplished by the Palestinian Authority in the years prior. This along with the death of Palestinian Authority and PLO leader Yasser Arafat would trigger changes in the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian leadership in general. The Palestinian Authority would be re-structured into an even more docile and obedient entity, Israeli colonization efforts would accelerate, and a new phase in the Palestinian question would begin. This phase continues to this very day.

Chapter 5: Palestine and Palestinians today

By the end of the second Intifada, a general atmosphere of disillusion and powerlessness came to dominate Palestinian society. The Intifada had failed to procure the hoped-for gains, and the Israeli con-

trol of increasing areas of Palestine had only tightened. Much of what the Palestinian Authority had built lay in ruins, and with it, general support for the Oslo accords and the two-state solution dwindled.

Parliamentary elections took place in 2006, resulting in a Hamas majority, beating Fateh, its rival and traditional leader of the PLO and Palestinian Authority. In the wake of this victory, Palestinians were subjected to enormous amounts of pressure from the international community as well as Israel, as many claimed that Hamas was a “terrorist organization.” In an effort to counter these pressures, Fateh and Hamas formed a unity government. Unfortunately, this government would eventually crumble from external pressure, as well as internal struggles over tactics, vision and ideology. This would culminate in Hamas taking military action in the Gaza Strip, and seizing control of it from the Fateh-dominated government agencies and security forces.

The Gaza Strip today

Even before the second Intifada, Israel had worked hard to cut off the Gaza Strip from the rest of Palestine. Travel between the West Bank and Gaza since the 1990s was always difficult, today it is virtually impossible for the general public. This was further exasperated by the military siege enacted by Israel following the Hamas take-over of the Strip in 2007. For the first time since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the West Bank and Gaza Strip would now be politically separated once again.

For all intents and purposes, the Gaza Strip has been turned into a ghetto, with Israel besieging it from most sides. Egypt helps maintain this siege from its side. Gaza has undergone some brutal as-

saults and wars on its population due to various Israeli pretexts, such as the 2008 and 2014 wars which killed thousands of Palestinians, including hundreds of children. This has made Gaza a convenient testing ground for Israeli arms manufacturers, who tout their equipment as “battle tested.”

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the Gaza Strip is a small coastal enclave compromised mostly of refugees ethnically cleansed from their villages by Israel during the Nakba. As such, it does not have the capacity to support such a large population, and according to multiple reports, including a United Nations one, it is teetering towards being unlivable. The water aquifers are gradually becoming poisoned, and its civilian infrastructure is frequently destroyed by Israeli shelling and bombing.

Recently, the refugees of Gaza organized themselves into the Great March of Return, which saw tens of thousands peacefully protesting at the edges of the besieged strip with the goal of ending the siege and for their right to return to their homes. This march was heavily demonized, with Israeli claiming they were “riots” manufactured by Hamas, and its participants were branded “terrorists” and mercilessly shot by Israeli snipers, despite them posing no threat to them. A prominent example of this was the murder of the Palestinian medic, Razan Al-Najjar, who was sniped while providing aid to the protestors. Israel even released doctored footage in an attempt to paint her as a threat, but it instantly backfired since it was apparent that it was tampered with. Almost 200 Palestinians lost their lives, and thousands were wounded and maimed for life. The situation in the Gaza Strip continues to deteriorate, poverty, Covid-19 and other circumstances have pushed it to the edge of implosion with no end in sight.

The West Bank today

Following the destruction of much of its assets, and the Hamas take-over of the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Authority found itself in the midst of a serious legitimacy crisis. Oslo lay in ruins, and any attempt to resuscitate the process would remain unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the people grew restless and skeptical of the Palestinian leadership and their role in society. So the Palestinian Authority did what any other Arab regime would do in its place; crackdown on dissent, and restructure and strengthen its security forces.

To this end, it would receive ample support, especially from the United States. US. General Keith Dayton would oversee what was officially dubbed “the security sector reform.” This basically entailed training a new generation of Palestinian security and intelligence officers fiercely loyal to the Authority’s leadership. This “reform” saw the ballooning of the security sector and its budget. This would be accompanied by an unraveling of Yasser Arafat’s old patronage networks, and establishing new ones with allegiance to the post-Arafat leadership.

