

A Socialist Worker pamphlet

PALESTINE RESISTANCE, REVOLUTION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM



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This 2023 edition was revised by Anne Alexander

Design by Ben Windsor

**In memory of
Bassem Chit
1979-2014**

Lebanese
revolutionary
socialist and
courageous
fighter for
Palestinian
liberation





Protesting the relocation of the US Embassy to Jerusalem

Introduction

More than seven decades have passed since Zionist militias began the process of ethnic cleansing which would force over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and clear the way for the construction of the state of Israel.

And, as the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee (BNC) put it in a statement marking Israeli independence day in 2018, this catastrophe (nakba in Arabic) is very much a living process:

The Nakba is not a crime of the past, it is ongoing. Seventy years later, Israel continues to demolish Palestinian homes, steal our lands to build illegal settlements exclusively

for Jewish-Israelis, push Palestinians out of Jerusalem by revoking our residency rights, and deny Palestinian refugees, like many of our members, our internationally recognised right to return to our homes.

Yet despite this, Palestinians continue to resist their dispossession. Time and again they have mobilised mass movements to challenge their oppressors.

This pamphlet uncovers the history that the Israeli state, and its allies among Western governments, would rather the world forgot. It goes beyond the headlines of the moment to ask, “how can the Palestinians win justice and end the occupation for good?”



Israel's birth and Palestine's catastrophe

In his meticulous history of the Palestinian Nakba (Catastrophe), Israeli historian Ilan Pappé argues compellingly that the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 was a pre-planned episode of ethnic cleansing. Around 850,000 Palestinians were forced from their homes, half of their villages and towns were “wiped out, leaving only rubble and stones”¹

This appalling crime was committed by people whose movement, Zionism, took shape initially as a response to racism and antisemitism in Europe and in the shadow of the Nazi genocide of the Jews in the Holocaust.

Anti-Zionism is not antisemitism

The Zionist claim is that anti-Zionism is just modern antisemitism in disguise. This argument dismisses the historical record.

Antisemitism is hatred of Jews as Jews, irrespective of their politics or social position.

Anti-Zionism is the political rejection of the idea of a confessional (religious or ethnically exclusive) state, and a criticism of the policies of Israel.

Until the Nazi attempt to wipe out European Jews, and the refusal of Western states to accommodate survivors of the death camps at the end of the Second World War, the vast majority of Jewish people were not Zionist.

So, there is no necessary connection between Jewish religious beliefs or cultural heritage and identification with Israel.

Today, some of the most prominent opponents of Israel and its policies are Jewish.

¹ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, (Oxford, Oneworld, 2006), p9.



Palestinians expelled from their homes during the Nakba

The tragedy of Zionism lies in the decision by its leaders to become pioneers of European colonialism, rather than champions of the oppressed.

Of all the relationships forged between Zionist leaders and Europe's states, the link with Britain would prove the most important.

In the Balfour Declaration of 1917, the British government declared its support for the "creation of a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine.

After the end of the First World War, the British wartime military occupation of Palestine was converted into a "Mandate" over the country.

Ronald Storrs, British military governor in Jerusalem after 1917, summed up British officials' view of the Zionist movement.

He described the Zionist colony as creating a loyal "Jewish Ulster" in a hostile region. Settler colonies of this kind were a feature of European imperialism in other parts of the world.

For example, French settlers ruled Algeria, while Algerians from Arab and

Amazigh communities were denied equal rights.

Nevertheless, British officials knew that the colonists could not subjugate an entire region.

They needed allies among local Arab rulers who would act as a buffer between the colonial masters and the rest of the population.

The region was parcelled out into petty kingdoms, each ruled from behind the scenes by powerful British advisers. The rest of the region was given to France, Britain's wartime ally and imperial rival.

The Arab princes, merchants and landlords who dominated the new kingdoms felt cheated by Britain's partnership with Zionism and occasionally mouthed nationalist grievances. Yet, they had too great a stake in the imperial order to risk overturning it.

In the wake of the Second World War, this system of imperial control was swept away in a tidal wave of strikes, protests and uprisings which shook the region to the core.

The monarchies in Egypt and Iraq were overthrown by rebellious army officers. Anti-colonial revolt forced the French out of Syria, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria.

The Palestinians, by contrast, saw their hopes of national liberation crushed by the creation of the state of Israel.

The Zionist movement's leaders welded together militias which mobilised tens of thousands of armed men and women to seize control of the majority of historic Palestine, and to expel hundreds of thousands of its inhabitants.

In defiance of the United Nations, which had drawn up plans to partition the country between Arabs and Jews, the Zionists executed a thorough process of ethnic cleansing.



The rise of Palestinian resistance

Israel's founders hoped that they had snuffed out Palestinian identity for good in 1948. They were wrong. During the 1950s, the long, slow process of building a national liberation movement gathered pace in the refugee camps and exiled Palestinian communities scattered around the region.

The vast majority of Palestinian refugees faced a miserable future. Crammed into camps, they were able to access meagre support from UN agencies, but were systematically denied political rights by most of their host countries.

Wealthy or middle-class Palestinians did not face the same obstacles. Many gravitated towards the Gulf, where they played key roles in public services, the media and some sections of industry. It was among these circles that a new Palestinian movement was born.

Fatah was founded by Yasir Arafat, who was an engineer, and a small group of comrades in Kuwait in 1959.

It looked to the experience of guerrilla struggles in East Asia and Latin America for inspiration.

One of Fatah's core principles was the idea of "non-interference": in other words, Palestinians should not take sides in the struggles within the Arab countries where they lived, and whose governments were financing their resistance.

Fatah came to dominate the Palestine

Liberation Organisation (PLO), which was set up by the Arab regimes in 1964 as the official representative of the Palestinian people.

In its 1967 offensive, Israeli forces obliterated Egypt's air force. In six days it seized control of Gaza, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. The success of the Israeli attack badly damaged the prestige of nationalist leaders such as Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Fatah and its rivals to the left, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, survived the shock of the defeat.

The catastrophic failure of the Arab regimes' conventional armies boosted enthusiasm for the strategy of guerrilla struggle.

For a while, Fatah achieved a highly unstable compromise. It won mass support in the refugee camps while retaining its backing from exiled Palestinian capital in the Gulf.

Fatah's leaders sought, therefore, to avoid entanglement in the internal political struggles of the countries where they made their base.

