

Some Reflections on Gaza and its Aftermath
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Israeli politics with Arab neighbors have always been weighed by the use of force. Israel has once again decided that in order to accomplish what could have been accomplished by negotiation and willingness to compromise; force would be the best solution. Apparently, the objective of the use of force this time is to eliminate the threat posed by rockets launched from the Gaza Strip. But to accomplish this goal Israel is also intent to deal a deadly blow to the overall infrastructure, both human and material of the Gaza Strip, irrespective of the damage inflicted and the costs to innocent civilians, families and communities as a result of the indiscriminate air power, naval bombardments and shelling. The end objective, accordingly, cannot be accomplished without reducing Gaza to rubble and holding its people captive. This supposedly would further Israel's political goal of weakening Hamas and rendering its authority and ability to govern questionable.

Observers of the Palestinian, Arab and indeed of the international scene speak of an overwhelming sympathy and support to the people in Gaza and to the Hamas movement. This sympathy, however, translates itself to no more than the needed humanitarian help that at the moment is not effective since the ground war on Gaza has begun and since the air strikes of the last 9 days have made it almost impossible for people to move around freely. Accordingly, the distribution system of food, medical and other essential commodities has been severely hampered. This may be intentional and policy guided by Israel as it aims to drive the Palestinian people of Gaza to their limits with the hope that this would serve the overall Israeli policy of showing that a weakened Hamas cannot cope with the emergent needs of the population.

The tragedy in what is happening in Gaza is not restricted to Israel's use of force as the preferred course of action by the electioneering politicians and their military cohorts. This tragedy unfortunately is also shared by the Arab world with its political divisions and by the World community with its inaction. In the Arab world, the Palestinian issue has become a political tug of war and those rulers who want to climb on the bandwagon have been doing so to serve their own narrow interests often in collision with regional and foreign powers, whose policies are not particularly favorable to our Palestinian people. We have been at pain with the political division in Palestine and yet the call for comprehensive Palestinian dialogue in Cairo has been torpedoed in part by considerations that are not in our interest. If the Arab world were to insist on Palestinian Unity and worked for it, as it should have diligently, we would have had one more reason against Israel's pretexts for attacking Gaza. This is not the place to blame but there is apparent frustration among all Arabs and Palestinians not simply with the inaction of Arab rulers in the face of the Israeli war on Gaza but more so with the missed opportunities that these same Arab rulers have lost in order to bring Palestinians together as they took sides between opposing Palestinian factions and parties, thus exacerbating the divisions instead of healing them. Some Arab analysts have argued that it is better to wait on the Palestinian Unity issue after President-Elect Obama takes office in January 2009 and after the Israeli elections in February 2009. The same argument unfortunately has also been made on promoting a

new truce with Israel. Our people under siege in Gaza and under continuing fierce Israeli control and occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem cannot wait. Arab politics needs to become proactive and not reactive and to assert Arab interests not with apologetics but with concrete and practical steps that force Israel, Western powers and the world to weigh the Arab world more seriously.

The Western Powers have failed us, in spite of the fact that the French President has shown much more acumen and movement than some of the rulers in the region, with the clear exception of Turkey and its Prime Minister and other officials. The inability of the UN Security Council to come up with a plan to end the Israeli war on Gaza is symptomatic of the delaying tactics, usually employed by the US, in order to enable Israel to finish its work on the ground. Meanwhile, if the Gaza situation has happened anywhere else, the US would be foremost on insisting on an immediate ceasefire, Georgia being the most recent example. The position of the West and its governments, in general, reflects quite poorly on the pretense often made of subscription to universal human values and the adoption of moral and ethical positions, especially in situations of war and conflict. The mass demonstrations across the globe and in Western countries and Capitals show that the decency of ordinary people in expressing their indignation and in calling for an end to the war remains to be matched by their government's actions and deeds.

We Palestinians are at a crucial juncture once again. It is absolutely clear that we need to come together since a house divided cannot withstand the storm nor be able to rehabilitate and reconstruct. Individual or factional agendas should be put aside as we should opt for a national agenda that would bring all of us together. The wounds of Gaza are the wounds of all Palestine and we need together to tend to these wounds as we call on all decent people and powers to do their utmost to stop the war. If Israel and its allies have their way, we will soon be forced to give up control of the Gaza Strip and possibly the West Bank in order to further the control over the population and to make Israel the undisputable Lord of the Land. Besides, it would help Israel greatly if in the process hundreds of thousands of our Palestinian people emigrate, leave or simply disappear or are transferred. The micro politics that has characterized Palestinian politics since the January 2006 elections should change to macro politics. We should adopt a clear course and we should insist that all Palestinian factions and political groups shed their narrow interests and benefits from the current status quo and come together in order to chart this course and to deal with the human, political, social and economic after effects of the Israeli war on Gaza. The rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip and its reconstruction necessitates equally the rehabilitation of Palestinian politics and its regeneration to serve the interest of our people. The challenge is how to get the world with us and to confront the difficult future that lies ahead in 2009 and perhaps for years to come. The more pressing challenge is to stop the Israeli carnage and to bring the war to an immediate stop. But we should never forget what awaits us all in terms of unification, reconstruction and molding a vision for the future of our Palestine.