

Palestine Still Unbowed



The last issue of *AWTW* featured a lengthy analysis of the situation of Palestine as the Palestinian people went into year two of what is known as the Second Intifada. The intensity and turbulence of the situation in Palestine has continued throughout 2002. At the heart of events has been the continuing refusal of the Palestinian people to surrender their struggle and acquiesce to the dictates of the US imperialists and their Zionist underlings. In June, US President Bush, who is vigorously promoting US aggression under the signboard of the “war against terrorism”, openly demanded that the Palestinian people get rid of Yasir Arafat and elect a leader acceptable to the US ... or else. The entire world was thus treated to the sight of these so-called champions of democracy contemptuously trying to overturn the results of the most recent Palestinian elections, which were widely declared legitimate by international observers, including former US President Jimmy Carter, because the outcome no longer conforms to their imperial interests. This is in line with the long history of these arrogant overlords, who try to overthrow democratically elected leaders who

do not conform with their interests – like Chile’s Salvador Allende, or most recently Venezuela’s Chavez – and then turn around and try to overthrow other political leaders they don’t like on the grounds that they are not “democratically elected”.

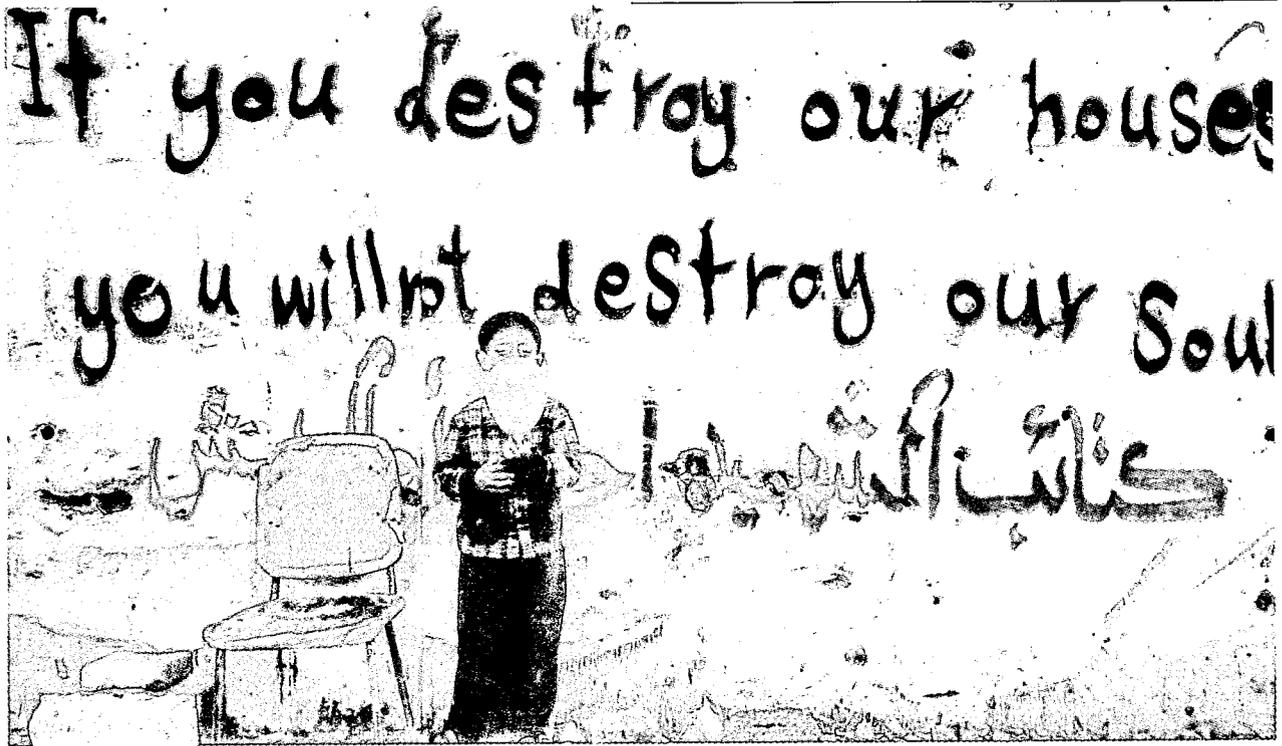
Bush’s two-faced bullying also says a great deal about the US’s “mini-state” solution. First, this is a solution designed to keep the Palestinian people in impotent South African apartheid-style bantustans [see *AWTW* 28/2002]. Now the US is also making it perfectly clear that the key criterion for US acceptance of this plan is that the Palestinian leadership accept being a cog in the wheel of a US-dominated Middle East in which Israel, built on the expropriation of the national rights of the Palestinian people, will play the central role.