This strategy first came undone in Jordan in 1970, as the Fatah leadership was reluctantly sucked into confrontation with King Hussein's regime, and was eventually forced to leave. The PLO moved its headquarters to Lebanon, and was drawn into the developing civil war there.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, encouraging the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by Israel's allies the fascist Phalangist militia. Fatah, along with the rest of the PLO, was



forced to move again, this time to Tunis.

From the 1950s until the 1980s, the political and military initiative lay with the Palestinian leadership in exile, not within the Occupied Territories themselves. In 1987, however, frustration with the daily misery of life under occupation exploded in an uprising (Intifada), which took the Israelis, the US and the PLO leadership equally by surprise.

The Intifada pitted stone-throwing youths against armoured cars. It reversed the carefully cultivated image of Israel as plucky David facing an Arab Goliath, and revealed the brutality of the occupation to the world.

Across the Occupied Territories, Palestinians mobilised demonstrations, organised strikes and created networks of local committees to provide health care and education. Their courage and resilience revived hopes that victory was possible.

Oslo and after: neoliberal Palestine

In 1993, secret talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators resulted in a formal peace agreement, signed by Yasir Arafat and Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin on the White House lawn.

Many Palestinians were jubilant or at least relieved; after years of struggle and sacrifice, at last it appeared as if real progress towards the foundation of an independent state was being made. Palestinian flags, banned by the Israeli authorities, festooned the streets in Gaza and the West Bank.

A Palestinian police force and other government authorities were quickly set up, and Yasir Arafat and the PLO leaders who had led the movement in exile for decades returned home.

Yet the Oslo Accords did not deliver peace. Twenty years after the signing, Israeli historian Avi Shlaim, a supporter of the peace process in 1993, condemned the calculated “bad faith” of the Israeli Likud Party leaders:



This turned the much-vaunted peace process into a charade. In fact, it was worse than a charade: it provided Israel with just the cover it was looking for to continue to pursue with impunity its illegal and aggressive colonial project on the West Bank.²

Palestinian academic Edward Said was more accurate, however. He called the Accords “an instrument of Palestinian surrender”, accepted by the leaders of the PLO after they had squandered the opportunities won by popular struggle through the Intifada.³

The terms of the Accords showed clearly that this was an agreement between two vastly unequal sides. The PLO, by recognising Israel’s right to exist, accepted the legitimacy of Israeli control of the majority of historic Palestine.

Israel “recognised” the PLO – which became the Palestinian Authority (PA) – while continuing to control the international borders of Palestinian territories, and most of the land within those borders, through an ever-expanding network of settlements, military zones and “nature reserves” (see map on p9).

2) Avi Shlaim, ‘It’s now clear: the Oslo peace accords were wrecked by Netanyahu’s bad faith’, *The Guardian*, 12 September 2013, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/12/oslo-israel-renege-colonial-palestine

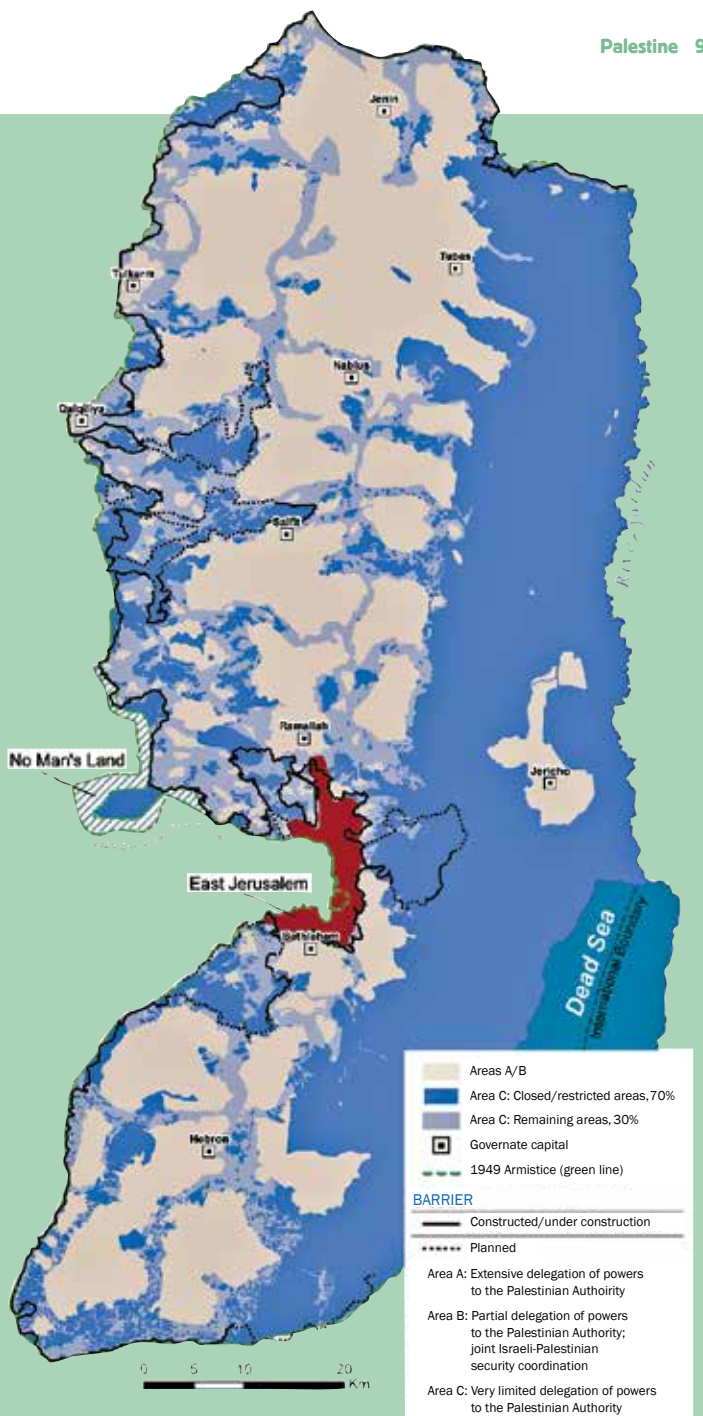
3) Edward Said, ‘The Morning After’, *London Review of Books*, 21 October 1993, www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after

The Oslo Accords divided the Occupied Territories into Areas A, B and C.

Area A is under full Palestinian military and civilian control.

Area B is under Palestinian civilian and Israeli military control.

Area C is completely under Israeli control.