The new tactic of the Palestinian Authority shifted towards state-building, in the hope that if they could prove capable of building effective institutions, the world would deem them “worthy” of a state. Slowly, but surely, things such as resistance and the right of return would be phased out of the Palestinian leadership’s language, and the Palestinian revolution turned from a liberation movement to a quest for autonomy. Not only that, but the security sector “reforms” included a security coordination program with Israel, meaning that the Palestinian Authority would basically become a subcontractor to the occupation.

Despite all of this, the Palestinian Authority never had any real “authority” to begin with, and this was by design. It is a purely administrative entity created to manage the “dirty work” of education, health and other burdens the occupying power is usually responsible for, while having absolutely no sovereignty or decision over any political aspect. This, of course, remains in the hands of Israel.

For example, the Palestinian Authority can’t even determine who a Palestinian citizen is. The citizen registry for Palestinians is under the control of Israel. Meaning that if a Palestinian marries a non-Palestinian, their spouse will never be able to gain Palestinian citizenship as Israel’s demographic obsession would not allow for any preventable increase in the Palestinian population. Even Abbas needs to coordinate with the Israeli military to be able to visit other Palestinian cities, cities of a “country” he is supposedly president of. The world, especially through its foreign aid, has effectively subsidized the Palestinian occupation and relieved Israel of many of its responsibilities, while maintaining all of the benefits.

Even though these changes to the Palestinian Authority have received praise from the IMF, and other international organizations, many of which deemed them ready for statehood, this did not sway Israel who was never truly interested in a real Palestinian state. This prompted the Palestinian Authority to take symbolic gestures, such as stamping “State of Palestine” on its paperwork instead of the traditional “Palestinian Authority” insignia. This gesture, of course, fell flat on its face when Israel threatened to not recognize these documents, which forced them to backtrack from stamping any papers that needed Israeli approval. A symbolic

move which was supposed to signal independence ended up proving the exact opposite.

Meanwhile, not only would the occupation and colonization of the West Bank go on, but it would become even more entrenched. Although both militarily occupied, the form of the occupation in the West Bank differs to that in the Gaza Strip. Whereas the occupation in the Gaza Strip is maintained at long range through siege as well as aerial and artillery bombardment, in the West Bank this occupation experience revolves around the daily presence of an occupying military and policing force. As a result, there are context specific effects to the occupation in one region which are not as prominent in the other; for example, arrest of Palestinians is much more common in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip, but the destruction of homes due to war and bombing is much more prevalent in the Gaza Strip. This is not to say that there are no deaths or demolitions in the West Bank, but the contrast between the regions is significant.

All aspects of life in the West Bank today are run by Israel, either directly or indirectly through the Palestinian Authority. This control extends from your basic rights, down to the most mundane of things, such as your phone coverage. Settlements continue to expand, now holding over 600,000 settlers with no indication of stopping. Increased areas are being annexed, and support for annexing area C is gaining more and more traction inside Israel. The annexation of the Jordan Valley, for example, has recently featured prominently in Israeli election campaigns.

Jerusalem today

Although the Eastern part of Jerusalem is techni-

cally part of the West Bank, Israel has never treated it as such since its capture in the 1967 war. Claiming that the “eternal capital” has finally been reunited with its western counterpart, which Israel occupied in 1948. East Jerusalem was officially annexed in 1980. This annexation, of course was illegal and not recognized by the world community barring a few exceptions, such as the United States under Donald Trump.

Although Israel claims that Jerusalem has been reunited, this is mostly in the realm of rhetoric and propaganda. East Jerusalem is subject to a slew of measures, laws and procedures that specifically target its majority Palestinian population. Palestinians are granted a special “residence” permit that is often revoked with the flimsiest pretexts. For example, if you were to study abroad or decide to move outside of Jerusalem, this could very easily get your residence revoked, forcing you to live in the West Bank instead.

