

TWO LOGICS OF WAR: LIBERATION AGAINST GENOCIDE

The logic of the war of national liberation is centred upon overturning the material equation of force that underpins colonialism and the broader imperialist world order.



by Bikrum Gill

its aim and intended outcome the destruction of the Palestinians as a national people with political claim-making capacity. The intentional policy of bombing hospitals, schools, homes, resulting in tens of thousands killed in mere weeks, alongside the intensification of the siege that has starved and dehydrated Palestinians in Gaza, takes as its aim the destruction of the Palestinian will to not only resist, but to reclaim and exercise real effective sovereign power. While the entirety of the Western media and political class has joined 'israel' in racialising Palestinian violence as an irrational savagery that must be responded to with a war of extermination, the response of the Palestinian resistance has been instructive regarding the longer term horizon. Rather than appeal for its humanity to be recognised by Western imperialism and Zionist colonialism, the Palestinian resistance has, in continuing to defeat 'israel' on the battlefield in Gaza, commanded a recognition of its political rationality and thus brought the racialised framework of 'irrational savagery' to crisis point. In so doing, it has opened a road beyond the inhumanity of genocidal colonialism that is the foundation of the Western world order.

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material unification of the Palestinian national liberation struggle. Al-Aqsa Flood was launched with the express purpose of ending 'israeli' impunity and demanding 'israel' release Palestinians being held and subject to torture in 'israeli' prisons, that it end its ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, abuse of worshippers at Al-Aqsa mosque, and an end to the blockade of Gaza. The operation demonstrated a material capacity to permanently and irreversibly overturn the equation of force that underpins 'israeli' colonial sovereignty. If the logic of 'israel's' colonial equation of force has been to impose a calculus that disincentivised the dispossessed Palestinians from returning to the lands from which they were expelled in 1948, the anti-colonial equation of force actualises a material basis for a Palestinian sovereign power that can enforce the right of return, reclamation of stolen lands, and an end to the ongoing imprisonment and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the West Bank. Al-Aqsa Flood, particularly in terms of how rapidly it overwhelmed 'israel's' southern command, has accelerated the crisis of the ideological component of 'israel's' equation of force. It is exceedingly difficult to envision how exactly 'israeli' colonialism can restore its necessary belief in the invincibility of its power to impose itself on Palestinians.

Conceivably, 'israel,' and its Western backers, could have responded to Al-Aqsa Flood by recognising its political rationality and negotiating a peace settlement on the basis of such recognition. However, insofar as Al-Aqsa Flood expressed a logic of a rising war of national liberation, that was overturning the underlying equation of force, such recognition would amount to a fatal loss of belief in the viability of 'israel' as a settler-colonial project. It is this contradiction that makes the Al-Aqsa Flood operation unintelligible to 'israel' and the West except as an act of pure irrational savagery that can thus only be responded to with the logic of total elimination. Unable to any longer defeat Palestinians on the battlefield, 'israel' has turned, finally, to attempting to restore its necessary equation of force with the application of the Dahiya doctrine on an enormous scale. The colonial war of genocide that 'israel' has launched has as

The onslaught of Western and 'israeli' propaganda since the beginning of Al-Aqsa Flood seeks to confuse and misrepresent what are in fact the very clear terms of the struggle in Palestine. The conflict between coloniser and colonised, between occupier and occupied, has reached now, finally and openly, a permanent overarching 'state of war' that contains within it a decisive confrontation between two particular logics of war. On one side, the Palestinian resistance has been undertaking a rising anti-colonial war of national liberation to free themselves and their lands from both 'israeli' colonialism and the larger Western imperial world order. On the other side stands an openly genocidal 'israeli' colonial project aiming to restore the colonial foundations that have been called into question by the Palestinian liberation war. It is in the increasingly evident incapacity of the 'israeli' army to defeat the Palestinian armed resistance on the battlefield that we can find the dark impetus for the 'israeli' and Western return to an openly genocidal approach that directs the violence of the colonial state towards the unarmed Palestinian population. Though the 'israeli' colonial war of genocide will not succeed in its aim of eliminating Palestinians from Gaza, it unleashes massacres and destruction on a horrific scale.