Israeli forces targeted the Al-Awda factory in 2014

The Oslo Accords reshaped the economy of the Occupied Territories to the benefit of Israel. It created the mechanisms by which Palestinian institutions would become active partners in the process of integrating the West Bank and Gaza into the Israeli economy.

These mechanisms included transforming the Palestinian labour force into what Adam Hanieh calls “a disposable reserve army of labour”, a “tap, which could be turned on and off depending on the economic and political situation”.⁴

Before the Oslo Accords, one third of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip worked in Israel. By 1996 that had collapsed to 15 percent, while earnings from work in Israel dropped from 25 percent of Palestinian GDP to 6 percent.

Economist Sara Roy has highlighted how Palestine has suffered “de-development”, an Israeli strategy to destroy independent Palestinian manufacturing and agricultural businesses.

During the 1990s, incessant closures of Israeli-controlled borders prevented Palestinian goods from reaching regional and international markets.

During attacks on Gaza in 2008-9 and 2014, Israeli forces shot cattle and camels in the head, uprooted olive trees and wiped food factories off the map with rocket strikes.

“This is a war on our economy,” Mohammed al-Telbani, the owner of Al-Awda factory, told *The Guardian* in August 2014: “I started at ground zero, spent 45 years building this business and now it’s gone.”⁵

A final plank of Israel’s economic strategy in relation to the Occupied Territories rests on the work of Salam Fayyad. A former IMF official, he became Minister of Finance and Prime Minister following the US-backed coup against the Hamas national unity government in Gaza in 2007.

“Fayyadism” led to an economic boom driven by the explosion of consumer spending and personal debt.⁶

Yet this did nothing to alleviate poverty and inequality. By 2011, half of Palestinian households in some areas were struggling

4) Adam Hanieh, *Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East* (Chicago, Haymarket, 2012), p109.

5) Harriet Sherwood, ‘Gaza counts the cost of war as more than 360 factories destroyed or damaged,’ *The Guardian*, 22 August 2014, www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/22/gaza-economic-cost-war-factories-destroyed

6) Ali Abunimah, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine* (Chicago, Haymarket, 2014), p85.



Israel's Apartheid Wall snakes through the West Bank, imprisoning Palestinian communities and destroying their homes and fields.

On completion the 6-8 metre high concrete wall will be 440 miles long.

to obtain sufficient nutrition.

Palestinian activist and writer Ali Abunimah describes how a new Palestinian elite emerged from the peace process, accumulating wealth thanks to its “symbiotic relationship with the Israeli occupation”:

When former Palestinian leader Arafat set up the Palestinian Authority, the PA, he brought with him an entourage of Palestinian diaspora capitalists, many of whom had made fortunes in the Gulf Arab states. They quickly established themselves at the commanding heights of the Palestinian economy.⁷

For example, Rawabi, the new West Bank city much heralded as proof that the new economics is working, is actually

modelled on Israeli settlement towns in Area C. To build it, the PA drove Palestinian villagers and farmers from their land, and construction materials were bought in Israel.

Finally, Israel and the PA are setting up industrial zones, and encouraging financial investment from the Gulf states but also from around the world to benefit from unregulated Palestinian labour. The World Bank has noted: “Israeli firms establish plants in the Palestinian state to access cheap labour and then export from there to the rest of the Arab world.” To ease access to the Arab market, the goods will have a ‘Made in Palestine’ label on them.

The Oslo Accords represented the moment when the Palestinian bourgeoisie’s political leadership – under Arafat – decided that its interests lay in capitulation to the demands of the region’s dominant imperial power, the US, and its local proxy, Israel.

⁷ Ali Abunimah, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine* (Chicago, Haymarket, 2014) p106.



In this, Arafat was following in the footsteps of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who had signed the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty in 1979.

As with Egypt, military and diplomatic concessions were intimately intertwined with the imposition of neoliberal economic policies.

The PA has become a mechanism for the enrichment of the few.

Following a global pattern, it protects privilege with a hugely inflated security apparatus, built by the US, and focused on guarding the group around Arafat's compliant successor, Mahmud Abbas.

It has become increasingly repressive and Palestinian forces and the Israeli

Army often act as one, realising a long-held aspiration of Israeli strategists.

The crisis of Palestinian nationalism is now more clearly a problem of class than at any time since the emergence of the PLO.

At that time, the Palestinian bourgeoisie of the Gulf attempted to mobilise the youth from the camps to advance its interests, launching a movement it then struggled to control.

Fifty years later, the West Bank bourgeoisie is linked much more closely to international capital through banking, commerce and media interests, and acts openly and consistently with Israel against the Palestinian population at large.

Gaza: Hamas' rise to power

The rise of Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement, *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*) is intimately connected to the Oslo Accords and Fatah's betrayal of the Palestinian struggle. Hamas emerged in the first Intifada in 1987.

Its roots go back, however, to Gaza's Islamist societies and welfare organisations set up in the 1970s by activists inspired by Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.

During the decades when Fatah and the left nationalist factions dominated the leadership of the Palestinian movement, Islamist leaders such as Sheikh Ahmed Yassin built support by different means.

They preached personal piety, sought to build up a popular base through charity work, and competed with secular nationalists for the control of professional associations. Winning Palestinians to practising an "Islamic" way of life was their primary goal.

The explosion of the Intifada in December 1987 prompted a dramatic shift in Islamist activists' tactics: they threw themselves into mobilising support for the popular uprising.

As the Intifada dragged on, the Islamist movement became more vocal in its criticisms of the PLO leadership for accepting compromises with Israel and its backers in the US.

The Oslo Accords had at first

marginalised the Islamists but as Palestinians became disillusioned with the "peace process" Hamas' support began to grow.

As border closures strangled the Palestinian economy, and as Israeli settlements continued to expand at breakneck speed, Hamas seemed to offer an alternative strategy to that of Fatah.

When a new uprising, or *intifada*, exploded in 2000, and Israel responded with brutal force, Hamas launched a military offensive against the occupying forces. Suicide bombers affiliated with the movement launched attacks far from the Occupied Territories, bringing the horror of war and occupation into the heart of Israel.

Hamas' military tactics reflected the huge gap in size and resources between Israeli and Palestinian forces.

They also continued a long tradition of Palestinian guerrilla actions pioneered by Fatah and leftist PLO factions decades earlier. Some sections of Fatah also continued with armed struggle against Israel but their domination of the PA security forces created an impossible contradiction.



