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## *Israel Wants to Destroy Gaza, Annex the West Bank: But What Does Gaza Want?*



Image by CHUTTERSNAAP.

What is taking place in occupied Palestine is not a conflict, but a straightforward case of illegal military occupation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing and outright genocide.

Those who insist on using ‘neutral’ language in depicting the crisis in Palestine are harming the Palestinian people beyond their seemingly innocuous words.

This morally non-committal, middle-ground language is now at work in Gaza. Here, the harm of this ‘impartiality’ is greatest.

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor,” late South African anti-apartheid activist, Bishop Desmond Tutu said. His wisdom will always ring true.

While most countries and peoples around the world are certainly not taking the side of the Israeli oppressor, some, wittingly or otherwise, are.

There are those who are taking Israel's side by directly fueling and funding the Israeli killing machine in the Gaza Strip, while blaming the Palestinians for the war and its devastating impact.

But supporting Israel does not only take place in the form of weapons, trade or shielding it from accountability before international law.

Ignoring Palestinian priorities, and spotlighting Israel's political discourse and expectations is a form of supporting Israel and denigrating Palestine.

Almost immediately following the October 7 war, questions began arising about what Israel wants in Gaza.

On November 7, while vowing to destroy Hamas, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel was set to maintain "security responsibility" over the Gaza Strip for "an indefinite period".

The Americans agreed. "There is no coming back to the status quo," US President Joe Biden said on October 26, which "means ensuring that Hamas can no longer terrorize Israel and use Palestinians civilians as human shields."

Even the Europeans, who had often presented themselves as equal partners to both Israel and the Palestinian Authority had a similar attitude. EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, for example, set out a proposal for Gaza, including a "reinforced" version of the current PA, "with a legitimacy to be defined and decided upon by the (UN) Security Council"- not by the Palestinian people themselves.

Even those who admonished Tel Aviv for having unrealistic expectations failed to ask the obvious question: what do Palestinians want?

As soon as it was obvious that the Palestinian Resistance was far too strong to allow Israel to achieve any of its lofty objectives, government officials, experts and media analysts began warning Israel that no military victory was possible in the Strip.

They contended that Israel must also develop a 'realistic' strategy to govern the Strip after the destruction of the Resistance there. Some of these statements were celebrated even by pro-Palestinian Arab and Middle Eastern media as an example of the changing western narrative on Palestine.

In actuality, the narrative has remained the same. What has changed is the unprecedented degree of Palestinian steadfastness, *sumud*, which inspired the world and frightened Israel's allies of the grim scenarios awaiting Tel Aviv, should it suffer an outright defeat in Gaza.

Even though many among Israel's western allies may have seemed critical of Netanyahu, they were still behaving out of concern for Tel Aviv, never love or respect for Palestinians.

This is not new.

Since the destruction of the Palestinian homeland – known as the Nakba – in 1948, two narratives emerged:

An Israeli one, which was fully embraced by western mainstream media, politicians and academics who became invested in misrepresenting the 'conflict'. They depicted Israel as a 'Jewish state' that fought for survival among competing Arab interests, factional and disunited Palestinians, who only agreed on one thing: wanting to destroy Israel.

And a Palestinian one, which argued that justice is indivisible, and that the cornerstone of any lasting peace in Palestine is the restoration of dispossessed Palestinian refugees to their homeland, what is known as the Right of Return.

As Israel occupied the rest of historic Palestine in 1967 and extended its system of apartheid to reach the newly occupied territories, it was only natural that ending the Israeli military occupation and dismantling apartheid became critical Palestinian demands – without ignoring the original injustice which had befallen all Palestinians in 1948.

Israel's allies in the West used the Israeli occupation as an opportunity to distract from the root causes of the so-called conflict. With time, they reduced the conversation on Palestine to that of the illegal settlements, which Israel began constructing, contrary to international law, after completing its military occupation.

Any Palestinian who contended that the conflict is not a conflict at all, and that the root causes of the crisis go back to the very foundation of Israel was, and continues to be deemed as radical, or worse.

This reductionist thinking is now being applied to Gaza where every historical reference is intentionally pushed aside, and where the Palestinian political discourse is shunned in favor of Israel's deceptive language.

But no matter how often western media continues to speak about 'Palestinian terrorism' and the need to release Israeli hostages and prioritize Israeli security – while ignoring Israeli terrorism, Palestinian detainees and political aspirations – there will be no resolution to this war, or future wars, if Palestinian rights are not respected.

Gaza is not an independent territory from the rest of historic Palestine. Neither its past nor future can be understood or imagined without appreciating the Palestinian struggle in the whole of Palestine – indigenous Palestinians in today's Israel included.

This is not an opinion, but the very essence of the political discourse emanating from all of Gaza's political groups.

The same assertion can be made about the political discourse of Palestinians in the West Bank, throughout historic Palestine, and those in *shatat*, or diaspora.

Israel and the US may try to imagine whatever future they wish for Gaza, and they may also try to achieve that future through missiles, dumb bombs and bunker busters.

But no amount of military might or firepower can alter history or redefine justice.

What Gaza ultimately wants is the acknowledgement of historical injustices, respect for international law, freedom for all Palestinians and legal accountability from Israel. These are hardly radical positions, especially when compared to Israel's practical policy of destroying Gaza, annexing the West Bank and ethnically cleansing the Palestinian people.

Will Washington and its western allies finally acknowledge this fact?

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