As with every other area of Palestine, East Jerusalem has been undergoing serious colonization efforts, with the building of colonies and the transfer of settlers into it with the declared plan to have Jerusalem with a 74% Jewish population. Towards this end, discriminatory lawfare is waged against Palestinians to find justifications for their removal. Thousands of Palestinian families have lost their right to live in Jerusalem over the decades, in what can only be described as protracted and silent ethnic cleansing of the city. Accompanying this is the erasure of traditional Palestinian names and toponomy, and replacing them with Israeli and Jewish names.

Massive discrimination in services, resource allocation and funding are the norm. Palestinian

neighborhoods are underserved, poorer and dirtier. Settlers in Jerusalem, naturally, do not need to worry about any of this or the risk of losing their homes.

Palestinians inside the green line

A cornerstone of Israeli propaganda efforts is the claim that all Israeli citizens are equal, this claim aims to obfuscate the fact that Israel distinguishes between citizenship and nationality.

What does this mean? You can be a citizen of Israel but be a Druze national, or a Jewish national. Your nationality is determined by your ethnicity and it cannot be changed or challenged. Many of the rights you are accorded in Israel stem from your nationality not your citizenship. Meaning an “Arab” Israeli citizen and a Jewish Israeli citizen, while both citizens, enjoy different rights and privileges determined by their “nationality.” Seeing how Israel is an ethnocracy it is not a mystery who this system privileges and who it discriminates against.

This is not merely discrimination in practice, but discrimination by law. Adalah have composed a database of discriminatory laws in Israel that disfavor non-Jewish Israelis. For example, the Law of Return and Absentees’ Property Law are but two examples of flagrant racism and discrimination in the Israeli legal system.

This is not some old, odd oversight, but a very deliberate part of the design of Israeli society. This is periodically reinforced whenever some Israelis petition the Supreme Court to recognize an Israeli nationality that does not discriminate based on ethnicity. A recent example of these petitions was

in 2013, where the Supreme Court rejected such an idea on the grounds that it would “undermine Israel’s Jewishness.”

It says quite a lot about Israel that a unifying egalitarian identity not based around ethnicity would “pose a danger to Israel’s founding principle: to be a Jewish state for the Jewish people” as the court ruled. The fact that such discrimination is seen as a cornerstone of Israeli society only reinforces its colonial ethnocratic nature, and undermines any claims to equality among citizens.

But this kind of discrimination is only the tip of the iceberg, as it only covers some aspects of de jure inequality. Inspecting the de facto discrimination against non-Jewish Israelis shines an even brighter light on Israel’s ethnocratic hierarchy. Almost half of all Palestinian citizens of Israel live under the poverty line, with a considerable percentage close to the poverty line. They also have a considerably lower life expectancy, a higher infant mortality rate, less access to education and resources as well as less municipality and government funding. Should you be interested in delving into some of the more detailed aspects of this discrimination, you can read Adalah’s The Inequality Report. It is an excellent overview of many issues.

Furthermore, most land inside the green line is off limits to Palestinian citizens of Israel. A large percentage of land in Israel is under the control of the Jewish National Fund (JNF), which has:

“..a specific mandate to develop land for and lease land only to Jews. Thus the 13 percent of land in Israel owned by the JNF is by definition off-limits to Palestinian

Arab citizens, and when the ILA tenders leases for land owned by the JNF, it does so only to Jews—either Israeli citizens or Jews from the Diaspora. This arrangement makes the state directly complicit in overt discrimination against Arab citizens in land allocation and use...”

The JNF is not the only entity blocking Palestinian citizens of Israel from purchasing, leasing or renting land and property, but also the so-called regional and local councils, which account for the vast majority of land. These councils have the authority to block anyone from settling in these areas that do not seem like a “good fit,” for example a religious community would not want to allow secular residents from moving in on the grounds that it would be against the spirit of their communities. In practice, this has translated into a virtual ban on non-Jewish Israelis moving into Jewish areas. In a Statement submitted by Habitat International Coalition and Adalah to the United Nations, it was estimated that almost 80% of the entire country is off limits to lease for Palestinian citizens of Israel.