The logic of the war of national liberation is centred upon overturning the material equation of force that underpins colonialism and the broader imperialist world order. Here, colonialism and imperialism are premised, in the first and last instance, on a 'greater violence' that enables the coloniser to usurp sovereignty from the colonised. This material equation of force generates a secondary ideological projection of power wherein the coloniser appears as invincible in any encounter with the colonised, capable of enacting any degree of violence with impunity. The ideological legitimation of this impunity consists of a supposed higher rational purpose (e.g. anti-terror, civilisational, democracy promoting, humanitarian, etc.) that is ascribed to the coloniser's violence. The colonised, by contrast, are rendered as inherently killable in any contestation with the coloniser due to an irrational savagery that is attached to their violence. There is no higher rational purpose to be found here, only

violence for the sake of a savagery that threatens all of humanity. Insofar as the colonised remain within such a balance of material and ideological force, they will by necessity be compelled to seek, or perhaps put more properly, beg for, recognition of their rights under the sovereign power of the coloniser. This is the condition to which 'israel' consigned the Palestinians with the Oslo Accords 'peace process' framework.

The total inability of the Oslo road to enforce Palestinian national rights and defend at any level Palestinian life and land created the conditions for a return of forms of armed resistance capable of calling into question the equation of force underpinning the denial of Palestinian sovereignty. The evolution of the post-Oslo armed resistance into a highly-effective hybrid army, combining guerrilla tactics with the discipline and organisation of a professional army, provokes an existential crisis for Zionist colonialism. Unable to defeat the Palestinian armed resistance in successive battles, 'israel' has turned instead to intensifying its genocidal violence against unarmed Palestinians as the means to restore its necessary equation of material and ideological force. There are, thus, two logics of war at play in Palestine today: the logic of a war of liberation versus the logic of a colonial war of genocide.

The Disarmed Premise of the Oslo Road

The disarming of the Palestinian national liberation struggle was central to the consolidation of a political framework that could go no further than offering Palestinians at best a quasi-sovereign status, eternally dependent upon the real effective sovereign power of Zionism. While the First Intifada (1987–1993) re-awakened the Palestinian national liberation struggle, and forced the world to

proceeded to deepen and accelerate its colonisation of the West Bank. Over this time, hundreds of Palestinians were murdered by the 'Israeli' occupation army, with thousands more being subjected to ethnic cleansing and imprisonment. Affirming the material unification of Palestinian struggle that was advanced during the Unity Intifada, resistance organisations based in Jenin in the West Bank took the lead in conducting armed resistance against 'Israel's' accelerating colonisation. In July 2023, the armed resistance in Jenin repelled an attempted 'Israeli' military incursion into the camp, forcing 'Israel' to retreat without achieving its stated objective of eliminating the Jenin Brigades. The Jenin resistance, in shifting the material equation of force, had the further effect of piercing through the ideological equation that has long granted 'Israel' cover from the 'international community.' In responding to its defeats on the battlefield by returning to its Dahiya doctrine, razing civilian infrastructure and terrorising the unarmed civilians of Jenin, 'Israel' exposed itself as a state conducting war crimes in service of a project of ethnic cleansing. UN and EU officials, normally quite subservient to 'Israeli' demands, expressed shock and concern regarding 'Israel's' assault on Jenin, openly declaring that this likely constituted a violation of international law.

The victory of the Jenin Brigades this past July gave further strength to the challenge posed by the armed resistance in Gaza to 'Israel's' fundamental equation of force. In the months that followed, 'Israel' would transfer military resources from its Gaza Southern Command to the West Bank in an effort to restore its fading deterrence capacity there. This proved critical to the Al-Aqsa Flood operation when it was launched soon thereafter from Gaza. With 'Israel' pre-occupied with monitoring and repressing the armed resistance in the West Bank, Gazan forces were afforded greater cover and room of manoeuvre in planning an launching what can, in part, be apprehended as a historic break out of the prison-camp-like conditions that 'Israel' had imposed on Gaza.

The political demands attached to Al-Aqsa Flood emphasise the

restore its equation of force. In the night that followed its defeat in battle, 'israel' launched a wholesale indiscriminate attack on the camp with the express intent of terrorising unarmed civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure. Nearly one hundred civilians were massacred in 'israel's' brutal attack on Shuja'iyya, and thousands more were killed during the entirety of the 2014 war.

