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INTRODUCTION

In the Mediterranean Region, the Palestinian Question is the oldest and the hardest to resolve. It perfectly epitomizes the settler colonial dynamic taking place in Palestine from 1897 until today, the ripple effects of the conflict affecting the stability and security of the whole Middle East and the Euro-Mediterranean area. And it is a perfect example of structural asymmetry between the powerful State of Israel and a population that has been driven out of its land or living under siege and occupation. In a certain sense, the Israeli Palestinian “conflict” is the mother of most conflicts in the region. And as Stephen Calleya¹ wisely comments: “*stability in the Middle East and across the Euro-Mediterranean area is dependent upon resolution of the Israeli Palestinian conflict*”.

If all Peace conferences, shuttle diplomacies, and all mediation efforts have pathetically failed to forge a just and lasting solution, it is mainly because of the dire misunderstanding of the root causes of the conflict, its centrality in the region and even its “global importance”, magnificently analysed by John Collins in his book “*global Palestine*”². The lethal Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, and the heartbreaking devastation of Gaza are a textbook example of this misunderstanding. The Israeli Palestinian issue is the most researched area in the world. The French historian, Henry Laurence, has written five volumes on the

Question of Palestine³. Palestinian analysts contributed largely their share. Among them the outstanding figures of Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, Elias Sanbar, Nur Masalha and many others.⁴

I wrote myself three volumes on the “*History of Palestine*” in French, in 1977, and another volume on “*Europe and Palestine: from the crusades until today*”, in 1999⁵. I do not intend therefore to rewrite another piece of history of the Question of Palestine. This essay is rather another way to look at it by offering new insights that had been poorly investigated or simply brushed aside. These insights are helpful as they can explain why the conflict:

- started (the Zionist project of a Jewish homeland in Palestine 1897)
- intensified (the Balfour Declaration 1917, The British Mandate 1922-1948, the First Palestinian Nakba of 1947-1948 and the creation of Israel 1948)
- escalated (1956 Suez Canal war, 1967 war, the 1973 October War)
- resonated (Israel’s occupation of South Lebanon 1982, Sabra and Shatila massacre 1982, the invasion of Kuwait 1990, the Oslo agreement 1993, the Israel-Hezbollah war 2006)
- rippled through the region (Iraqi invasion of Kuwait 1990, American invasion of Iraq 2003, Iran’s assertiveness, the Arab Spring 2011, Abraham Accords 2020) etc.
- and acquired, after October 7, new salience upending dynamics that defined regional politics and becoming a central issue in world affairs.

October 7 has been a horrific attack with many innocent Israelis killed, injured, or kidnapped. Personally, I do not subscribe to any attack targeting civilians. But October 7 is not the beginning of history: it is the

result of a long history of denial, dispossession, and humiliation of the Palestinian people. It is the history of 76 years of zero accountability and total immunity for Israel. Mr. Jean-Louis Bourlanges, the ex-president of the Commission of Foreign Affairs at the French National Assembly put it in a nutshell: *Hamas attack is without excuse but not without cause.*

Contextualization of October 7 is therefore of paramount importance: it is not antisemitism or justification of violence, as Israel argues. It is rather an eye-opener: as violence does not come “*in a vacuum*”, as Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary General, wisely recalled.

October 7 has shattered many illusions, on top of them that the Palestinian question is not a central issue or that Israel can pursue its merciless occupation and rampant expansion while enjoying security and peace.

October 7 is the result of the relegation of the Palestinian cause to a second -order priority in the Arab States, either because they prioritized their immediate national needs or because of their detestation of Islamist movements, like Hamas or Jihad, considered to be akin to the Moslem Brotherhood.

October 7 is also the result of the fragmentation of the Palestinian political scene, with two “governing bodies” in Ramallah (the Palestinian Authority) and in Gaza (Hamas).

October 7 is the result of the neglect of the Israeli Palestinian “conflict” by the most influential players, mainly the US and Europe, and of the inconsistency of Western diplomacy which parroted, for decades, the mantra of “peace process” and the “two-State solution», while shielding Israel and entrenching its occupation. The failure of all peace-making efforts contributed to embolden hard-right religious

and nationalist parties in Israel that call for the erasure of Palestine and to convince Islamist movements in Palestine that seeking peace with an ever-radicalized Israel is a mere fallacy.

Hopefully, the trauma produced in Israel by October 7 and the widespread devastation and severe suffering in Gaza will serve as a wake-up call. The Peace Roadmap presented by Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative, during the meeting of EU foreign Ministers on 22 January 2024, goes in the right direction, as it proposes to “” *hold a preparatory conference*” and launch not another “*Peace Process*” but a “*Two -State solution process*” that “*should lead to an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel*”.

My fear is the reiteration of tired frameworks -conferences, working groups, procrastination, and never-ending negotiations. The International community should not repeat the farce of the “Oslo Process” as the chilling situation in Gaza requires urgent remedy and a lasting solution. Already, as the UNWRA Commissioner, Philippe Lazzarini, warned: the plight of Gaza and the tragedy of its children who are killed, maimed, orphaned, traumatized, and deprived of education are “*staining our shared humanity*”⁶.

If the West in general and the EU in particular are serious about peacebuilding and the creation of a Palestinian State, then, it is high time for the Security Council to adopt a resolution enshrining a peace settlement based on two-state solution and for the USA and the EU to join the 146 nations that have recognized the State of Palestine.

My purpose here is not to engage in a contentious debate, in a sort of binary zero-sum logic. My objective is fivefold:

1. To go back to the core roots of the Palestinian Tragedy which started with the birth of the Zionist project (1897) and

culminated with the expulsion of two-thirds of the Palestinian population in 1947-1949. This forced exodus was dubbed as the first Palestinian “Nakba”, which means catastrophe. It was followed by another Palestinian exodus in the aftermath of the 1967 war. Since many decades there is a “Nakba in the making” in the occupied Palestinian territories with Settlers’ harassment, violence, land grab and displacement. And from late 2023 there is a televised on-going third Nakba in the Gaza Strip.

2. To clarify the specificity of the Israeli Palestinian conflict as it always spills over the whole region and beyond, in what I call the “ripple effect «or “the domino effect “.
3. To debunk the claim that Israel is exceptional (because of the Holocaust), that it is inherently different from all other nations, that it is a “civilized villa in a jungle of barbarism” and finally that it cannot be analysed critically or seen morally responsible.
4. To highlight the historic responsibility of the International Community, mainly Europe⁷ as it has been part and parcel of the Palestinian issue since its very beginning.
5. To call for another course of action by the West in general and Europe in particular by walking the talk and putting an end to the Palestinian Permanent Tragedy: it is a moral duty towards Israelis and Palestinians alike, and it is a political duty to commit to a lasting peace in Palestine and Israel, for the sake of the whole region and for their own interests.