No matter how you look at it, Israeli society is a heavily segregated and hierarchical one. Whether through the legal system or just the attitudes of average Jewish Israelis, the ethnocratic nature of Israel and its obsession with ethnic gerrymandering always rises to the surface. Some would deny it, citing standards of living or some random “Arab” judge as a refutation of this point, but none of these challenge the extreme inequality—by design—of Israeli society. This denial is not unique to Israelis, we saw similar sentiments among white Americans who denied the existence of white supremacy, even though they reaped its benefits either directly or indirectly.

Palestinians in the diaspora

Today, the Palestinians expelled during the Nakba and the Naksa and their descendants form the majority of the Palestinian people worldwide. Situated mostly in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine, they continue to be denied the right of return despite many still holding the original deeds and keys to their houses, now expropriated by the Israeli state. They live under harsh conditions and yearn for the day they are able to return.

Not only does Israel deny their right to return, but it has also been waging a war on the very concept of the Palestinian refugee, arguing for the redefinition of the term to exclude descendants. This would run counter to every refugee population in the world, which has its descendants recognized as refugees in the cases of protracted conflicts, such as in the occupied Western Sahara.

The return of Palestinian refugees is the core of the Palestinian question, and their expulsion formed the basis for the establishment of Israel. Therefore, any proposed solution that neglects this, as the Oslo framework did, is doomed to failure. These approaches are preoccupied with finding solutions to symptoms, rather than dare address the root cause, which is Zionist settler colonialism and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. This can be clearly seen when taking the 1967 borders as their starting point, although today not even that is good enough for Israel, which seeks to annex increasing territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Palestinians are then pressured to relinquish any rights or hopes for their millions of refugees, or their rights to live in over 80% of the land they were ethnically cleansed from.

As you can see from these chapters, the democratic, progressive Israel we hear so much about in the mainstream media has never once existed. From its inception, it functioned as an ethnocracy with the intent of taking over as much land as possible with as few Palestinians as possible. Although a new tactic of Zionists is to try and claim that Zionism was a liberation movement with the aim of decolonization, this is belied by the very detailed writings left behind by movement founders.

Chapter 6: BDS 101

If you've been researching the question of Palestine, then I'm sure you've heard of the BDS movement in one form or another. However, between the debates regarding its efficacy as a tactic, and the wild accusations hurled at its promoters, some confusion is bound to arise. Consequently, we've prepared this short BDS primer for you, with basic information as well as answers for some of the more frequently asked questions.

What is BDS?

The Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement is a non-violent human rights campaign formed in 2005 by over 170 Palestinian non-governmental organizations, unions and civil society groups. The aim of the movement is to campaign for and protect the rights of Palestinians through the application of international pressure on Israel until it complies with international law. While the BDS movement is decentralized, and functions through local organizations, groups and grassroots efforts in each area, the BDS National Council (BNC), along with The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of

Israel (PACBI) serve as a compass for the movement. They introduce guidelines and revisions, as well as deliberate on particularly tricky cases.

How does BDS function?

The call of the BDS movement can be understood through its acronym: B(oycott), D(isinvestment), and (S)anctions.

The act of **Boycotting**, is to refuse to buy, use, or participate in (something) as a way of protesting; to stop using the goods or services of (a company, country, etc.) until changes are made. Simply put, the movement encourages people to, for instance, stop buying Israeli products, or engaging with Israeli services as a form of protest until the goals of the movement are met.

The act of **Disinvestment** is the withdrawal of investments. In our context, this means that the movement encourages different institutions and organizations to sell their stock in any company that profits or benefits from Israeli oppression of the Palestinians, or to refuse to invest in any company or organization which does.

The act of **Sanctioning** is an action that is taken to pressure a country or an organization towards a certain goal. For example, in the context of BDS, this means pressuring Israel to obey international laws by limiting or stopping trade with that it, or by cutting off economic aid, etc. Perhaps the most extreme, but if carried out, the most effective form of pressure. Discussing sanctions against Israel, especially until it shows serious good will and intentions about the two-state solution has been happening at an increased rate in parliaments around the world.

What are the goals of BDS?