A revolutionary perspective on Hamas

By Mostafa Omar,
the Revolutionary
Socialists, Egypt

Our perspective does not ever claim that varied “Islamist” movements in different countries at different time periods are all alike.

Rather we always attempt to understand Islamist movements in light of the historical context where they arose, their social and class content and their political goals.

We always attempt to analyse whether these movements are resisting reactionary and imperialist regimes, even if in a vacillating or distorted fashion.

For example, we consider Islamist movements such as ISIS in Syria and Iraq as reactionary to the core.

Their racism and crimes against Shi’a Muslims and Christians are contrary to the idea that the unity of the oppressed is fundamental to resisting dictatorship and colonialism.

We consider that such movements necessarily serve the interests of the



Celebrating the victory of Hamas in the 2006 elections

dictatorial regimes and imperialism and we oppose them on principle.

We differentiate between ISIS and Islamist movements such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

Confrontations

The latter two movements came into existence to resist imperialism and entered into many confrontations and struggles with Zionism and imperialism in defence of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the Lebanese people.

Hamas, which originated in the midst of the first Palestinian Intifada at the end of the 1980s, won wide popularity among Palestinians because of its rejection of the concessions and surrender which Fatah offered to the Zionist enemy and the

United States, and through its military resistance to the brutal Israeli assault on Gaza.

We consider Hamas to be a resistance movement against Zionism and imperialism.

From this perspective we unconditionally support Hamas when it is engaged in military or non-military struggles against Israel.

Weakens

It weakens the Zionist state and terrifies the Arab regimes and the United States and therefore strengthens the potential for class struggle in the Arab states against this imperialist system.

Our unconditional support for Hamas is not uncritical, however, because we believe that the movement’s strategies in the struggle to liberate

Palestine – like the strategies adopted by Fatah and the Palestinian left before it – have failed and will fail in the future.

Hamas' strategy is to associate itself with some of the Arab regimes (even including Egypt until recently), as well as non-Arab regimes, which are reactionary and repress their people and conspire constantly to suppress the Palestinian struggle.

Catalyst

These regimes realise that Palestinian heroism and steadfastness is and always will be a catalyst for their peoples, who are natural supporters for the Palestinian cause. Hamas' strategy, which reproduces the strategy of Fatah and the Palestinian left since the 1960s, will not liberate Palestine.

Instead of standing in solidarity with the struggles of the Arab masses who have an interest in getting rid of imperialism and Zionism, Hamas is pushing a strategy of alliance with regimes which cooperate willingly with imperialism and Zionism.

Secondly, despite the extraordinary heroism of Hamas' fighters, who stand courageously against every Israeli assault in



A Fatah poster from the 70s

impossible circumstances, igniting hope in the hearts of millions around the world at the very moment of the Arab Spring's defeat, Hamas adopts an elitist approach to dealing with the Palestinian masses.

Tools

This is the method which Fatah and the Palestinian left relied on previously, seeing the Palestinian people as tools whose role is limited to supporting the armed struggle and obedience to the revolutionary leadership rather than active participants in the development of a strategy of resistance and in decision-making.

This approach weakens the capacities of mass resistance in the long term in the face of an enemy whose weapons are becoming more lethal day by day.

For these reasons, support of the

revolutionary forces for Hamas and the Palestinian Resistance is critical as well as unconditional.

By the same logic, despite our support for Hezbollah in any confrontation with Israel, we condemn its hostile position towards the Arab Revolutions by standing with the butcher Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

Our support for the resistance in Palestine is unconditional because the Palestinian struggle against Zionism is a thorn in the side of imperialism and because, like all colonised peoples, the Palestinians alone have the right to decide their destiny.

Leadership

That includes the right to choose their own leadership and adopt means of resistance which they see as appropriate to their circumstances.

But our support is critical because the fate of revolutionary change in the Arab world and the fate of the Palestinian Resistance are organically connected to each other.

Written in July 2014.

Read the full article online at: tinyurl.com/hamas9



The Great March of Return was met with brutal repression

Should Fatah's leaders abandon the PA and the apparatus of power that the Oslo Accords created, or abandon resistance to Israel? They chose to abandon resistance, leaving the field of battle largely to Hamas.

Hamas also proved an effective challenger to Fatah in elections. It swept the polls in the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, and promptly made a public offer of a long-term military truce.

The US, Israel and Egypt responded by conspiring with Fatah against the Hamas-led unity government. Following an attempted coup by Fatah-led security services in Gaza, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip, only to face a comprehensive military and economic blockade imposed by Israel, and enforced by Egypt.

Meanwhile, the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority ramped up pressure on Hamas, refusing to pay the salaries of

local government workers in Gaza and colluding with Israel in blocking electricity supplies to the Strip.

Increasing competition at a regional level between Saudi Arabia and its allies on the one hand, and Iran and its allies on the other, added to Hamas's difficulties.

The state of Qatar had provided the Hamas government in Gaza with vital funding, and hosted Hamas's leadership in exile following their forced departure from Syria in 2012.

But in June 2017, Qatar itself became the target of an economic and diplomatic embargo by Saudi Arabia as part of an aggressive strategy to dominate the Gulf and curb the influence of Iran in the wider region.

The combination of these pressures pushed Hamas towards compromise, and in October 2017 Hamas signed a 'reconciliation' agreement with Fatah.

Under the deal, brokered by the Egyptian regime, the movement agreed to the formation of a unity government under the Palestinian Authority with general elections scheduled to take place by the end of 2018.

The eruption of massive protest marches at the border with Israel in March and April 2018 provided dramatic evidence that despite the inhuman pressures of the siege, Palestinians in Gaza wouldn't give up on the struggle for justice.

Tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered at the border, only to be met with lethal violence by Israeli forces. Heavily armed Israeli snipers shot dead unarmed protesters carrying flags and young people who showed their defiance by throwing rocks. On 3 April 2018, at least 17 Palestinians were killed and around 1,500 injured. On 14 May at least 60 more were killed.

Israel's overwhelming military response to the 'Great March of Return' protests is not an accident. It is part of the same policy that drives the brutal collective punishment of Gaza's residents through the siege.

Palestinians who resist occupation, whether through military struggle or peaceful protests, whether under the banner of Hamas or any other organisation, must pay a terrible price.

