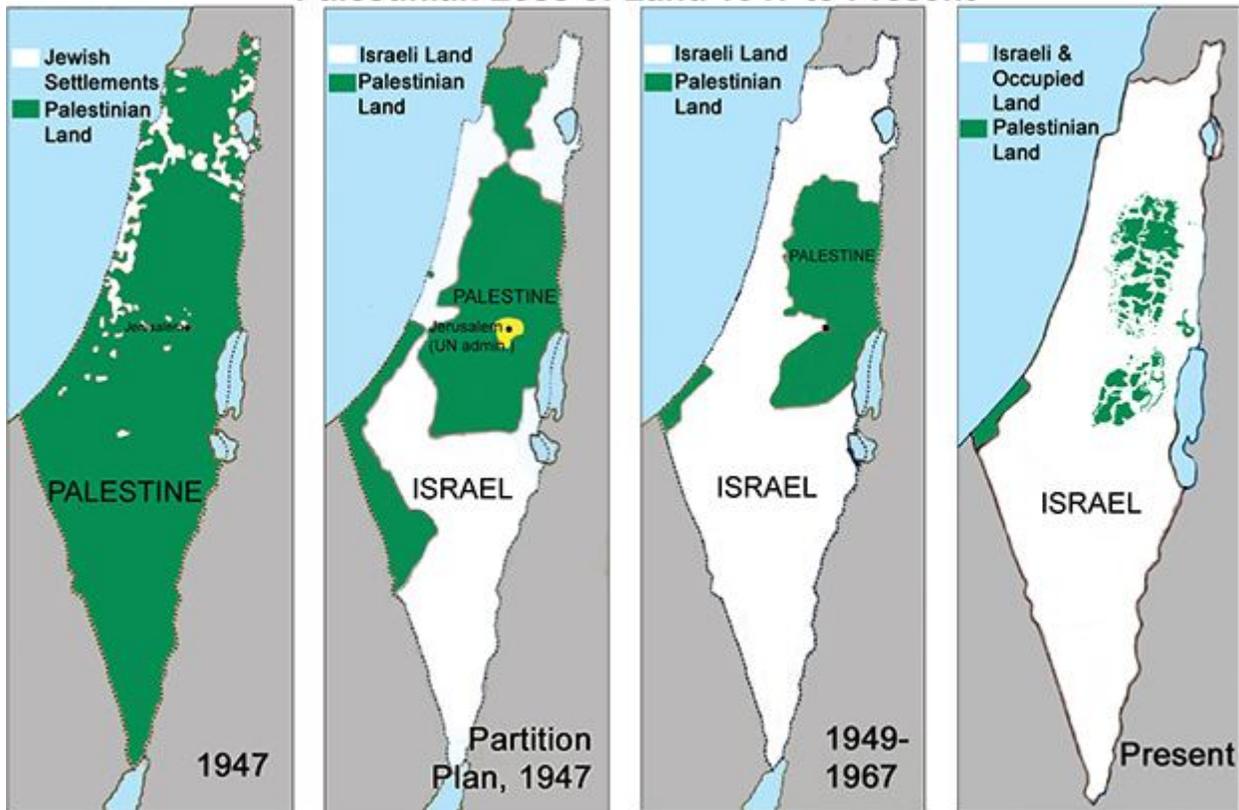




An Opinion Piece on
Genesis of Arab-Israel Conflict

by Asif Haroon Raja

Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present





In the 19th century, Palestine was inhabited by multi-cultural population with 86% Muslims, 10% Christians and 4% Jews living in peace. Extremist Jews called Zionists decided to create a separate homeland for the Jews. Accordingly, from late 19th century, the Jews started relocating to Palestine under a calculated plan. Great Britain which was in control of Palestine granted them permission to emigrate. Their influx disturbed the local inhabitants and heightened tensions.