The BDS movement has three goals, which can be found in its call to action:

1. Ending Israeli occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall.
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality.
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

As you can see, the goals of the BDS movement are simply the consistent application of international law. Any other intentions or objectives attributed to the movement are the result of projecting them onto it, and is often by bad faith actors intent on smearing any kind of Palestinian resistance.

Why BDS?

Since its inception, Israel has been the target of dozens of UNSC and UNGA resolutions calling on it to cease its violations of international law. In the absence of any real pressure from the international community, Israel saw no reason to comply. For example, its settlement enterprise in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan heights is but one instance of its brazen contempt for international and humanitarian law.

A prominent case of this noncompliance was the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice which deemed the construction of Israel's wall illegal. Based on the courts findings, it called on Israel to: A) Cease all construction of the wall, including in East Jerusalem. B) Dismantle

the sections already constructed. C) Re-appeal all legislative and regulatory acts relating thereto. The importance of this opinion was reiterated when the United Nations General assembly voted overwhelmingly on August 2004 in favor of resolution A/RES/ES-10/15 which called on Israel to comply with the findings and opinion of the International Court of Justice.

One year after this event, and in light of no effective pressure on the Israeli government—from within or without—to comply with the UN resolution or the court opinion, the organizers of BDS sought an effective way to push Israel to change its policies. This would be accomplished through the application of non-violent, international, legal and popular pressure. In their own words, the founders of the BDS movement wrote that:

“..since 1948, hundreds of UN resolutions have condemned Israel’s colonial and discriminatory policies as illegal and called for immediate, adequate and effective remedies; and Given that all forms of international intervention and peace-making have until now failed to convince or force Israel to comply with humanitarian law, to respect fundamental human rights and to end its occupation and oppression of the people of Palestine.”

The inspiration for the movement comes from the successful BDS campaign carried out against Apartheid South Africa, which played an instrumental role in cornering the regime.

Historically, preaching to Palestinians about the “proper” form of resistance has always been a pre-

text to delegitimize Palestinian resistance as a concept. Despite the legitimacy of armed resistance to colonialism being enshrined in international law, you will not be surprised that those who commented on the necessity of the Palestinians finding a peaceful way to resist would find various other pretexts to oppose BDS. It very quickly becomes clear that these “sympathizers” issue is the resistance itself, lip service notwithstanding. This mentality can be observed where even approaches as toothless as turning to the ICC were deemed “counterproductive” and even called “legal terror” by some.

Misconceptions and arguments

As with anything Palestinian that rises to prominence, it becomes a magnet for anti-Palestinian sentiment. BDS is no exception, yet due to its non-violent nature it has been slightly harder to dismiss as outright terrorism. Therefore, elaborate interpretations and readings have been undertaken to frame the movement as the embodiment of evil, going as far as to ridiculously suggest that it is a prelude to genocide and a new Holocaust.

Naturally, much of the misconceptions about BDS stem either from bad faith attacks such as the above, or from a lack of research on the movement and its goals. Some are simply the result of unfamiliarity with the Palestinian question. The following section will inspect some of the most prominent criticisms and misconceptions regarding the BDS movement.

Does BDS call for the destruction of Israel?

This is perhaps the most common baseless smear directed against the BDS movement. As you saw from the goals of the movement, as well as its call

for action, nowhere does it call for destruction. This is a bad faith reading of the movements third goal:

“Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.”

Since this calls for the return of Palestinian refugees, this would mean threatening Israel’s Jewish majority. Naturally, the fact that this majority is only artificially maintained through expelling the natives is never brought up. I suppose it is an inconvenient fact to face that Israelis only have their homes because millions of Palestinians don’t have theirs.

Regardless, if Israel were truly an egalitarian and democratic state, as its defenders so often insist, then it wouldn’t matter what the demographic make-up of the country is. A citizen is a citizen. However, Israel is not a democracy, but an ethnocracy built around privileging Jewish Israelis over everyone else. This pushes Israel to instate racist laws that discriminate against Palestinians, even those it begrudgingly calls citizens. This ethnocratic logic animates much of Israel’s demographic obsessions, and gives credence to the utterly dehumanizing view that Palestinian babies are demographic threats, because they endanger an absolute Jewish majority. Could you imagine any other state saying “we need to maintain a majority of X ethnic group” and instating racist laws to make it happen, and still be considered a liberal first world democracy?