This is why, contrary to the claims of Israeli spokespeople, or their apologists in Western governments, the question of who governs Gaza has never just been about Hamas. It is about the right to resist occupation and the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their stolen lands.

2021: the 'Unity Intifada'

May 2021 saw a historic general strike unify the whole of historic Palestine – from the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the heart of areas which the Zionist movement seized in order to create the State of Israel, or '48 Palestine. This was a genuine revolt from below, called by a new generation of activists in defiance of Israel's apartheid regime.

From Haifa to Ramallah and Gaza to East Jerusalem, Palestinians took to the streets with the same demands: stop the bombardment and siege of Gaza, halt the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian families from East Jerusalem, and end the violence and incitement against Palestinians by Zionist settler movements.

One of the motors for this new wave of resistance was the intensification of racism directed at Palestinian citizens of Israel. In addition to discrimination in law, increasingly Palestinian communities in '48 Palestine have been assaulted by racist gangs. During May 2021, Zionist settler movements used Telegram and WhatsApp to attack Palestinian homes and businesses in cities such as Lydd and Haifa.

Palestinians living in '48 Palestine responded with organised self-defence, but also mass protests and strikes.

Around 1,000 Palestinian bus drivers working for Israeli companies respected the general strike call. Meanwhile 65,000 Palestinians from the West Bank

stayed at home from work in the Israeli construction industry, causing Israeli bosses to lose \$40 million.

At the same time resistance fighters in Gaza launched rockets at Israel in retaliation for its assaults on the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Israel responded with a two week barrage on the besieged enclave. This was a significant step towards reviving traditions of struggle from below which could unite the majority of Palestinians across historic Palestine, after decades of fragmentation and isolation from each other.

Inside Israel's racist state

Its supporters like to present Israel as a democratic, enlightened state, but racism against Palestinians not only pervades Israeli society, the state itself is founded on it.

In recent years, groundbreaking reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem have labelled Israel an apartheid regime. In the words of the Amnesty report published in 2022:

In the course of establishing Israel as a Jewish state in 1948, its leaders were responsible for the mass expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages in what amounted to ethnic cleansing.

The result today is a society where almost every state institution is, according to Amnesty, “involved in the enforcement of the system of apartheid against Palestinians.”

Key laws defining citizenship and the right to emigrate to Israel privilege Jews over Palestinians. New laws allow Palestinians – about 20 percent of Israel's population – to be stripped of Israeli citizenship for “disloyalty” to the state. And the 2018 Nation State Law entrenched into law what has been reality for decades: that only Jewish people have the right to self-determination in Israel.

Palestinian citizens of Israel married to Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories have been unable to bring their spouses to Israel since 2002.

Palestinians also face systematic discrimination in employment, and are frequently barred from jobs because they have not served in the army.

Poverty rates are far higher among the Palestinian minority than the Jewish majority. Discrimination is rife in housing and access to land. Approximately 600 new Jewish municipalities have been built by the state since 1948 but none for Palestinian communities.

The infant mortality rate for Palestinian citizens of Israel is twice that of their Jewish



counterparts.

This legal framework for discrimination is getting stronger. When Adalah issued its 2011 report, it listed 30 racist laws. By September 2017, Adalah's database listed 65 laws "that discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel in all areas of life."⁸

Imperialism's watchdog

Since 1948, the Israeli state has received £72 billion in US assistance. No other country has received as much aid from the US. Nevertheless, the relationship between the Israeli "watchdog" of imperialism and its US master has undergone a number of subtle but important shifts.

These reflect both the internal dynamics of Israel's economy and society, and the wider changes in the balance of power in the region.

US-Israeli military cooperation has intensified in recent years, while direct economic aid (once important in keeping the Israeli economy afloat) has been phased out. Maintaining Israel's military advantage over its neighbours has long been a key plank of US policy.

As a Congress briefing states, "US military aid for Israel has been designed to maintain Israel's "qualitative military

edge" (QME) over neighbouring militaries."⁹

Moreover, since 2008, the US government has been legally obliged to show that arms sales to any Middle Eastern country will not adversely affect Israel.

Since 1999, ten-year Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have governed US aid to Israel. The first of these, signed during the Clinton administration, provided Israel with at least \$26.7 billion in total military and economic aid. The lion's share of this (\$21.3 billion) took the form of military aid.

Under George Bush a new ten-year MoU pledged \$30 billion, while Barack Obama signed a new deal with Israel in 2016 which promises \$38 billion in military aid for financial years 2019-2028.

The MoUs highlight that despite changes of president and ruling party, support for Israel has been a cornerstone of US foreign policy for decades.

Four decades of US military aid have reshaped Israel's economy, and reinforced the role of the military within Israeli society.

Israel was the world's 12th largest arms exporter in 2020. Although its population is tiny in comparison, Israeli arms exports since the 1960s are nearly half the volume of China's. Its high-tech warfare industry has been the engine of its economy for two decades. It has transformed Israel from an economic 'basket case', reliant on US support in

8) The Israeli Discriminatory Law Database (2017) is available online at adalah.org/eng/Israeli-Discriminatory-Law-Database

9) fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33222.pdf

the 1980s, to the affluent, industrialised nation it is today.

This can be seen in the changing balance between military and economic aid over the past 10 years. Direct economic aid was phased out entirely in 2007 – but overall military assistance increased.

Long-term strategic investment in the military technology sector by the US since the 1970s has made Israel into a colonial garrison, a military research laboratory and an elite strike force, all rolled into one.

The interlocking nature of the US and Israeli military industries has become more visible in recent years.

In March 2014, the US and Israel signed a co-production agreement that will give US manufacturers access to the technology behind the Iron Dome rocket defence system. Recent US investment in Israel has focused on technologies that could be transferred to US wars against the “asymmetric threat” of lightly-armed resistance groups.

The rise of a high-tech military has also helped cement Israel’s policies of racist exclusion. Zionists always sought to exclude Palestinians from their economy, even before the creation of Israel. In important sectors such as agriculture and construction, however, they were forced to use large numbers of Palestinians as cheap labour.

The high-tech industries, reliant on a relatively smaller and more skilled workforce, eventually proved profitable without the need to exploit Palestinian workers.



Thus, while Israel can certainly be described as an apartheid state, the configuration of this apartheid is very different to the historical experience of South Africa’s version of apartheid.

The racist state there was brought down largely by the mobilisation of the black working class. Black workers in South Africa had an economic muscle that the Palestinians alone do not.