During the First World War, the British Empire convinced the Arab leaders in 1916 to revolt against the Ottoman Empire promising them an independent Arab State including Palestine. However, contrary to the given commitment, Balfour Declaration in 1917 envisaged establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. In 1920, European colonial powers divided Ottoman Empire into series of separate states and shared the spoils of war in the Middle East. Once Hitler gained power in Germany, the Jews came under the axe of Nazis. Historians claim that about 6 million Jews died in the Holocaust.

After the 2nd World War, the UN under Zionist pressure recommended partition of Palestine into two States and internationalization of Jerusalem under UN administration. Minority Jews were to receive 57% and the majority Arabs 43% of land. After the plan was approved by the US, the State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948. Rejection of the partition plan and creation of Israel by the Arab States led to 1948 Arab-Israeli war. The combined armies of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Trans-Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt were defeated and the Israeli Army captured 78% of Palestine.



750,000 Palestinians were driven out into refugee camps. Their breakdown was 2 million in Jordan, 427,057 in Lebanon, 477,770 in Syria, 788,108 in West Bank, 1.1 million in Gaza and a quarter million internally displaced within Israel. Over 500 villages/towns were depopulated and destroyed. In 1956, armies of Britain, France and Israel invaded Sinai after Egypt under Jamal Nasser nationalized Suez Canal. Although Egypt was defeated, but international pressure forced the invaders to withdraw. In the six-day war in 1967, Israel annexed

Golan Heights in Syria, Jordan's West Bank and Gaza Strip from Egypt. Since then, Israel is in military occupation of these lands. In the 1973 war, Israel captured Sinai but returned it to Egypt after signing Camp David Accord in 1978.

Emergence of Hezbollah as a powerful group in Lebanon and establishment of HQ of PLO in Beirut in late 1970s impelled Israel to invade Lebanon in 1982 and destroy PLO/Hezbollah infrastructures. In the same timeframe intifada sparked in occupied Palestinian territories. Israeli troops killed thousands of teenagers armed with sling shots and stones.

1993 saw signing of US brokered Oslo Peace Accord whereby Israel recognized PLO and gave them limited autonomy in return for peace. Gaza was turned over to newly created Palestinian Authority (PA). But it was in actuality a ruse to end Intifada which had brought a bad name to Israel. The Accord helped Israel in gaining control over land, water and other resources of Palestinians. In 1994 Israel carried out partial withdrawal from Gaza Strip and later withdrew from Lebanon in 2000. However, it continued with its

settlement policy and besides constructing a security fence in West Bank in 2002/03, it stepped up its campaign against Hamas as well as targeted assassination of prominent Palestinians.

After the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004 under mysterious circumstances, Mahmood Abbas became PLO's Chairman and later President of PA. By September 2005, Israeli troops completely withdrew from Gaza. In January 2006, Hamas won the elections and ousted Fatah government, which by then had become unpopular. It triggered infighting but in June 2007, much to the chagrin of Israel, Hamas fighters seized control over Gaza Strip and formed a government. Tel Aviv refused to recognize Hamas government and clamped down stringent controls over movement and flow of daily commodities. The US and the West backed Israeli stance and jointly declared Hamas a terrorist outfit. Israel then created rift between Fatah Party led by Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas. Consequently, Abbas led Fatah formed a government in Israeli controlled West Bank.



As time has unfolded, the Gaza Strip consisting of 1.7 million Palestinians has remained economically, financially, under the military siege of Israel Defense Forces. Even Egypt under pro-US/Israeli Hosni Mubarak has been a party of the siege. Tel Aviv has continuously refused to honor the Oslo Accord it had signed in 1993, giving Palestinians the right to establish an independent State in Gaza Strip and West Bank with Jerusalem as its capital or Jerusalem becoming a common capital for both, since a two-State solution goes against the master plan of establishing Greater Israel. Coupled with political refusals, Israel has used excessive military force over the years, as estimate of over 10,000 Palestinian men, women and children are being held in Israeli prisons; physical abuse and torture has become a routine. Refugees are prohibited to return to their homeland. The lands on which Israelis are being settled are prime lands. Water sources are under the control of Israel. According to Robert Fisk, 'Future Palestinian State will have no borders and be an enclave within Israel'.