However, the return of refugees would effectively end the Israeli regime which has historically organized itself through discriminatory and colonial

Zionist policies of ethnic supremacy. It is intellectually dishonest to claim that dismantling this racist system is tantamount for calling for the genocide of all Israelis, as it is often claimed. When the Apartheid regime in South Africa was defeated, this did not mean the physical destruction of South Africa as a state, or the genocide of the Afrikaner. However, critics of the ANC constantly falsely accused them of calling for the genocide of the white population, similar to how Israelis do today against Palestinians.

It should be noted, however, that the BDS movement takes no position on political solutions. It is purely a human rights movement, no matter what intentions are projected onto it. Naturally, its various members do have political positions, but these are not representative of the movement as a whole which has only the three objectives discussed above.

Does BDS single out Israel for punishment, and apply a double standard towards it?

This is also a prominent argument put forward by critics of BDS. The argument is as follows: There are human rights violators out there much worse than Israel, yet there are no campaigns aimed at isolating them and putting pressure on them. Therefore, the BDS campaign is practicing a double standard as it does not call for the boycott of other human rights violators and singles out Israel specifically. A more extreme version of this argument posits that since Israel is the only Jewish state, and this movement singles out Israel specifically, then the movement itself is de facto antisemitic in nature and is fueled by hatred for the Jewish people.

This criticism—if we assume good faith—betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of what BDS is.

The BDS movement was started by Palestinians specifically regarding their very own issue. It is not a universal scale of justice that metes out punishments on a global scale, rather it is an issue specific movement that focuses on the Palestinian question. People all over the world choose to answer this call for solidarity.

Furthermore, this argument is an implicit admission of guilt. The objection does not even attempt to deny Israel's wrongdoing, but rather seeks to distract from the fact by pointing fingers at others. This is a laughable attempt at shifting blame, could you imagine this argument in any other context?

Was the Black Civil Rights movement full of hypocrites for boycotting the Montgomery Bus Company while their fellow Africans were being slaughtered in Algeria under French colonial rule? Of course not, and it is ridiculous to even suggest such a thing.

Notice, however, how these violations in other countries are instrumentalized and wielded as a cudgel with no real interest in their impact. The latest spate of normalization with absolutist Arab monarchies shows that this concern was nothing more than a distraction tactic, as the Gulf countries used to be a favorite example for this maneuver. I'm certain they'll be shifting to less friendly cases soon enough.

However, if we wish to discuss Israel being singled out it should be noted that although Israel is one of the world's leading countries when it comes to violating and ignoring UNSC resolutions, it is still afforded a special place among the nations and considered a democratic civilized first world country and is afforded special privileges, trade

offers and partnerships not available to any other serial violator of human rights. If Israel is being singled out for anything, it is for its impunity to any real consequences for its violations.

Does BDS harm academic freedom?

This argument is as follows: There are moderate voices within Israeli academia that sympathize with the Palestinians. By expanding the campaign to include academic targets for boycott, these voices are also damaged and silenced to where they cannot help create a just peace. Furthermore, it damages academic freedom which should be above politics.

Israeli academia, like virtually every sector of Israeli society, has a long history of not only complicity with Israeli colonialism, but active support for it. For example, part of Tel Aviv university lies on the ethnically cleansed ruins of the Palestinian village of Sheikh Muwannis. Israeli medical schools store Palestinian bodies which are then used as bargaining chips against their families. Israeli universities help develop the weapons which are then tested on Palestinians, and the tech which control Palestinian lives. But this is hardly the only ways in which Israeli universities aid in the dispossession of Palestinians; as institutions of ideological production and reproduction, they contribute to the maintenance of colonial thought in Israeli society, creating moral justifications for the colonization of Palestine and repression of Palestinians. Anti-Apartheid South African activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu, asserts that:

“Israeli Universities are an intimate part of the Israeli regime, by active choice.... Israeli universities produce the research, technology, arguments and leaders for

maintaining the occupation. BGU is no exception. By maintaining links to both the Israeli defence forces and the arms industry, BGU structurally supports and facilitates the Israeli occupation. For example, BGU offers a fast-tracked programme of training to Israeli Air Force pilots.”

