

Resistance & Representation

1967-2000

1982

During the decades that followed Israel's occupation, Palestinians launched a regional armed struggle campaign which targeted both Israeli soldiers and civilians. Inspired by Third World anti-colonial and liberation struggles, the PLO engaged in military operations aimed at reversing the Zionist project in Palestine. Initially, the PLO used Jordan as a base from which to launch its operations. The PLO's activities threatened to destabilize the Jordanian monarchy and led the government to violently crack down on Palestinian fighters and expel them in 1970-71 in what came to be known as Black September. The PLO relocated to Beirut, where it rapidly became a state within a state. Its small-scale operations against Israel were used as an excuse to launch an expansive Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

Driven by its goal to end the Palestinian claim to self-determination and to degrade the PLO, Israel allied with local Christian Lebanese Phalange militias and oversaw horrific massacres against Palestinian refugee camps such as Sabra and Shatila. The brutal assault and prolonged siege of Beirut by Israel's army led to the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon and into another military and political exile, this time in Tunisia.



Palestinian Woman in Sabra Refugee Camp in Lebanon, holding the helmets of who she believes massacred the camp. Source: www.flickr.com/photos/nostri-image/5008827075

Soon, however, Palestinian nationalism and the drive for self-determination resurfaced. After two decades of weathering Israel's militarized occupation, its expanding state-sponsored settlement project, and its policies of discrimination and dispossession, Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem rose in 1987 to shake off Israel's rule. This mass uprising, the First Intifada, was a popular mobilisation grounded in years of grass-roots organizing in which Palestinians demanded an end to occupation and called for the creation of a Palestinian state. Despite being a non-violent uprising, Israeli forces reacted forcefully, with its Prime Minister infamously calling on the army to "break the bones of the protestors." Israel intensified its crackdown on human rights, particularly on Palestinians' freedom of movement and on their physical safety, including through systematically detaining and imprisoning Palestinians, imposing curfews, and introducing restrictive ID systems.



Children Throwing Stones to Israeli Soldiers in the Am'ari Refugee Camp near Ramallah against the Occupation, February 1988

1987-1988

The First Intifada marked a turning point in the Palestinian struggle for national rights. Given the power disparity with Israel, the PLO's armed struggle had failed to secure Palestinian political or civil rights. In 1988, the PLO conceded its goal of liberating the entire land of Palestine. It accepted the creation of a Palestinian State in the 22% of the land that constituted the occupied territories of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, and renounced violence. However, there were dissident voices. Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, was launched at the time of the First Intifada. Protesting the PLO's recognition of Israel and formal acceptance of the two-state solution, Hamas called for a return to armed struggle as a means of liberating Palestine.



Photo Credit: Mohamad Badarne

With the PLO's recalibration, the so-called "peace process" began. This process incorporated the premise of partition that the UN had declared in 1947. Under American mediation, the Israelis and Palestinians embarked on negotiations towards the goal of achieving a "two-state solution." In 1993, they signed the core pillar of this process, the first of the Oslo Accords, a set of agreements which marked the mutual recognition of Israel by the Palestinians, and of the PLO by Israel. Although this was celebrated by many as a breakthrough, Israel had merely recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians, making no formal endorsement of their right to self-determination or statehood, and its denial of Palestinian rights persisted.

1993-2000

The Accords were an ostensible framework for negotiations that would lead to an eventual "final agreement". As part of the Oslo Accords, a temporary self-government, the Palestinian Authority (PA), was created. This was seen by Palestinians as the embryo of the future Palestinian state, a state-in-making that was intended to govern the areas from which Israel redeployed its military as the parties theoretically moved towards a two-state outcome. The PA was tasked with local governance, and entered into extensive security coordination mechanisms with Israel, to safeguard Israel's security as it withdrew from the territories. Under the Accords, the West Bank was divided into three areas, Areas A, B, and C. 17% of the West Bank (Area A) fell under the PA's control at the start of the process, with Area B under joint control and Area C under exclusive Israeli control. In practice, Israeli security forces maintained their absolute domination over the territories.



Photo Credit: Hosam Salim

The stark imbalance in power between Israel and the Palestinians was reflected in the structure of the negotiations, where Israel - closely aided, allied and favoured by the US - acted as the counterpart to the marginalized PLO. Palestinians protested this imbalance, and argued against the futility of an occupied people negotiating their freedom from their colonizer. Over the course of the negotiations, rather than moving towards Palestinian self-determination and a Palestinian state, Israel in practice accelerated its land annexation and repression, vastly expanding the number of settlers it moved into the occupied territories, in violation of international law.



A Palestinian man sitting in the West Bank as soldiers walk by. Photography by Mohammad Badarne

In effect, the Oslo Accords gave Israel time and space to effectively institutionalise its control over Palestinian territories and population. Israel's use of the negotiations as a cover to accelerate its colonization of Palestinian lands was punctured time and again by Palestinians calling for their rights. The Second Intifada (uprising), which erupted in 2000, seven years after the Oslo Accords had been signed, aptly demonstrated the failure of Oslo and the result of sustained violation of Palestinian rights.



Israel soldiers in the West Bank