

Palestine: Gaza: between a second Nakba and the revival of the Oslo fiction

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Which of the two options will be achieved in the end will be determined by the speed with which the Zionist army can advance in seizing the Gaza Strip in the face of an international pressure that will escalate the more the spectacle of what is happening to Gaza's people will overshadow the scenes of the "Al-Aqsa Flood".

There are forecasts that one hopes will be belied by reality. What we forecasted on these pages a week ago ("The 'Al-Aqsa Flood' Threatens to Sweep Gaza Away", *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 10 Oct. 2023) on the fourth day of the new Gaza war, is one such instance. Here is what we foresaw:

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Zionist right has been dreaming of completing the Nakba of 1948 with a new mass expulsion of Palestinians from the whole of Palestine between the sea and the river, including the Gaza Strip. There is no doubt that they now see what happened last Saturday as a shock that will allow them to drag the rest of Zionist society behind them in implementing their dream in the Gaza Strip first, while awaiting the opportunity to implement it in the West Bank. The gravity of what befell Israel last Saturday can reduce the deterrent role of Hamas's holding of hostages, unlike what happened in previous rounds of confrontation between the movement and the Zionist state. It is very likely that the latter this time will not be satisfied with anything less than a destruction of the Gaza Strip to an extent that exceeds anything we have seen to date, in order to reoccupy it at the lowest possible Israeli human cost and provoke the displacement of most of its residents to Egyptian territory, all under the pretext of completely eradicating Hamas. It is to be greatly feared therefore that the 'Al-Aqsa Flood' will eventually sweep away the entire Gaza Strip, just as the natural flood swept away the Libyan city of Derna a month ago, but on a much larger scale.

Unfortunately, the spectacle of Gaza's destruction has already begun to outweigh that of what the natural flood swept away in Derna. What is yet more serious than the destruction of buildings is that the new massacre that the Zionist occupation army has begun to carry out in Gaza has already exceeded in size the largest previous massacres that befell the people of Palestine, while the Israeli aggression is still at its beginning, and the number of displaced people inside the Gaza Strip has now exceeded the number of those who were displaced during the 1948 Nakba. The Zionist army is truly destroying the Gaza Strip to an extent that exceeds anything we have seen to date.

This is because it is an army keen on keeping its human losses low, which is what thwarted its attempt to invade Beirut in August 1982. Ariel Sharon ordered his troops to storm the besieged Lebanese capital then and they were forced to stop the operation after realizing that they would incur heavy losses because of the difficulty of penetrating into built-up areas, where it is easy for resistance fighters to hide and surprise the enemy. The lesson was confirmed when the Zionist army launched a ground attack on Gaza in 2009. The Zionist army was not going to repeat the experience, therefore. Instead, it is using its overwhelming superiority in destructive power to flatten built-up areas as a prelude to storming them.

Destruction on a similar scale was not possible in Beirut 1982, nor in Gaza 2009 due to the absence of favourable political conditions (in 1982, Israel was subjected to great international pressure and its society was deeply divided over the invasion of Lebanon led by the duo of Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon). Today, the “Al-Aqsa Flood” operation—which included acts of killing committed against unarmed men and women in numbers that exceeded anything Israel had ever known before, acts that were exploited to the fullest extent by the global pro-Israel media—provided Israel with a golden opportunity to proceed with the implementation of a new chapter of the Nakba, just as Al-Qaeda’s attacks in 2001 provided the US administration of George W. Bush with a golden opportunity to realize its members’ long-held project to occupy Iraq (they agreed to start with Afghanistan after some of them insisted that starting with Iraq might be difficult to sell to the public opinion).

The massive destruction inflicted on Gaza is not limited to military considerations this time. It serves an additional goal, which is the displacement of the Strip’s population. We have become accustomed to the Zionist army’s excuse that it did warn civilians and that Hamas is responsible for their deaths because it is based in the middle of built-up, populated areas (as if it were possible for Hamas to be based outside these places without being immediately destroyed by Israeli bombing!). However, this time the call on the people to flee is not like what was witnessed in previous rounds of aggression against the Gaza Strip but falls rather transparently into the project of displacing most of Gaza’s population, in the same way as eighty percent of the Palestinians living in the lands seized by the Zionist state in 1948 were displaced out of them.

Completing what was begun in that fateful year is a dream that has haunted the Zionist far right since the Nakba. This far right, of which the Likud Party is the legitimate heir, blamed David Ben-Gurion and his colleagues in the mainstream Zionist movement of that time for having accepted a ceasefire before completing the occupation of all the land of Palestine between the sea and the river. It is worth remembering that it was that same political movement that carried out the Deir Yassin massacre, the most famous of the atrocities that accompanied the Zionist takeover of Palestine and caused the displacement of its population.

The Zionist far right remained determined to achieve its “Greater Israel” project. Thus, Sharon faced strong opposition within Likud in 2005 when he was both leader of the party and Israeli prime minister and decided to evacuate Gaza (“unilateral disengagement plan”) to satisfy the military’s desire to get rid of the burden of controlling the Strip from within. Sharon’s priority was indeed to consolidate Israel’s control of most of the West Bank and formally annex these territories at first political opportunity, while keeping Gaza and Areas A and B stipulated in the Oslo II Agreement under the control of the Palestinian Authority so as to liquidate the Palestinian cause under the pretext of granting the Palestinians an entity of their own (even if under tight Israeli supervision).

Benjamin Netanyahu led the campaign against Sharon within Likud and went so far as to resign from the cabinet in protest against the withdrawal from Gaza. Sharon soon left Likud to establish another party, and Netanyahu replaced him at the helm of the party, which he continues to lead to this day. He saw in the “Al-Aqsa Flood” not only an opportunity to divert the attention of the Israeli opposition from him and achieve a Zionist revengeful unity against the people of Gaza, but also a golden opportunity to reoccupy the Gaza Strip, while emptying it of most of its people this time, as in the 1948 Nakba. Netanyahu, who brandished a map showing “Greater Israel” at the UN General Assembly less than a month ago, clearly wants to displace most of Gaza’s people to Sinai, beyond the border with Egypt. For this, he hopes that the United States will be able to convince the Egyptian regime to take them in.

On the other hand, Washington hopes that the Zionist army will “content itself” with eradicating Hamas (and Islamic Jihad) from the Gaza Strip in order to then hand over its administration to the

Ramallah Authority, thus reviving the Oslo fiction without a permanent displacement that would increase the amplitude of the Palestinian refugee issue. For, what Netanyahu aspires to would inflame the entire Arab region and cancel the “normalization” achieved between Israel and some of the Arab regimes, whereas Washington believes that what it advocates will allow the “normalization” process to move forward. Which of the two options will be achieved in the end will be determined by the speed with which the Zionist army can advance in seizing the Gaza Strip in the face of an international pressure that will escalate the more the spectacle of what is happening to Gaza’s people will overshadow the scenes of the “Al-Aqsa Flood”.

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