Despite all of this, the BDS movement does not target individual Israeli persons, whether academic or otherwise, but targets mainly Israeli institutions and those representing them in an official capacity. An Israeli professor would not be boycotted purely for being Israeli.

However, there is good reason to suspect that these champions of academic freedom are not sincere in their assertions. For instance, never once during both Intifadas which saw the closure, bombing and raiding of Palestinian universities, did the:

“..senate of any Israeli university pass a resolution protesting the frequent closure of Palestinian universities [by Israel], let alone voice protest the devastation sowed there during the last uprising.”

This silence on the violation of Palestinian academic freedom was hardly a one-time occurrence. Israeli professor Menachem Fisch et al. designed a social experiment in the aftermath of the bombing of the Islamic University in Gaza during the war in 2008, where he circulated a petition among Israeli academics to denounce this attack against academic freedom and Palestinians right to education. Out of the 9,000 academics contacted (5,000 of which were senior faculty academics), a mere 4% of them agreed to sign the petition.

This sudden interest in academic freedom should only be understood as an insincere and cynical pretext to demonize the BDS movement, and nothing more.

Does BDS harm sympathetic Israelis?

As mentioned earlier, the BDS movement does not target random Israeli individuals. BDS targets the Israeli government, as well as institutions, organizations, and their representatives which are complicit in the repression and dispossession of Palestinians.

Is the BDS movement one-sided, assigning all blame to Israel?

Settler colonialism is by definition asymmetric and one sided. It is disingenuous to appeal to a false equivalence or a “both sides” approach when it comes to the Palestinian question. It is the Israelis who are colonizing the Palestinians, and it is the Israelis who are building settlements and annexing Palestinian land. Israelis hold the power between the river and the sea. We are not speaking of a conflict between two countries, but an expansionist settler colony versus a native population.

Should the target of the BDS campaign be restricted to the illegal Israeli settlements?

Some argue that the scope of BDS is too indiscriminate, and that we should focus our attention instead on the illegal Israeli settlements themselves, rather than Israel. There are multiple issues with this line of thought; most glaring of which is that settlements and other illegal policies are not self-perpetrating, and neither are they occurring in a vacuum. Settlements need to be built, maintained, protected, developed, and all this is performed gleefully by Israel, which has always sought to maximize its land-grabs.

Israel actively incentivizes the transfer of its population into the settlements by declaring them “National Priority areas,” meaning that they are the recipients of generous state subsidies in multiple areas, such as housing and education. Furthermore, Israel’s violations of international law are not related only to the areas it occupied in the 1967 war, but to the entirety of the land it controls, including inside the green line.

However, even if you were to remain unconvinced by all of the above, this type of targeted boycott is unfeasible for practical reasons as well. From a distance, looking at static maps it might appear that the green line neatly dissects Palestine into 1948 and 1967 territories, on the ground the green line simply does not exist for Israelis. Hundreds of thousands of settlers commute to work every day over the green line, and it is not a factor in everyday Israeli life. For all intents and purposes the settlements are part of Israel, and not a neat separate entity that can be easily singled out for boycotts.

Should BDS not include a boycott against Israeli culture?

BDS does not target individual Israeli artists, but institutions or those complicit in the oppression of Palestinians and the whitewashing of Israeli crimes.

Israel has always been very public about using cultural means to improve its image abroad, and to divert attention away from its oppression of the Palestinians. A recent example is Israel hosting Eurovision in Tel Aviv in an attempt to put a pluralistic and “pretty face” on the state, and whitewash its human rights violations. It should be noted that Israel is not unique in this regard, as Apartheid South Africa also hosted music festivals

and cultural events in an effort to change perceptions of the racist state.

In this context, cultural activities gain a new role, one that is complicit in oppression. Even things that seem inconsequential in the grand scheme of things all contribute to whitewashing Israel's image. For example, Maxim magazine's infamous "Women of Israel Defence Forces" article was deemed so beneficial to Israel's international reputation that the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs threw a party celebrating its publication.