These shifts help explain the long-term drift to the right in Israeli politics.

Israel has always been a racist project. But the economy has become ever more integrated into the military economy of the US.

This feeds a sense that Israel needs to conquer the Palestinians, not compromise with them. This in turn empowers the Israeli right, as does the experience of occupation.

Donald Trump’s arrival in the White House in November 2016 intensified pressures on the Palestinians.

Although the ongoing rise in US military funding for Israel is a long-term trend (see p.18) that began decades before Trump’s election, Trump brought in new policies such as the implementation of a long-delayed decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem and the withdrawal of funding

for the United Nations body that provides economic aid to Palestinian refugees, UNWRA.

Trump's support for these policies was partly linked to a convergence of interests between right-wing Christian political forces in the US and right-wing Zionist political forces in both the US and Israel.

Some evangelical Christians believe that the creation of the Israeli state has been foretold in the Bible and that support for it is a religious duty.

This chimes neatly with the interests of Zionists who want to erase even largely symbolic signs of opposition to their occupation of Palestinian land from international bodies such as the UN and by other governments.

Evangelical Christians formed an important part of Trump's electoral base, and some of his key campaign donors were Zionists, such as casino-magnate Sheldon Adelson.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also backed by Adelson, the owner of Israel's largest circulation daily newspaper.

Yet it would be a mistake to reduce Trump's policies over Palestine to a desperate desire to please his well-heeled donors and electoral base.

For the US, Israel is a crucial part of its machinery of domination in the Middle East. Israel helps it control a strategically vital region rich in oil. The tightening of the US-Israeli embrace also has to be set in the context of other changes in the region.

Revolution and counter-revolution in the Arab world

The uprisings that erupted in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 gave the lie to the claim that change from below in the Arab world was an impossible dream.

Dictators fell in Tunisia and Egypt as protesters surged into the streets, and strikes paralysed key sectors of the economy.

From Benghazi in Libya, to Manama in Bahrain, from Homs in Syria to Sana'a in Yemen, hundreds of thousands took up the intoxicating refrain: 'the people demand the downfall of the regime.'

These revolutionary crises drew millions into political activity for the first time: setting up popular committees, organising strikes to kick the ruling party's stooges out of the workplace, founding independent unions and launching newspapers and websites.

Religious minorities, such as the Coptic Christians in Egypt, took their demands for equality and justice onto the streets, and new movements challenging women's oppression flourished.

Western commentators were initially puzzled. Journalists and academics scrambled for explanations. Was Facebook the cause? Did the popular uprisings represent a yearning for

Western democracy? Or were people clamouring for a new Islamist order?

Two major factors lay behind the region-wide explosion of revolutionary crisis. The first of these was the adoption of neoliberal policies across the region. The shift in state economic policies gradually had a destabilising effect on the nationalist regimes that had emerged from anti-colonial rebellions after 1945.

Most of these regimes had offered job security, a basic welfare state, and the official adoption of various anti-colonial ideologies, in return for complete political quiescence.

After the 1970s, as the global economy slipped into crisis, the ruling class found that maintaining even the threadbare welfare systems of the previous decade would eat into their profits. Governments around the region, therefore, signed up for structural adjustment programmes and IMF loans, and embraced neoliberalism.

The second key factor was the US defeat in Iraq. The invasion and occupation after 2003 proved to be a catastrophic misjudgement for the superpower.

US forces were bogged down for years fighting Iraqi insurgents, and the sectarian Iraqi regime that emerged from the chaos was at least as much under the influence of neighbouring Iran as it was under the control of the White House.

After 2008, the global economic crisis further reduced the availability of funding for more costly occupations

or to prop the up ailing economies of US allies. The relative decline of US power has given both its allies and enemies more space to pursue their own agendas, increasing competition between states across the region.

The intermingling of political and social demands by mass movements from below during the Arab revolutions represented a profound threat to the existing ruling class across the region.

For the first time in decades the calls of opposition movements for greater democracy found a mass audience among millions of ordinary people, including organised workers, who had borne the brunt of neoliberal reforms.

Unsurprisingly, it was the ruling class of the leading regional centre of capital accumulation, which had the most to lose from the victory of the revolutions, which began the counter-revolutionary fightback.

The rulers of Saudi Arabia, with the support of a wider section of the Gulf ruling class, were at the centre of a strategy of rolling back the popular uprisings by combining direct military repression with the promotion of sectarianism between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims as a way to divide the movement from below.

The island of Bahrain was the first place where this strategy was tested out: Saudi troops invaded on 16 March 2011 in order to crush a popular uprising at the invitation of the corrupt authoritarian monarchy.

The Saudi ruling class also threw itself behind the counter-revolution



Egyptian revolutionaries scale the wall of the Israeli embassy in Cairo

in Egypt, providing massive financial support for the military regime which overthrew president Mohamed Morsi in 2013, and which carried out horrific massacres of Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters in August that year.

In Syria, the counter-revolution was led by the Assad regime itself, but with the backing of another regional power, Iran, which has expanded its influence through Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

As in the Gulf there is a sectarian dimension to the struggle for regional hegemony: the Syrian regime has presented itself as the protector of non-Sunni Muslims and other religious minorities from sectarian Sunni Islamist groups.

In reality, the regime's own brutal policies of collective punishment of

areas where support for the Syrian revolution was strong were the biggest factor which transformed the revolution into a sectarian civil war.

But the intervention of the Gulf states into the Syrian civil war through their backing for the most reactionary and sectarian Sunni Islamist groups accelerated this process.

The Palestinian struggle ran right through the revolutions. Protesters in Tunisia celebrated Ben Ali's fall by chanting for the liberation of Jerusalem. In Egypt, tens of thousands marched on the Israeli embassy in September 2011, and forced it to close.

In Syria, Palestinians in the refugee camps in Damascus threw themselves into the revolutionary struggle against the regime, and paid a terrible price as Assad took his revenge by besieging the camps.

