

Zionism in Gaza's shattered mirror

For more than a hundred years since the launching of the Zionist project, the "wild" Palestinians have remained undefeated. For more than thirty years, they faced the "iron wall of British bayonets," and since 1948, they have courageously stood up against the thickening "iron wall of Jewish bayonets."

M. SHAHID ALAM

At a time when Palestinians, corralled in the ghetto of Gaza since 1948, are being relentlessly bombed, it is instructive to turn to some of the founding fathers of Zionism and ask what they might have thought about this obscene consequence of their messianic vision.

In the writings of these founding fathers, the Palestinians rarely merit even a passing reference. You can pore through one of the earliest works of the Zionist credo, Moses Hess' *Rome and Jerusalem*, but you will not find a single reference to Muslims or Arabs. Twice, the word "Palestinian" enters this venerated text; the first time, it appears in connection with the training of Jewish youth for the "life of a Palestinian farmer," and the second refers to the "Jerushalmi Palestinian Talmud Sanhedrin." Palestine always existed, inscribed on some divine tablet, as Israeli land; but there are no Palestinians.

If you search Theodore Herzl's *The Jewish State*, you come away with the same disappointing results. It contains no reference to Muslims, Arabs or Palestinians -- or even Bedouins. Incredibly, a search through Arthur Hertzberg's *The Zionist Idea*, a classic anthology of excerpts from several generations of Zionist thinkers, produced identical results.

Muslims, Arabs or Palestinians never entered into their plans for a Jewish

state. To use a term from Lawrence Davidson, this is "perceptual depopulation" of Palestine at its extreme.

Almost from the outset, the Zionists exuded power. Palestine was a thing to be bought; and if it was not for sale, they would take it by force. Twice, Rabbi Kalischer urged the head of Rothschild family and Moses Montefiore to buy Palestine -- or, at least, Jerusalem -- from the Ottoman Sultan. More than once, Theodore Herzl, too, offered to buy Palestine from the Ottoman Sultan. He was told it was not for sale.

That would not derail Zionist plans; they could persuade one or more European powers to take it for the Jews by force. In 1818, Mordecai Noah, an early American Zionist, proposed that the Jews could create their own army. Nearly all Zionists were more pragmatic: they decided to let the Europeans do it for them.

This is how Theodore Herzl laid out his plan for creating a Jewish state. "Let the sovereignty be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation; the rest we shall manage for ourselves (italics added)." Hidden in that innocuous "the rest" are the unmentionable people who inhabited Palestine. Two agencies would suffice to carry out this plan: The Society of Jews and The Jewish Company.

In the plan that Herzl worked out, The Society of Jews would "treat with the present masters of the land (the Ottomans), putting itself under the

protectorate of the European powers --" Herzl adds that the "creation of our state would be beneficial to adjacent countries," but the people living there go unmentioned.

However, Herzl does pay careful attention to more weighty matters, such as how best to get rid of the "wild beasts" in the country they would appropriate. The methods used to colonise Palestine (or Argentina) would have to be modern, using the latest technology. "It is foolish," he explains, "to revert to old stages of civilisation, as many Zionists would like to do."

Here is how the Zionists should work, Herzl explained, if they "were obliged to clear a country of wild beasts."

"We should not take spear and lance," he emphasises, "and go out singly in pursuit of bears; we should organise a large and lively hunting party, drive the animals together, and throw a melinite bomb into their midst."

It is most unlikely that Herzl was speaking -- even subconsciously, I will grant -- of the Palestinians when he explains for the benefit of Jewish colonists, how to clear their colony of "wild beasts" such as "bears."

Nevertheless, who can escape noticing the eerie parallels between the methods that he proposes to get rid of the "wild beasts" and the strategy and tactics that Jewish colonists have adopted since 1948 to clear Palestine of its indigenous population?

Already, in the 1930s, the Yishuv had created "a large and lively hunting party" called the Haganah, that would grow very quickly after 1948 into one of the most formidable militias in the world.

In 1948, this "large and lively hunting party" would launch its first massive drive to "clear" Palestine of the "wild" Palestinians. The hunting party has since worked to ensure that the "wild" Palestinian refugees would never return

to their lands. Whenever the "wild" Palestinians have ventured out of their refugee pens to re-enter or reclaim their lands, the "hunting party" has deterred them by throwing "a melinite bomb in their midst."

A second drive to clear out the "wild" Palestinians was launched in 1967, when a much-expanded "hunting party" captured all of Palestine.

After 1967, the Israeli "hunting party" began to implement a new plan for clearing out the West Bank and Gaza of the "wild" Palestinians. Eager to make room for new cohorts of Jewish settlers, the "hunting party" began to "drive... together" the "wild" Palestinians into ever-smaller enclaves within these newly acquired territories.