Does the BDS movement harm Palestinian workers?

When all other pretexts for why Israel shouldn't be held responsible for its violation of international law fail, critics of BDS become fierce advocates of the Palestinian worker. Suddenly, the welfare of the Palestinians is their chief concern, and we cannot boycott Israel because many Palestinians who work in settlements and inside the green line would lose their jobs. Similar to those who suddenly discover the sanctity of academic freedom when boycotting Israeli academia is mentioned, the sincerity of these claims is questionable at best.

However, should anyone actually care about the plight of Palestinian workers, supporting BDS to end the occupation is a much better way to accomplish that. While approximately 120,000 Palestinians work in settlements and inside the green line, it is estimated that these settlements and occupation policies cost Palestinians 110,000 jobs per year according to UNCTAD. Meaning that had there been no Israeli stranglehold on the Palestinian economy, and had there been no

settlements stealing the most fertile and resource rich areas, Palestinians could have created nearly two million new jobs for themselves since the year 2000. This would have gone much further towards improving the lives of Palestinian workers than maintaining their status as exploited labor in an ethnocracy that sees them as inferior.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the BDS call to action came from Palestinian civil society, which includes its labor and trade unions who remain proud signatories to this day. Support for BDS among Palestinians is virtually unanimous, and any qualms about it are due to concerns over effectiveness, rather than thinking it would cause harm.

Interestingly enough, this is a carbon copy of the argument used against boycotting Apartheid South Africa, where the people benefiting from exploiting cheap Black labor suddenly became concerned about worker wellbeing. It remains as transparently cynical today as it was back then.

Just how effective is BDS?

"There are some pretty powerful elements in the world that are active in the matter—within countries, including friendly countries, in various organizations of workers, academics, consumers, green parties...and this drive boils down to a large movement called BDS, which is what they did with South Africa. It won't happen at once. It will begin, like an iceberg, to advance on us from all corners."

—Ehud Barak, 2011

When it comes to the effectiveness of BDS, you will find that arguments range from calling the movement “flimsy” and ineffective, all the way to calling it an “existential threat” to the very survival of Israel.

Concretely measuring the effectiveness of the BDS movement is difficult, because many of its effects are non-material in nature. For example, how does one quantify the cancellation of a concert or conference in Israel? Simply looking at the loss of potential income is inadequate to reflect the psychological or discursive effects of such an event. Even more complicated is measuring the reluctance to host Israelis or any other action involving Israel simply due to a desire to avoid controversy, rather than actually being part of the boycott movement.

On the economic front, there are more tools to measure losses. For instance, a study carried out by the RAND corporation, entitled “The costs of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” estimates that if the current trends continue, BDS would escalate in the next decade to cost Israel close to 2% of its GDP, around 9 billion dollars per year. It should be noted that this was calculated mainly in opportunity costs rather than in direct damage. However, it is once again important to stress that there are many aspects and potential loss of business that cannot be anticipated or accounted for.

We can argue at length about these points, however, there are signs that Israel’s fear of the BDS campaign is genuine. The responsibility for combating the campaign has been moved from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. This is the same ministry responsible for tackling urgent matters relating to Israel’s “nation-

al security.” Pro-Israel mega donors have hosted secret conferences to come up with and fund strategies to combat BDS all over the globe. Israeli lobbying groups have worked hard to push for the criminalization of BDS in some American states.

Why go to all of these lengths if Israel perceives BDS as powerless and ineffective?

Because the real power of the BDS movement lies outside its material effects. Yes, some economic pressure on Israel is good, but nobody was arguing that the BDS movement was going to topple the Israeli economy, nor were they arguing that BDS alone would liberate Palestine. The effectiveness of BDS stems from its ability to raise awareness, speak truth to power, and bring to light parallels that Israel cannot combat. The discursive ability of BDS to shift the conversation, as well as its grassroots mass participatory nature, makes it a much bigger threat to Israel than the loss of a few billion dollars. This is where its strength lies, and as it becomes more mainstream among activists and campuses all over the world, this strength will only grow. ■

