

The voice of a Gaza under occupation

HINDU
Oct 27

While the conflict rages in Gaza amidst allegations and counter-allegations, and in the midst of unabashed American partiality, it is relevant to recall what the senior leader of Hamas, Mousa Abu Marzouk, told *The New Yorker* magazine (October 13) about the political approach: "We rolled down all of the pathways to get some of our rights – not all of them. We knocked on the door of reconciliation and we weren't allowed in. We knocked on the door of elections and we were deprived of them. We knocked on the door of a political document for the whole world – we said, 'We want peace, but give us some of our rights' – but they didn't let us in." He added, "We tried every path. We didn't find one political path to take us out of this morass and free us from occupation... We spoke to the Americans, Europeans and all of the people in order to achieve the Palestinian people's rights, without any benefit. Nothing has been achieved towards the idea of two states, from 1948 until today. We are a people under occupation."

Abu Marzouk added that in earlier conflicts, the Israelis waged wars outside their borders; "This is the first time that the Palestinians are crossing the borders and fighting in their historic land." The conflict has shattered the aura of invincibility.

Tel Aviv's response

The Israeli response to the Hamas attack has been to order the evacuation of the northern half of Gaza, to enforce it by a blockade, by the cutting off of food, water and electricity as also by the massing of 3,00,000 troops on Gaza's border. The objective presumably is to occupy the northern zone and expand space for new settlements. The Palestinians see it as such and recall the manner in which the state of Israel came into existence on May 14, 1948 when 6,56,000 Arabs inhabited of the Mandate Territory of Palestine were made to flee by what the historian, Paul Johnson, called (*History of the Jews*, p.521) as 'the scientific use of terror to break the will of liberal rulers'. Palestinians were thus



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There may be merit in the claim from Gaza – of a knocking on every door and trying every path, for peace, rights and freedom, but to no avail

made to pay for the genocide of Jews in Europe which was committed by Germans, not Arabs.

Nor should the ideological motivation, particularly of the present Israeli leadership, be overlooked. It has repeatedly equated the Palestinians with the Nazis who should be eliminated. This is a reiteration of what Vladimir Jabotinsky, a respected predecessor in right-wing Zionism said in 1923: Zionism 'is a colonizing adventure and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force.' He predicted that the Palestinian will not leave his land unless confronted 'by a wall of Jewish bayonets so that a new race, proud, generous and cruel, shall arise.'

The reality of this perception has been reinforced by decades of connivance by world powers. Innumerable United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions have remained unimplemented. Each reiterated the earlier ones and some even indicated new goalposts; each sought to explain away the guilt of the culprits. Resolution 2334 of December 2016, for instance, outlawed all settlement activity and reiterated the desirability of implementing the two-state solution.

A departure from the UNSC route was attempted in September 2020 by the Abraham Accords seeking, piously, to 'end radicalization and conflict' while ignoring the causes of both. An expectation of expanding the ambit of both has not materialised.

No more invincible

Israel's objectives for the Gaza operation have been officially identified with precision: toppling Hamas and destroying its military capabilities; eliminating the threat of terrorism emanating from the Gaza strip; exerting maximum pressure to find a solution to the hostage issue, and defending the borders of the state and its citizens. These would require going into Gaza. Informed Arab columnists like Abdel Bari Atwan are of the opinion that the most recent fighting has deprived Israel of its two most effective weapons: its scariness and its deterrent power. Such a move, he says, would be more far reaching than Ehud Olmert's foray and Ariel Sharon's venture.

The response of the United States and some of its allies to the present crisis raises the question of motivation. Did they know more about the chink in Israel's armour? Did they apprehend the implications of conflict going beyond Gaza and its adverse impact on Israel?

Pertinent questions

The prognosis of Thomas L. Friedman in *The New York Times* of October 16, 2023 sheds light on the prospects: "If Israel goes into Gaza now, it will blow up the Abraham Accords, further destabilize two of America's most important allies (Egypt and Jordan) and make normalization with Saudi Arabia impossible – huge strategic setbacks. It will also enable Hamas to really fire up the West Bank and get a shepherd's war going there between Jewish settlers and Palestinians. Altogether, it will play directly into Iran's strategy of sucking Israel into imperial overstretch and in that way weakening the Jewish democracy from within."

Friedman adds: "While Biden is right to support Israel, he must get clear answers from Netanyahu now, before it's too late: Once Israel topples Hamas, who will govern Gaza? If Israel intends to govern Gaza, will it pay for the rebuilding of the infrastructure that it is destroying? And if not, who will? How long does Israel intend to allow the humanitarian crisis to unfold in southern Gaza? Does Israel plan to build settlements in Gaza? Does Israel respect Gaza's borders? Does it have a plan to help rebuild the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank?"

U.S. President Joe Biden was emphatic in his condemnation of Hamas for the responsibility of the hospital attack. Its timing is yet to be established and Professor Anthony H. Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies is of the opinion that the only way to convince those who do not take sides is to establish some form of international investigation that is led by nations or individuals who are credible.

Clearly, there may be merit in Abu Marzouk's claim. Hasty resort to partiality may not be the option.