To supplement the failure of Hamas government in Gaza' it was subjected to frequent aerial and artillery assaults as well as ground offensives by Israel. Israeli Defense forces (IDF), have subsequently launched ruthless offensives codenamed Operation Cast Lead (2009) and Operation Pillar of Defence in 2012 (8-day war). Each offensive has caused hundreds of civilian of Gaza to lose their lives. Egypt added to the woes of Palestinians by blocking the Rafah crossing and destroying secret tunnels opening into Sinai. The only time, Egypt has facilitated it's Muslim brethren in

Palestine, was during the one year rule of Morsi (Jun '12 - July '13). The Morsi government helped in arranging truce in November 2012, but its ouster and subsequent replacement by pro-Israel military regime has once again put not only Hamas, but the civilians under a perilous disadvantage. Iran, however, has proven to be a continuous support, financially and weapon-wise to Hamas, due to which improvement of its defensive capability has been evident. Alignment of Hezbollah and Hamas during Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006 put Israel on the back foot for the first time.

In 2012, the UN General Assembly upgraded the Palestinian status at the UN from 'observer entity' to 'non-member state', which by implication was a de facto recognition of an independent Palestinian State. Reconciliation pact was signed between Fatah Party and Islamist Hamas on April 23, 2014 which called for uniting the two feuding factions and forming a unity government. The two sides agreed to establish an interim government of independents that would organize elections, thus ending seven years old rivalry which suited Israel. On May 29, 2014, President Mahmoud Abbas ignoring threat of sanctions by Israel asked PM Rami Hamdullah to head a new national unity government and the long awaited unity government took oath on June 2, 2014 at Ramallah. Gaza's Prime Minister Ismail Haniyah and his cabinet resigned and 17-member cabinet, all politically independent, was selected after mutual consultations of Fatah and Hamas. Although the reconciliation agreement has held, a lot of bad blood still remains between Hamas and West Bank leadership.



Israel, an artificial implant in the Muslim heartland, is highly disconcerted and agitated over the unification of Fatah and Hamas and has reacted in establishing 1500 new settlements in New Jerusalem and West Bank. Israel is trying its best to sow discord in order to not only break the unity but reactivate the enmity between the two factions. In revenge of the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli youths on June 12, 2014, alleged to be the handiwork of Hamas activists, a 15-year old Palestinian Tariq Abu Khudair was arrested by Israeli Police in East Jerusalem on July 3 and beaten to pulp. His 16-year old cousin M. Abu Khudair was kidnapped, barbarically beaten to near-death and then burnt alive by the three Israeli teens in Jerusalem on July 4. Over 460 Palestinians in West Bank and East Jerusalem were arrested and jailed on suspicion and their homes demolished. Social media sprang into action and young Jewish boys and girls, expressing the innate hatred, started posting flurry of messages seeking death to Palestinians. An individual act has subjected 1.7 million Gazans to collective punishment.



These vicious acts prompted the armed wing of Hamas Izzel-Deen al-Qassam to fire rockets over Israeli southern towns including city of Ashdod in protest. In reaction, Israeli Defence Forces (IDFs) launched an airstrike on July 1, striking 15 Hamas sites in Gaza Strip. From July 8 onwards, Israel broke the 2012 truce and unleashed Operation Protective Edge. Till July 16, 1300 aerial strikes have killed 220 Palestinians, mostly women and children including handicapped, injured 1250 and destroyed 500 homes. Hamas homes are the preferential targets. It is reported that over 77% fatalities are of innocent civilians but the question is that under which law 23% people are considered as not innocent.