Counter-revolution gave the initiative back to the enemies of Palestinian liberation. The military regime led by Al-Sisi in Egypt has persecuted Palestinians living in Egypt, demonised Hamas and tightened the siege on Gaza by demolishing tunnels used for smuggling goods and destroying the homes of people living on the Egyptian side of the border.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, widely acknowledged to be the rising power behind the throne in Riyadh, has openly said that he believes that “Israelis have the right to their own land.” As the *New York Times* explains, this new-found warmth towards a state which Saudi Arabia has officially condemned for decades has both economic and geopolitical dimensions:

Instead of seeing Israel as an enemy, Prince Mohammed has come to view the Jewish state as an attractive regional economic and technological hub as well as a potential partner in the kingdom's cold war with Iran. And part of that is recognizing Israel's right to exist, preferably in the context of a peace deal with the Palestinians.¹⁰

The rise of BDS and the Zionist counter-offensive

The BDS movement was launched in 2005 with a declaration directly from Palestinian social movements and trade unions, in the name of “the three integral parts of the people of Palestine: Palestinian refugees, Palestinians under occupation and Palestinian citizens of Israel”.

It targets Israel as a racist state, and not simply Israeli practices in the Occupied Territories. It is an independent Palestinian movement which asserts Palestinians’ dignity and calls for international solidarity with their struggle.

Since 2005 the core of the movement for international solidarity with Palestine has shifted from general support for the Palestinian struggle to interventions aimed at isolating the Zionist state in international commerce, world politics and global culture.

Amongst charities and trade unions, in universities and colleges, in churches, temples and mosques, in shareholders’ meetings and at town council meetings, the question is being raised whether it is morally defensible or politically justifiable to continue business as usual with the companies and institutions that benefit from and support the racist policies and brutal oppression at the

10) Ben Hubbard, ‘Saudi Prince says Israelis have right to their own land’, *New York Times*, 23 April 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/04/03/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-mohammed-bin-salman-israel.html



A solidarity demonstration in London Photo: Alisdare Hickson @ Flickr

heart of the Zionist project.

This new strategy was designed as a non-violent alternative both to the armed national liberation struggle, and to the idea of a negotiated compromise with Zionism.

While defending the right of the oppressed to take up arms in self-defence against colonialism, it recognised that a straightforward military victory against an aggressive colonialism supported by the US was impossible in the 21st century.

It also acknowledged the need for appropriate negotiations, but recognised that negotiating with Zionist governments from a position of weakness could only mean a settlement that would leave the vast majority of Palestinians dispossessed and oppressed.

The BDS movement has made an enormous contribution to the crisis

of Zionist legitimacy outside Israel. It re-affirms commitment to the basic principles that have sustained the Palestinian movement for decades:

- The right of return of the refugees ejected from Palestine in 1948 and their descendants;
- The right of self-determination for all Palestinians;
- The rejection of Israel's "right" to exist as a "Jewish state" – that is, as a state where citizenship is defined in religious or ethnic terms.

The BDS founding declaration calls on "all people of conscience" to ensure that their organisations do not deal with Israeli organisations, and that they do not make themselves complicit in Israel's crimes by associating or working with Israeli organisations.



Jeremy Corbyn (second left) has come under fire due to his support for Palestinian rights Photo: Guy Smallman

It calls on governments to impose sanctions on Israel, and on companies to disinvest from Israel and from any joint ventures with Israeli firms.

Centrally, it calls on all those in favour of justice and equality to boycott all Israeli organisations and to campaign for sanctions and disinvestment, and for a boycott of the goods and services of those companies that will not disinvest but continue to profit from the oppression of the Palestinian people.

It is not a boycott aimed simply at Israeli goods that are illegally produced by Israeli companies on the West Bank.

It is about universal human rights for all Palestinians, and about the recognition of international law in relation to occupation, and the right of a displaced people to return to their homes. It applies, therefore, to all Israeli goods and

services, not just to those produced in the West Bank.

The BDS movement has scored some remarkable successes in recent years: it has won the support of major trade unions, local councils and student unions.

The case for taking action against the racism, discrimination and violence that Palestinians face from the Israeli state has moved from the margins to the mainstream.

But this success has also provoked a determined backlash. The Israeli government considers BDS a “strategic threat” and has devoted huge resources to mobilising against the movement, including supporting legal cases, running smear campaigns in the media and bringing in new legislation to ban BDS supporters from entering Israel.

Antisemitism, anti-Zionism and the Left

One line of counter-attack against BDS and growing support for Palestinian rights which has had some success in recent years is the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism.

Israel's self-proclamation as "the Jewish state" means that attacks on Israeli policies, or challenges to the racist nature of a state that excludes non-Jews from full citizenship, should be interpreted as attacks on Jews, according to Israel's defenders.

The picture is confused further by the fact that antisemitism is on the rise in many countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, where far-right parties that deny or diminish the Holocaust and peddle hateful antisemitic lies have started to win mass support.

In the US, the growth of the far-right paved the way for Trump's election victory in 2016, giving antisemitic white

supremacists and Nazis access to the corridors of power. However, the fact that Trump's power base included these elements and encourages their growth did not deter right-wing Zionists in their support for him.

Rather, they have concentrated their attack on the Left, and have won the backing of sections of the media, mainstream political parties in Britain and some within the Labour Party.

Jeremy Corbyn's principled backing for Palestinian rights, and his staunch opposition to US and UK imperialism in the Middle East made him and his supporters a particular target when he was Labour leader.

It is vital to defend Corbyn and those who stand up for Palestinian rights against unfounded allegations of antisemitism.

Opposing Israeli's racist violence against Palestinians, and challenging the "right" of Israel to exist as a state which systematically denies non-Jews equal rights is not antisemitic.

At the same time, there should be no place in the movement for Palestinian rights for anyone who spouts antisemitic hate and blames Jews as Jews for the occupation.

Everywhere that racism is on the rise, whatever form it takes, socialists will be at the heart of building movements to oppose it.



Photo:
Duncan
Brown

How can the Palestinians win?

Thirty years after the Oslo Accords, it is clear that the idea of a Palestinian state emerging alongside Israel is a fantasy.

The “state” which has been created through this process of colonisation is a shrivelled wreck. Meron Benvenisti, one of a tiny minority of former Zionist leaders repulsed by the implications of this strategy, foresaw that this “state’s” sovereignty would be:

limited to the height of its residential buildings and the depth of its graves. The airspace and water resources will remain under Israeli control.

Helicopter patrols, the airwaves, the hands on the water pumps and the electrical switches, the registration of residents and the issue of identity cards as well as passes to enter and leave, will be controlled (directly or indirectly) by Israelis.

This ridiculous caricature of a Palestinian state, beheaded and with no feet, future, or any chance of development, is presented as fulfilment of the goal of symmetry and equality, embodied in the old slogan “two states for two people.”¹¹

Yet if the Oslo Accords had produced a viable Palestinian state by partially meeting Palestinian demands for the return of refugees, by the sharing of Jerusalem and by the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, would this have brought justice?