IMPERIALIST HYPOCRISY

The world is also now being treated to the sight of the US rulers invoking Iraqi violations of UN resolutions as justification for a large-scale war, while studiously ignoring the fact that their client state of Israel is itself in flagrant violation of

numerous United Nations resolutions starting in 1948. But the blatant hypocrisy of this stand is in fact of no great concern to the US or Israeli rulers. They are making only the slightest pretence these days of abiding by international law or any kind of internationally recognised universal standards, and instead are adopting the age-old tact of bullies everywhere: “might makes right”. For Bush and the US media, terrorism is whatever they say it is, never mind the reality. Israeli bulldozers and tanks have destroyed some 20,000 homes in blatant violation of international law, Israel’s helicopters fire on crowds and its jets bomb cities, it has been condemned over and over again by human rights groups for torture in the prisons – yet in the eyes of the US rulers and media, none of this has anything to do with “terrorism”, while every incident of Palestinian resistance is loudly condemned.

In the current situation, the continuing resistance of the Palestinian people has been an especially sharp thorn in the side of the US. Their struggle punctures the lie that US war moves in Iraq have anything to do with “justice” and “human rights” by showing the brutal reality of life



ABOVE LEFT: Youth on the front lines, Jenin.

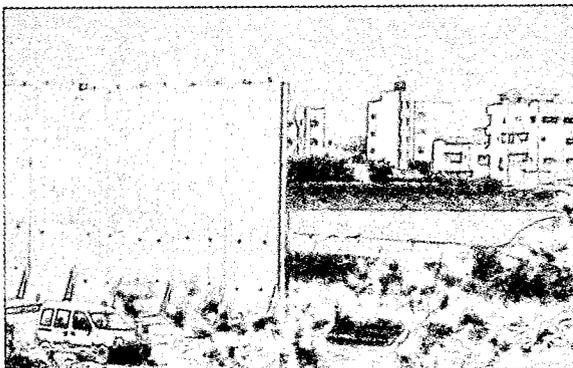
ABOVE: Jenin.

RIGHT: Israeli troops search for militants at a shop in Hebron, West Bank. 11 November 2002.

BELOW RIGHT: Sharon's walls around Palestinian cities greatly exceed in size the former Berlin Wall in Germany.

under the US client regime of Israel.

Indeed, Israel has been doing its utmost to further tighten its grip on Palestine and enforce peace at gunpoint. One of the ways it is doing this is through the ongoing expansion of what are termed the "illegal" settlements (because they violate international law and UN resolutions against settling in militarily occupied territories). They have continued to set up these illegal settlements at more or less the same pace under Labour and Likud government alike. The ever greater presence of Israeli settlers scattered at strategic points throughout the territories has meant stepped-up vigilante actions against the Palestinians, as every incident involving Palestinians leads to multiple acts of revenge against Palestinian civilians. The increasing number of settlers is also being used by the Israeli government to "create



facts on the ground". Despite claims to the contrary, Israeli government policy continues to encourage illegal settlement by offering certain privileges, as well as lower taxes and rents. During each round of negotiations, the Israeli leaders then agree to withdraw a certain number of settlers, while leaving ever-greater numbers of settlers occupying Palestinian land.

ISRAELI INFIGHTING

The unyielding Palestinian resistance has generated fierce infighting among the Israeli ruling class over how to proceed. As we go to press in November 2002, the Labour Party of Simon Perez has left the government and Prime Minister Sharon's government has been forced to call new elections. Regardless of their outcome, however, the Israeli state is sure to intensify its attacks on the Palestinians and to seek to institutionalise new levels of repression. Where once every incursion of Israeli troops into the territory that had been allotted the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo "peace accords" provoked an international outcry, now the Israeli armed forces routinely go in and out of what is internationally recognised as Palestinian territory, and have even begun to set up a semi-permanent military base there.