This is the worst flare-up in the last two years and seems to be in reaction to reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. Israeli leadership particularly defence minister Moshe Ya'alon wishes to completely obliterate Hamas infrastructure once and for all to prevent future rocket attacks and has readied plans for a ground offensive. Dani Dayon urged the government to cut off fuel and electricity to Gaza. Netanyahu has asked 100,000 Gazans to vacate northern Gaza. Fearing ground assault, over 10,000 Gazans have taken shelter in installations of UN agency. Hospitals are short of medicines and equipment. Repeated

bombardments are destroying the vulnerable water system. Hundreds of thousands are now without water, and Egypt again has blocked the border not only to the Palestinian refugees coming to, but also basic supplies going from Egypt.

Hamas has fired 777 home-made rockets during this period most of which were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system. Amid worldwide protests condemning genocide of people of Gaza by IDFs, Egypt proposed a ceasefire on July 15 without consulting Hamas. It was silent on sea blockade and compensation for human/material losses incurred by Gazans. These shortfalls shortened the life of ceasefire to six hours only. Continuation of rocket attacks by Hamas and other militant groups like Islamic Jihad, Popular Front/Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine impelled Israel to resume offensive.

West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem are under illegal military occupation of Israel for the last 47 years. The Israeli forces are ruthlessly bombing densely crowded refugee camps, schools, apartments, mosques and hospitals. Champions of democracy and human rights mired in hypocrisy, double-standards and Orwellian lies are projecting Israel as the victim of aggression and patting it on the back that it has the right to defend itself and to go any length to safeguard its people. The US led west is shedding copious tears over the so-called piteous plight of the Israelis. The Israelis are mourning that they have to run for cover each time a rocket is fired and that they cannot sleep peacefully because of the noise of rockets. In the calculation of Israel and biased west, Palestinians are an expendable commodity while Israeli Jews are holy cows. For the US, security of Israel is top most priority. The western world is silent over vicious bombing of IDFs massacring so many in open prison of Gaza and is not moved over the heart-wrenching sights of cruelly killed infants and wailing mothers. World powers including the UN are insisting upon Hamas to stop rocket attacks that have caused death to one Israeli soldier and injury to two and are politely requesting Israel to show 'maximum restraint'.



The American leadership bears the taunts and barbs of Israeli leaders smilingly and not only accept their blackmailing tactics submissively but also defends Israel's black deeds resolutely and bend over backwards to keep it in good humor. This policy of appeasing Israel has been going on for decades and there are no signs of any change in this policy despite the fact that over a period of time the American public has got weary of Israel. While they detest the repulsive arrogance and high-handedness of Israeli leaders and feel pity for the victims of Israeli unabated savagery, they abhor their leadership getting dictated by Israel and that too at the cost of American interests. They have seen the ugly face of Israel which is in illegal occupation of Palestinian lands since 1967 and is consistently gobbling up additional territory under the scheme of forward settlement of Jews and persecuting the subjugated Palestinians.



They are now questioning as to why their government remains subservient to the commands of Tel Aviv when it doles out largest share of aid (\$3 billion) to it each year. They ask as to why Israel's wanton crimes and injustices against Palestinians are being willfully ignored and its criminal acts backed. Such resentful sentiments are heard all over the world and voices of concern against Israeli Apartheid can be heard from all quarters. Calls are being made to try Israeli leaders for war crimes in international court of justice. Even Jews in Israel are turning away from

vindictive and violent policies pursued by their leaders. Support to Israel is diminishing in Europe as well.

The international community must take advantage of this change in the thinking of American and European public and should collectively exert pressure on Israel to immediately stop its madness and vacate the Palestinian lands under its illegal occupation and grant Palestinian refugees the right to return to their homeland. The Muslim rulers, the OIC and Arab League must pay their role to stop the genocide of people of Gaza at the hands of Israeli forces.



In this regard, all Muslim countries need to raise this issue in UNO unitedly and forcefully. Furthermore, they should collectively move International Court of Justice against war crimes being committed by Israeli aggressors against innocent Palestinians. Besides, all out support be extended to refugees and special fund be established for their welfare.

The Author is a defence analyst and he has contributed this article for MUSLIM Institute.