As was the case earlier in Lebanon, the widespread death and destruction imposed by the Dahiya doctrine failed in its objective of eliminating the Palestinian will to resist. On the contrary, the Palestinian resistance proved successful in repelling the 'israeli' invasion and forcing 'israel' to agree to terms demanded by the resistance—such as an easing of the blockade—as part of a ceasefire. This emerging challenge to 'israel's' equation of force was advanced further during the 2021 Unity Intifada, where the Gazan armed resistance again directly challenged the impunity with which 'israel' could engage in land theft in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Rockets were fired from Gaza with the aim of compelling 'israel' to stop its ethnic cleansing in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Jerusalem and its ongoing abuses of worshippers at Al-Aqsa mosque. In responding, again, to 'israeli' abuses against Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem, the armed resistance in Gaza challenged the division imposed by 'israeli' colonialism and apartheid in order to weaken and isolate Palestinians. Instead, the 'Sword of Al-Quds' operation provisioned the means for the material unification of Palestinian struggle across the divided zones of occupied Palestine. While 'israel' attempted to again eliminate the armed resistance in Gaza with airstrikes which killed hundreds of Palestinian civilians, it did not undertake a ground invasion in light of the costs its army suffered during its 2014 invasion. This shifting equation of force would result in an even clearer victory for Hamas, as it imposed costs that forced 'israel' to end its ethnic cleansing operation in Sheikh Jarrah and its attacks on Al-Aqsa worshippers.

In the two years that followed the Unity Intifada, 'israel,' having been granted even more diplomatic cover by the Biden administration,

again take note of it, the absence of the hard material power of armed struggle left Palestinians with limited leverage in the Oslo 'peace process' that the u.s. and 'israel' pursued in response to that uprising. In order to be granted recognition as a legitimate political subject and partner in the peace process, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) had to permanently renounce armed struggle as a means of pursuing national liberation from Zionist colonialism. Insofar as the Oslo road did not demand a demilitarised and disarmed 'israeli' partner, the PLO concession on armed struggle amounted to an effective surrender of the material basis of Palestinian sovereignty. Under the Oslo framework, 'israel' would exclusively hold the monopoly of violence that confers de facto sovereign right, leaving Palestinian political subjecthood as one which could only operate in so far as it accorded with the aims of 'israeli' colonial sovereignty. The Palestinian Authority that emerged from Oslo has only been granted recognition as a quasi-sovereign to the extent that it deploys organised violence, not against Zionist colonialism, but rather towards policing Palestinian resistance. The deepening of the colonial equation of force enabled 'israel' the means to accelerate its theft of Palestinian land, and to impose even greater restraints on Palestinian existence and movement across historic Palestine in the post-Oslo period.

The Oslo framework constituted an attempt to permanently return the Palestinians to the foundational condition of colonialism, the normalisation road wherein the colonial monopoly of violence is assumed to be eternal and irreversible. Upon this road, as Palestinian revolutionary Ghassan Kanafani warned, the Palestinians are forced to exist in a 'world that is not theirs.' It is the 'israeli' coloniser that holds the material power that ensures that Palestinian life can only ever be ordered against its own flourishing, in service of 'israeli' colonialism. As across much of the South, however, an 'end of history' that took as its premise a permanent colonial and imperial sovereign rule would be undone in Palestine with a return of the resistance road. In the time beyond the 'end of history,' the renewed challenge to the colonial equation of force has proven

to be irreversible, and has now opened a clear road to a liberated Palestine.

Beyond the End of History: The Return of Resistance

‘Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.’

—Frantz Fanon

The contradiction of the colonial equation of force is that it is constantly in dialectical motion with its own negation. From its inception, the colonial imposition of force seeds in the colonised territory an anti-colonial force of resistance. In this unfolding dialectic, the colonial equation seeks to constantly renew itself by imposing an even greater force with the aim of achieving a permanent repression of the anti-colonial negation. The irrepressible contradiction for the coloniser is that the anti-colonial force that re-emerges in response to each round of renewed colonial imposition grows stronger and nearer to its final aim of returning, to recall Fanon, a ‘greater violence’ that alone will make the coloniser yield.

We can see this dynamic unfolding in ‘israel’s’ invasion and occupation of Lebanon in the 1980s. The logic and tactics of colonial war used to achieve the disarming of the PLO—widespread indiscriminate bombings, siege warfare—would come to constitute the conditions for the re-emergence of the resistance road on even firmer grounds. For it was from the Lebanese Shia communities that bore the brunt of ‘israel’s’ colonial war alongside the Palestinians that would emerge an armed resistance capable of overturning ‘israel’s’ equation of force. It bears emphasising here that the Lebanese resistance

the logic of total elimination, an irreversibly eroding deterrence capacity.