The heightened Israeli repression has had dramatic consequences on the life of the Palestinian people. The vice-like grip of the Israeli occupiers on the West Bank and Gaza Strip is strangling the Palestinian economy and the people themselves. Living conditions are steadily being eroded. It is estimated that today almost half the children in the West Bank and Gaza are malnourished. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been pushed down below the official poverty line in the wake of Israeli attempts to crush the Second Intifada. The impoverishment of the Palestinians is in part because the Israelis are closing down transport and communications at random intervals and an increasing pace, making it impossible to carry on business and trade. In these

conditions, foreign investment has all but dried up. One Palestinian commentator said, "What the Israelis are doing is nothing but slow genocide".

The Western imperialists and Zionist rulers have always tried to hide the suffering of the Palestinian people caused by the unjust Israeli seizure of Palestine. This is reflected most notably in the Zionist slogan, "a land without a people for a people without a land", used to justify the dispossession of the Palestinian people. Recently, however, Israeli willingness to use the military superiority provided by their US backers to terrorise the Palestinian population has reached new depths. Western mythology eulogises the image of the methodical, efficient Mossad agent who kills cleanly and silently, but the real face of how Israel ensures its domination is revealed every day in the tanks that blow away 10-year-old boys with slingshots and the F-16s that screech overhead and rain down bombs on ghettos. In one recent incident, a US-supplied jet dropped a one-tonne bomb on Gaza City, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, in an effort to kill a Hamas leader. The inevitable result: 10 people killed, including children as well as innocent men and women. Sharon publicly hailed this as "a big success".

THE BIGGEST PRISON WALL ON EARTH

In Autumn 2002, the Israeli government began to build a gigantic steel and cement wall to enclose the West Bank. At eight metres high, this wall is three times higher than the infamous wall that once separated east and west Berlin that the Western imperialists so loudly denounced. There is also a three metre deep trench running alongside it. The Israelis are claiming this wall is an effort to separate the two peoples, and that "good fences make good neighbours". But this fence line represents a further Israeli encroachment on Palestinian land. Indeed, much of the wall is being constructed some 200-600 metres inside the territory of the

West Bank, so that it will in effect shift a substantial amount of Palestinian land directly into Israeli hands. It is also being diverted in a number of places to enclose Israeli settlements and in particular to fence in the vital aquifer at Q'aaliya, a major source of Palestinian water. Establishing control over these water resources, which have been in Palestinian hands, would give Israel a grip on the jugular vein of the Palestinian economy and the very lives of its people. This monstrous fortification in fact represents an effort to literally turn the West Bank into a huge prison complex for the Palestinians.

In recent months many different social forces around the world have adamantly demanded some kind of fundamental change in the situation of the Palestinian people. Protests of tens and even hundreds of thousands in defence of the Palestinian people have been held not only in the Arab world, but also in the streets of London and other Western capitals. Yet the US rulers have contemptuously ignored the pressure.

There is no reason to believe that the situation of the Palestinian people might somehow improve as the US closes in on Saddam Hussein. On the contrary. The basic premise of US policy is that by "taking out" the Iraqi regime and replacing it with US puppets, as they have in Afghanistan, they will achieve a major transformation of power relations in the Middle East and secure themselves unprecedented hegemony there. By their brutal display of force, and by taking over direct control of Iraq and its oil resources themselves, they hope to use their heightened power to intimidate, roll over and outright crush other recalcitrant forces and regimes in the region, not least of all the Palestinian resistance.

The Israeli reactionaries are already gearing up for this new situation. An important section of the Israeli ruling class believes that the US imperialists' grab for power in the region will offer them an unprecedented opportunity to "solve the Palestinian problem" in a more lasting and favourable way than ever.

Exactly what this means remains to be seen, and developments in Palestine will depend greatly on what happens as the US steps up its aggression against Iraq. But it is clear that at the top of the Zionists' agenda is "regime change" for the Palestinian people too. This means setting up a more compliant Palestinian governmental façade, intensified repression of the Palestinian people and legitimisation of a large part of the "illegal settlements" in the West Bank and Gaza. It might even possibly include an attempt to expel large numbers of Palestinian people from historic Palestine.

