

Yet there is also a history of anti-Palestinian behavior that demands recognition as injustice and cruelty of the first order. Just as Jews require recognition from the world, we too must continue to make the same demands, not on the grounds of vengeance but because justice requires it. Thus the misery of Oslo is that our leaders simply brushed off our history, whereas it behooves us to remember what Zionism did, and—no less important—what Britain, the United States, and other pro-Zionist Western governments have done to conspire in our dispossession.

The first challenge, then, is to extract acknowledgment from Israel for what it did to us and to other Arabs whose sons and daughters were killed in its wars, conquests, military occupations, settlements. This is a moral mission for each of us to pursue by not forgetting, by reminding each other and the world, by testifying to the continued injustice against us. I simply cannot imagine that history will ever excuse us for failing in this task.

But then, I believe, we must also hold out the possibility of some form of coexistence in which a new and better life, free of ethnocentrism and religious intolerance, could be available. It is the present poverty of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism that accounts for the void in vision and moral energy that we suffer from today. I am certain that if we present our claims about the past as ushering in a form of mutuality and coexistence in the future, a long-term positive echo on the Israeli and Western side will reverberate.

It is also evident to me that we cannot detach our views of Israel from our attitudes and policies towards the United States. Since 1949, America has poured about \$140 billion into Israel. Not only is this a major financial investment, but the American political establishment has a long-term investment in the country, as well. To expect the United States to lessen support of Israel, or even to become critical of it—these are real possibilities, in my view—requires a massive campaign in the United States on behalf of Palestinian political and human rights. This is so obvious as not to require much insistence here. The only question to ask, however, is why has this not been done before?

Israel's successes on the ground have been prepared for and supported by assiduous propaganda about Arab intransigence, the Arab wish to drive Jews into the sea, the Israeli desire for peace and tranquility, and, central to all this, that Israel as a Jewish state was created by the national liberation Jewish movement (Zionism), which found the place deserted and made it a garden. Zionism, along with all the other successful mass movements in the twentieth century, learned the lesson of propaganda: that the battle for opinion is the most important one to win. This is something that we still have not com-

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In short, Israel is the measure of our failings and our incompetence. We have waited for a great leader for years, but none came; we have waited for a mighty military victory, but we were defeated roundly; we have waited for outside powers (the United States or, in its time, the Soviet Union), but none came to our aid. The one thing we have not tried in all seriousness is to rely on ourselves: Until we do that with a full commitment to success, there is no chance that we can advance towards self-determination and freedom from aggression.

In the current Palestinian case, the failures seem the most glaring and the remedies more easily at hand than anyone has suspected. We have been saddled with poor leadership ever since I can remember, and still we persist in supporting the same bankrupt group through all its mistakes and disasters. On the other hand, we pride ourselves on the many successes of our people—doctors, lawyers, engineers, entrepreneurs, businesspeople, intellectuals, academics, artists.

We claim that we want statehood and independence, yet none of the most basic institutions of statehood are in anyone's mind. There is no basic law where the Palestinian Authority rules today, the result of one man's whim not to approve such a law, in flagrant defiance of the Legislative Assembly. Our universities are in an appalling state, starved for money, desperately run and administered, filled with professors who struggle to make a living but have not done a stroke of research or independent work in years.

We also have an impressive group of extremely wealthy businesspeople who have simply not grasped that the essential thing for any people is a massive investment in education, the construction of a national library, and the endowment of the entire university structure as a guarantee that as a people we will have a future. I have attended meetings for almost twenty years in which hundreds of little projects are funded, but without a central

vision of what it is that as a society we need. The absence of a collective end to which all are committed has crippled Palestinian efforts not just in the official realm, but even among private associations, where personality conflicts, outright fights, and disgraceful backbiting hamper our every step.

Looked at from this perspective, the fundamental challenge that Israel poses is to ourselves—our inability to organize, our inability to dedicate ourselves to a basic set of principles from which we do not deviate, our inability to marshal our resources single-mindedly, our inability to devote all our efforts to education and competence, and finally, our inability to choose a leadership that is capable of the task.

It is no use blaming the failures of the current PLO on a few inadequate and corrupt individuals. We now have the leadership we deserve, and until we realize that we are being driven further and further from our goal of self-determination and the recovery of our rights by that leadership which so many of us still serve and respect, we will continue to slide.

Antonio Gramsci put it very succinctly: pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will. Yes, our situation *vis-à-vis* Israel is calamitous, and under Netanyahu the situation will get worse. But we need to ask what it is that we can do, and then by an act of collective will we must do it. The rest is simply a waste of time.

The choice of better leaders is an imperative, but we must also improve our own conditions so that our workers do not have to build Israeli settlements just to put food on our tables, and our students do not have to settle for incredibly backward curricula in an age when our opponents are sending people to the moon, and our people have to accept lamentable conditions of tyranny and oppression where our Authority punishes dissent and uses torture to cow the citizenry—all in the name of national unity.

Until we awake, we will continue to lose more land and power to Israel. But we cannot fight for our rights, our history, and our future until we are armed with weapons of criticism and dedicated consciousness.

In this we need the support of the Arab intellectual and cultural community, which has devoted too much time to slogans about Zionism and imperialism and not enough to helping us fight the battle against our own incompetence. The challenge of Israel is the challenge of our own societies. We are now unequal to the task because we are still chained to methods and attitudes that belong to an earlier time.

The struggle of the twenty-first century is the struggle to achieve self-liberation and self-decolonization. And then Israel can be properly addressed. ■