The answer has to be no. Such a solution would not address the historic crime on which Israel’s existence is based: the ethnic cleansing of 850,000 Palestinians in 1948.

It would also leave in place a racist, colonial state, armed to the teeth by US imperialism, which would act as a permanent threat not only to the Palestinians but to the region as a whole.

That is why the demand being raised by key Palestinian activists is for one secular, democratic state built on the principle of equal rights for all citizens, including Israeli Jews.

As Omar Barghouti, a founding member of the BDS movement, argues:

Accepting the colonial settlers as equal citizens and full partners in building and developing a new shared society, free from all colonial subjugation and discrimination, as called for in the democratic state model, is the most magnanimous offer any indigenous population, oppressed for decades, can present to its oppressors.¹²

11) ‘United We Stand’, *Ha’aretz*, 19 January 2010. His article is referenced in Ali Abunimah, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*, (Chicago, Haymarket, 2014), p47.

12) Omar Barghouti, ‘Re-imagining Palestine’, *Znet*, 29 July 2009, zcomm.org/znetarticle/re-imagining-palestine-by-omar-barghouti/

How could this state be created? There is little prospect of armed struggle alone achieving such a victory. Courageous armed resistance by Hamas and other Palestinian factions cannot defeat the Zionist war machine. The Arab regimes are an integral part of the imperialist system in the region; they cannot and will not confront the Israeli military.

The creation of Israel made Palestinians into an oppressed minority in their own homeland. The return of Palestinian refugees would allow the question of Palestine's future to be settled by democratic means such as a simple referendum on the basis of one person, one vote.

The question of self-determination is also central. Palestinians are not bargaining chips in a diplomatic or military struggle but are decision-makers whose actions will decide the future of their country.

They have the right to take up arms in pursuit of that goal, and the right to decide who fights and speaks on their behalf.

Palestinian movements which revive democratic traditions of popular protest, mass civil disobedience and strikes are deeply threatening to the Israeli project.

These kinds of movement directly link the struggle of Palestinians within the territories acquired by Israel in its brutal, armed conquest in 1948, with those of their brothers and sisters in the West Bank and Gaza, and beyond to those of the



Palestinian refugees outside the borders of historic Palestine.

The Oslo Accords, the settlement landgrab and the huge concrete wall which Israel has built through the West Bank, were all designed to stop revolts from below from happening again. Israeli efforts to prevent such eruptions have rarely succeeded for long, however.

Nevertheless, the struggle of Palestinians on their own, even combined with the growing international solidarity movement, will not be enough to win justice.

The oppression of the Palestinians is a cornerstone of the system of imperialism in the Middle East, a system which relies on the Arab regimes as much as it does on Israel.

This is why Palestinian struggle must be connected with the building of independent revolutionary movements against the Arab regimes.

For activists around the region, this is not a new idea. It is part of their shared experience of the period before the revolutions of 2011.

Yet the revolutionary wave of 2011 also revealed certain weaknesses, in particular a lack of roots in workplaces and poor neighbourhoods.

A critical question for Arab revolutionary activists is whether solidarity with Palestine can become a key demand of independent workers' movements in the Arab world.

The re-emergence of such a movement would pose new and different questions to Israeli workers.

We saw a glimpse of the political and

social contradictions between Jewish Israelis in 2011 when the revolutions in the Arab world inspired massive social protests inside Israel.

On their own, these protests could not break down the grip of Zionism's racist settler ideology over the consciousness of Jewish workers in Israel.

But they did show how even partially successful revolutionary uprisings can expose the class divisions within Israeli society.

As revolutionary socialists, we understand that the battle for "one state" in Palestine is unlikely to be won without the revolutionary transformation of the region.

We want to see the struggle for national liberation grow into a struggle for socialism – not merely for the overthrow of dictatorship and colonial occupation but for the dismantling of the capitalist system on which these oppressions rest.

In this battle, the role of the organised working class will be decisive. Its methods of struggle are strikes, mass protests and civil disobedience: mobilisations involving the widest and most democratic forms of participation.

Their outcomes are not decided behind closed doors by diplomats or generals (even those from the resistance).

None of this is going to be easy. Counter-revolution stalks the region.

It is an uphill struggle to win backing for the Palestinians in Egyptian workplaces while the military regime



wages a ferocious campaign to demonise Hamas. Yet the prize for winning that battle will be immense.

Amongst young people living under occupation, it will not be easy to win the argument not to trust those who have led the movement for decades but rather to rely instead on their own resilience and courage.

Though it is difficult, there are Palestinians who are making this argument today.

Those of us outside the region also have a critical role to play. Israel sends drones manufactured in Britain to kill children in Gaza. The corporations that profit from occupation are present in our schools, universities and local services.

Every blow we strike against the British state and the British ruling class undermines the stability of imperialism in the Middle East.

Building an internationalist revolutionary socialist current has never been more important. If you agree, now is the time to join us.

Selected reading

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The Nakba: why Israel's Birth was Palestine's Catastrophe,
Bookmarks

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The Battle for Justice in Palestine, Haymarket Books

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The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World, Penguin

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Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation, Verso Books

Selected websites

BDS National Committee in Palestine
bdsmovement.net

Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel
bdsmovement.net/pacbi

Guidelines for the academic boycott
bdsmovement.net/academic-boycott

Guidelines for the cultural boycott
bdsmovement.net/cultural-boycott

Palestine Solidarity Campaign
palestinecampaign.org

British Committee for the Universities of Palestine
bricup.org.uk

Electronic Intifada
electronicintifada.net

Jews for Justice for Palestinians
jffjp.com

Boycott Israel Network
boycottisraelnetwork.net

Who profits?
whoprofits.org

Alternative Information Centre
aicnews.org

The Revolutionary Socialists international website
global.revsoc.me

About this pamphlet

For more than seventy years, the Israeli state has inflicted oppression, suffering, apartheid and occupation on the Palestinian people.

As this pamphlet explains, such brutality is no accident. Since its creation, Israel has always been a racist state. Founded out of a brutal process of ethnic cleansing which drove hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their home, it evolved into imperialism's watchdog in the Middle East.

This pamphlet is for everyone who wants to go beyond sympathy and condemnation to get organised in solidarity with the struggle for freedom in Palestine and across the Middle East.

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