Expulsion has long been on the agenda of the "extreme right" in Israel. But in recent years these forces have gained greater power in the Israeli government, in parallel with the rise of a more aggressive, repressive agenda within the US ruling class as well. Such forces have recently been elevated to Cabinet level. The ultra-right wing Benjamin Netanyahu, who was just brought into the Sharon government as Foreign Minister, has declared that war on Iraq would give the Israelis "a good opportunity to get rid of Arafat". Even more shamelessly, the option of "expulsion" is now being treated as a respectable topic of debate in Israeli society and even in the pages of the Western press. Consider the Israeli historian Benny Morris, who came to prominence when he used his access to Israeli archives to document Zionist violence employed to drive out the original Palestinian inhabitants when Israel was created in 1948. Now he has taken a reactionary turn and argues in the British "left of centre" daily *Guardian* that expulsion would at least bring a halt to the "cycle of violence" that has engulfed both peoples. While the imperialist media still tries to portray Israel as a tiny "democratic outpost of Western civilisation" surrounded by a sea of backward Arab fundamentalists – even though it now has the fourth strongest military in the world, thanks overwhelmingly to US aid – the following is worth contemplating: what other country

would be allowed to make an explicit argument for mass ethnic cleansing in the pages of the Western press?!

There is a need as never before to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Palestinian people and oppose any imperialist-sponsored attacks. The imperialists and Zionists are seeking any excuse for escalation, and if a suitable one does not appear, they may well fabricate something to justify the bloody crimes they have already planned. The Zionists have long used the crimes committed by the Nazis against Jews in the Second World War as a blank cheque to give themselves the right to carry out towering crimes against the Palestinians – much as the US is trying to use the 11 September events to legitimise a whole series of attacks on the people of the world and reshape the world in its interests. It is worth noting that Marek Edelman, one of the two main military leaders of the 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising, recently wrote an open letter comparing the Palestinian people's struggle to that of the Jews against the Nazis.

The escalating Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people have not only been met by unyielding Palestinian resistance, but have also brought forth resistance from within Israeli society itself. Some 500 Israeli reservists have now signed a declaration that they will not serve in the West Bank or Gaza, and 40 of them are currently being held in jail. The large official Israeli "peace camp" Peace Now has also stepped up its activity, and recently held a series of large protests under a slogan calling for finding a way to "end the occupation" and "return to ourselves". But what does it mean for Israeli society to "return to ourselves"? To what point in Israel's history would Peace Now like to return – the 1950s, just after the Zionists drove almost a million Palestinians out of their homes and land at gunpoint? Or how about 1967, when with the aid of US jets and tanks Israel seized the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza? The myth of the kibbutz (co-operative) farmer who peacefully tills his own land without harming a soul hides the same dark truth as the myth of the US

southern gentlemen did in the days of slavery – that their society is built on the expropriation of another people. No amount of myth making can hide this cold truth.

**SUPPORT THE PALESTINIAN
PEOPLE'S JUST STRUGGLE**

The challenges facing the Palestinian people today are unprecedented and the danger of some kind of attempt at large-scale expulsion is real. But this is not the nineteenth century, where the reactionary powers could wage bloody campaigns against isolated peoples and deal with them largely away from the gaze of the world. Today there are a million threads that bind the struggle of the Palestinian people to that of the rest of the world's oppressed, and these the imperialists can never break. The struggle of the Palestinian people today can only advance by going up against imperialism, and it is thus tightly bound up with the advance of the world proletarian revolution.

As the US imperialists gear up for war against Iraq, they are puffed up and seeking to secure unprecedented global hegemony, and the Israelis are eagerly marching alongside to claim their share of the spoils of war – which for them means first of all achieving a longer-term "solution" to the "Palestinian problem". But in stretching for new heights of regional and global domination, the US, along with its faithful Zionist attack dog, may well be over-reaching their actual capabilities. The Palestinian cause and its symbols such as wearing the *keffiyeh* chequered scarf have been already taken up by a great many young people as their own. The imperialists' aggression against the Iraqi people and the heightening attacks on the Palestinians that are sure to go along with it will provoke rage and opposition throughout the world and will surely bring into being new conditions for advancing the struggle for revolution and national liberation in Palestine and elsewhere in the region. ■