The Rising Palestinian War of National Liberation Against the ‘israeli’ Colonial War of Genocide

The capacity of the Palestinian armed resistance to advance an anti-colonial equation of force was first demonstrated during ‘israel’s’ 2014 military assault on Gaza. In response to ‘israel’s’ intensification of its repression in the West Bank in the summer of 2014, and particularly of its imprisonment of hundreds of Palestinians, the armed resistance in Gaza fired rockets into ‘israel’ as a signal that such repression would not continue with impunity. ‘israel’ sought to repress the armed resistance, and restore the impunity necessary for its survival as a colonial project, by launching a military invasion of Gaza. It is here, in defence against that invasion, that the Palestinian armed resistance applied the tactics and weaponry that Hizbullah had earlier proven effective in demonstrating to ‘israel’ a new equation of force. The Palestinian resistance was able to fire rockets more persistently and deeply into ‘israel,’ the impact of which was most notably felt when it disrupted air traffic around Ben Gurion airport. Even more significantly, Palestinian fighters demonstrated the capacity to achieve tactical victories against ‘israeli’ military units in direct battle. The new equation of force was demonstrated most powerfully in a direct battle that occurred in the Shuja’iyya refugee camp during ‘israel’s’ invasion, where the Palestinian resistance deployed guerilla tactics to target and eliminate more than a dozen ‘israeli’ soldiers in a single battle. ‘israel,’ confronting here evidence of the further deterioration of its deterrence capacity, and incapable of restoring it in direct battle with the Palestinian armed resistance, turned again to its genocidal Dahiya doctrine in an attempt to

fighters, once again, commenting openly on the weak resolve of 'israeli' fighters they encountered on the battlefield. The continuing reversal of the ideological-psychological component of the equation of force proceeded in step with the material component, with Hizbullah demonstrating a stronger capacity to inflict damage on 'israeli' military equipment and fire rockets even deeper into 'israel.' 'israel's' deterrence capacity was dealt a further blow by not only its failure to achieve its stated aim of eliminating Hizbullah, but even more fundamentally through a further demonstration that the regional resistance was rising in its capacity to permanently overturn 'israel's' constitutive equation of force.

While 'israel' suffered a historic, irreversible, defeat in the 2006 summer war, it did, in the course of the conflict, formulate and apply a military doctrine that sought to restore its deterrence capacity through explicitly targeting unarmed civilians for death and civilian infrastructure for destruction in the Dahiya suburb of Beirut. The motive of doing so was to undermine the popular support that sustained Hizbullah's resistance capacity. An 'israeli' commander articulated the Dahiya doctrine as one in which 'we will wield disproportionate power...and cause immense damage and destruction. From our perspective, these [civilian neighbourhoods] are military bases...harming the population is the only means of restraining Nasrallah.' This doctrine would be applied repeatedly in the subsequent wars 'israel' periodically unleashed against Gaza over the following two decades.

What we see, then, in the period from 2006 onwards is the capacity of the rising armed resistance to re-open contestation of that which was long assumed to have been settled: the fundamental equation of force underlying 'israel's' colonial project. In overturning this equation, the armed resistance has opened, irreversibly, the road to liberation and 'israel' has responded by explicitly returning to its genocidal foundations. The massive death and destruction 'israel' has routinely visited upon Gaza is not a collateral damage of war; it is the intended outcome of a doctrine that seeks to restore, via

emerged in alliance with the PLO, and its eventual consolidation as a force capable of defeating 'israel' cannot be divorced from how it built upon and learnt from the foundations and tactics developed by the Palestinians over the course of their decades-long struggle against Zionist colonialism.

Lebanese armed resistance to the 'israeli' invasion and occupation would come to be consolidated under the leadership of Hizbullah, a Shia Islamist political organisation founded and centred upon the strategic aim of the expulsion of 'israel' from Lebanon and, even more fundamentally, the ultimate defeat of 'israel' as a colonial project through the liberation of Palestine. Over a period of two decades, as the Oslo road was being constructed on the basis of an armed 'israeli'/disarmed Palestinian equation, Hizbullah engaged in a constant refinement and enhancement of its tactics and capabilities for conducting an armed resistance that would become capable of achieving an equation of force conducive to decolonisation. Such capacities were further enhanced by the strategic depth Hizbullah gained through its role in the development of an emergent regional resistance bloc that included the backing of the Iranian revolutionary state.