In Gaza, the Israeli plans began to run into difficulty with the start of the Second Intifada in 2000. The Islamist Hamas had been gaining strength in the heavily overcrowded and miserable pens to which the Palestinians had been confined since 1948. In preparation for a new approach to neutralising the besieged Palestinians, Israel adopted a new approach in 2005. It removed its "hunting party," including Jewish settlers, out of harm's way, as it moved to seal Gaza's borders, the better to throw "melinite bombs into their midst."

It is the ghastly culmination of this new strategy we have been witnessing in Gaza over the past weeks.

Israel is the crowning achievement of modernity in our times, of the rational, efficient and ruthless pursuit of power for one tribe; its success depends now, as in the past, on the massive deployment of "melinite bombs" against virtually unarmed "wild beasts."

In the words of Herzl, again, Israel seeks to complete its colonial-settler enterprise "in a bolder and more stately style than was ever adopted before, for we now possess means which men never yet possessed."

Yet, for more than a hundred years



Zionism in action?

since the launching of the Zionist project, the "wild" Palestinians have remained undefeated. For more than thirty years, they faced the "iron wall of British bayonets," and since 1948, they have courageously stood up against the thickening "iron wall of Jewish bayonets."

The Palestinians have one resource the Zionists do not have: they have justice on their side. Yet, justice has not always prevailed when it has been overmatched by brute force. America's dead natives can testify to that. That is the hope that drives Israelis; they are sustained by their conviction that they "possess means which men never yet possessed."

Perhaps, world conscience will wake up in time to convince the Zionists to the contrary. Perhaps, this can happen before it is too late, before the tide of history has turned decisively against Israel.

Israel can only be sustained if it can score repeated victories against the peoples of the Middle East -- clear,

quick and stunning victories, like those of 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1982. That has been changing, starting with Israel's unilateral retreat from Lebanon in 2000. Then there was Israel's costly and transparent failure to attain any of its objectives with the massive onslaught against Hizbullah in 2006. Israel faces another failure against Hamas now, a much weaker foe.

How will Israel save face after this? Will it persist with its attempts to destroy the Palestinians with a new generation of "melinite bombs" dispatched from the United States? Alternatively, will Israeli mothers force Israeli warmongers to make a sincere determination to make amends to the Palestinians and learn to live with them in a non-racist society?

Let us hope that Israelis -- at last -- will make the right choice.

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Religious education for the 21st century

But if the SSC and HSC syllabi were revised as mentioned above, all the government-funded Alia madrasahs could be turned into regular schools. All the regular government schools and colleges would also have the option of giving their students a thorough knowledge of the Qur'an, which a considerable number of families are likely to appreciate.

ZEEZHAN HASAN

MUCH has been written about the divide between madrasah education and standard government SSC/HSC education. However, it is worth considering this question from a fresh angle; namely, what is really valued by the public and worth retaining from the traditional madrasah approach? The answer to this question should dictate the means of unifying the various educational systems in Bangladesh.

The most valued part of madrasah education is not hard to find. Bangladesh is overwhelmingly made up of Muslims, among whom the reading

of the Qur'an is universally appreciated. Middle class households who can afford to employ a local moulavi saheb to ensure that the children of the family recite the entire Qur'an at some point. Memorisation of the Qur'an is generally acknowledged as a significant act of devotion.

So, obviously, the reading of the Qur'an, which takes place in madrasah education is fulfilling an important public service; it allows poor families which may not be able to afford the services of a private maulana to fulfill their desire to have their children recite, or even memorise, the Qur'an. However, the practice of reciting the Qur'an just by



Modernisation needed.

repeating memorised Arabic words has a big limitation; the student understands nothing.

Here is an interesting point; the

40 years in school by reading only 75 pages a year. This should show us the rational way of integrating religious education into SSC; have an optional SSC subject on the contents of the Qur'an in Bangla translation (studied from class 1 to 10).

Additionally, memorising 750 pages should easily be possible in 2 years (it requires memorising only 1 page a day). This then tells us how to integrate madrasah education into HSC; have an optional subject on the Arabic text of the Qur'an (studied during classes 11/12).

If we look at all the other traditional madrasah subjects (Arabic, Hadith, interpretation of the Qur'an/tafsir and Islamic law), it is immediately obvious that these do not have anything like the mass appeal of the Qur'an to the guardians of schoolchildren. No one hires a maulana to get children to read the Hadith. In fact, these subjects are of little use to anyone except a family law magistrate. In that case, they should not be part of basic primary or lower secondary education (class 1-10). They should be options only in

class 11 and 12.

Arabic could be particularly useful at HSC level to ensure that the many migrant workers bound for the Middle East have a decent knowledge of the local language of their employer.