By the late 1990s, Hizbullah had acquired the capacity to directly expose the limits of 'israeli' military power. This included the development and deployment of anti-tank weapons that demonstrated the capacity to transform 'israel's' hitherto feared hard power capacity to impose force—such as the Merkava tank into targets for the demonstration of the 'greater violence' of anti-colonial force. In piercing the armour of the Merkavas, Hizbullah not only set in motion the overturning of the material component of the colonial equation of force. Equally crucial here, the material transformation of force generated a further transformation in the ideological or psychological component of force. No longer could 'israeli' soldiers believe in their own invincibility and thus their capacity to inflict force upon those they occupy with impunity. Henceforth, when 'israeli' soldiers encountered Hizbullah fighters

on the battlefield their increasing psychological disbelief in their armed capacity exposed the weakness of their fighting resolve. From the other direction, the growing strength of Hizbullah's armed capacity served to demonstrate the belief and resolve of its fighters on the battlefield. Combined, the overturning of the material and ideological equation of force would make it impossible for 'israel' to continue its occupation of Southern Lebanon. In contrast, then, to the Oslo road equation, which allowed 'israel' to accelerate its theft of Palestinian lands by the turn of the millennium, the resistance road preserved and deepened by Hizbullah expelled 'israel' from Lebanon and demonstrated to Palestinians how they could construct a sovereign capacity with which to reclaim their lands.

'israel's' defeat at the hands of Hizbullah in Southern Lebanon would intensify the crisis of the Oslo paradigm in Palestine and significantly inform the emergence of a post-Oslo trajectory of armed struggle that would ultimately evolve into a rising war of national liberation. In the first instance, 'israel's' defeat in Southern Lebanon was a devastating blow to its vaunted deterrence capacity which had been central to its ideological projection of an invincible power that could be waged against any form of resistance with impunity. The capacity to stamp out resistance with overwhelming and invincible power is essential to maintaining belief in a Zionist project built upon dispossessing the Indigenous people of Palestine from their lands. Zionists have long recognised that dispossessed Palestinians would never relent in their desire to return to the homes from which they were expelled. Therefore, a powerful deterrence capacity, both in a material and psychological register, was necessary to disincentivise Palestinians from enacting their right to return and to provide Zionist settlers with the belief that they could feel secure living on stolen land. In substantially eroding this deterrence capacity, Hizbullah intensified the existential crisis of Zionist colonialism.

Frustration with the dead end of the Oslo peace process on the one hand, and the evident success of Hizbullah's strategy of armed struggle on the other, converged to significantly shape the

emergence and unfolding of the Second Intifada (2000–2005). With the outbreak of the Second Intifada occurring only four months after 'israel's' expulsion from Southern Lebanon, it was anxious to demonstrate to Palestinians that it still possessed the necessary deterrence capacity, or equation of force, to overwhelmingly suppress Palestinian resistance. It attempted to do so by violently repressing the largely non-violent tactics—e.g. demonstrations, marches—that Palestinians were using in the early stages of the Second Intifada. However, here the contradiction of the colonial equation of force once again revealed itself, as the more militant Palestinian groups, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, responded by engaging in armed resistance that would impose greater costs on 'israel' for its violent repression of unarmed Palestinian political actions. The shifting of the calculus of the costs of war would compel 'israel' to abandon its remaining settlements in Gaza, where the costs imposed by armed struggle were most acutely felt. This did not, of course, end the occupation of Gaza, as 'israel' maintained a control over the territory's land, air, and sea borders which would be ultimately used to impose a devastating blockade. It did, however, powerfully signify, again, how a change in the equation of force was central to the reclamation of Palestinian sovereign rights over their lands.

The 2006 Equation

After expelling 'israel' from Lebanon in 2000, Hizbullah continued to enhance and develop its military capacities in anticipation of a subsequent war through which 'israel' would attempt to restore its eroding deterrence capacity. The war arrived in summer 2006, when 'israel' rejected Hizbullah demands for a prisoner exchange and instead responded by conducting a total war against Lebanon with the expressed intention of eliminating Hizbullah's force capacity. 'israel' continued to prove incapable of defeating Hizbullah in direct battle during its ground invasion of Lebanon, with Hizbullah