But if the SSC and HSC syllabi were revised as mentioned above, all the government-funded Alia madrasahs could be turned into regular schools. All the regular government schools and colleges would also have the option of giving their students a thorough knowledge of the Qur'an, which a considerable number of families are likely to appreciate.

The religious studies teachers who would no longer be required at Alia madrasahs could simply be moved to regular schools and colleges as Qur'an teachers. And almost everyone in Bangladesh would get the same education system; except for the non-government Qawmi madrasahs and English medium schools, which are a separate matter and need to be dealt with differently.

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'We will act again'

In spite of a UN ceasefire resolution passed late last week, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni was talking tough in an interview with Newsweek's Lally Weymouth. She appeared confident that Israel had dealt a setback to Hamas, the Islamist group that governs the Gaza Strip and has been firing rockets into Israel. She warned that further provocations would be met with force.

WEYMOUTH: How does Israel respond to the pressure for a ceasefire from the global community?

LIVNI: I don't like the term "ceasefire," since it looks like an agreement between two legitimate sides. At the end of the day, this is not a conflict between two states but a fight against terror. We will continue to fight terrorism. We need to fight in Gaza because (Hamas) has targeted Israel for eight years.

Your aim is to weaken Hamas?
To weaken them and to affect their motivation. (Also, we need to stop the smuggling of weapons into Gaza).

Is the idea that Egypt will now take a more active role in stopping the smuggling?

This must be stopped by Israel or someone else. In six months Hamas has changed the range of its missiles from

20 kilometers to 50 kilometers. This now threatens 1 million Israelis.

We need to know that at the end of this military operation, we will not face the rearmament of Hamas.

Do you see the hand of Iran behind it all?

Oh, yes, clearly. When Hamas started, the missiles were made in the Gaza Strip. Now they are professional, coming from Iran.

How long do you think this operation is going to take?

It depends. We need to find out whether they understand that Israel is no longer a state they can target, while hoping for restraint. Israel is going to defend itself. Have you achieved your objectives? Some of the goals were achieved. Right now, I think they understand that the equation has changed.

Will Israel reoccupy Gaza?

The idea is not to reoccupy Gaza. When we left, Hamas used to write on billboards that terror won. Now we are coming back because of terror. Terror doesn't serve the interest of the Palestinians.

It must have been a difficult decision to send Israeli troops into Gaza by land. Yes, it was a very difficult decision, but right now it looks good.

Are you worried that Hamas will claim victory as Hassan Nasrallah (the leader of Hizbullah) did in Lebanon?

They are (hiding) underground, taken by surprise, asking Hizbullah to do something -- nobody (has) helped them. I am sure they will find a place on Al-Jazeera to claim victory. But after what we did there, it is not related to reality.

Are you thinking about stopping the operation?

We have daily meetings asking ourselves whether it is enough or not.

Does the pressure put on Israel by the international community to reach a ceasefire strengthen the hand of Hamas?

Hamas's strategy is resistance and survival. As long as they survive, this is a victory. When they know the international community is putting pressure on Israel, they can hold out, waiting for Israel to be stopped. It is a pity... (But) I cannot tell you that this is the last operation. If they target us again, we will act again. Strongly.

So that is the message to Hamas?

Yes. Israel is not going to show restraint anymore. We are going to attack strongly if they continue. We are not going to wait years or months.

Do you believe the Obama administration will support Israel the way Bush did?
I do believe that the United States and Israel share not only the same values and interests (but) the same understanding.

People in Washington are interested in what Israel's aim is.

At the end of the day, a state needs to defend itself. We are not looking to reoccupy Gaza and we do not want to control the Palestinians, but we have a situation in which... Hamas is getting stronger, while Abu Mazen (Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas) is getting weaker. The Palestinians need to understand that Israel can share and implement and translate the vision of two states for two peoples with those who accept this vision, who accept Israel's existence and renounce violence and terrorism. Hamas does not.

The only way to continue the peace process is not only by continuing the dialogue with their pragmatic leadership, but also by weakening those who are not willing to live in peace in this region. This is the strategy.

Would you say Hamas needs to be removed?

I would say that the Gaza Strip con-



Tzipi Livni (R), unabashed and unrepentant.

trolled by Hamas is a burden not only to Israel but to the Palestinians themselves. It is an obstacle on their way to creating a state, and it represents the kind of radical elements that threaten other pragmatic regimes in the region.

Do you feel you have the backing of the Arab moderates?
I don't want to embarrass anybody, but

I know I represent their interests as well. It is no longer the Israeli-Palestinian or the Jewish-Arab conflict, but it is a conflict between moderates and extremists. This is the way this region is now divided.

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