

A New Trajectory for the Region

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Global Research, May 19, 2023

[The Jordan Times](#) 17 May 2023

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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Palestinian Nakba Day commemorations at the UN and the lifting of Syria's suspension from the Arab League have altered the trajectory of events in this region.

The May 15th first-ever Nakba Day events at UN headquarters have, at long last, acknowledged that the UN treated the Palestinian people unjustly when the General Assembly voted in November 1947 — under strong US pressure — to partition their country into two states. The “Arab State” was allocated 45 per cent of Palestine, the “Jewish state” 55 per cent. At that time, Palestinians were 1.3 million strong, two-thirds of the population of their country, while the 630,000 European Jewish immigrants amounted to one-third and owned only 7 per cent of the land. The proposed “Arab State” would have had a Palestinian population of 725,000 (99 per cent) and 10,000 Jews (1 per cent); the “Jewish State” would have had 498,000 Jews (55 per cent) and 407,000 Palestinians (45 per cent). This was, from the start, an unworkable plan which was designed to enable Britain to desert the land for which it secured a mandate in 1920, having trained and armed Jewish paramilitaries to both defend their communities and take whatever land they wanted. Minus Palestinians, of course.

The division of the land and disposition of the two major populations was unacceptable to the Zionists who used their underground army (Haganah) to systematically seize land intended for the Palestinian state and expel its population. Israel's war of establishment which began before May 15th, 1948, ended in 1949 with the conquest of 78 per cent of Palestine while Jordan came to administer East Jerusalem and the West Bank (21 per cent) and Egypt Gaza (1 per cent). In 1967, Israel completed the conquest of Palestine and extended to these areas the a augmented version of the apartheid system already imposed on Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The harsh facts of the Palestinian case have been largely suppressed or dismissed since the Nakba but brave politicians, officials, journalists and activists from many countries, including Israel, have become acquainted with the Palestinians' cause had have done their utmost —

often at considerable personal expense — to tell their story. Unfortunately, it has taken people across the globe decades to listen.

On Monday evening, supporters of the Palestinian cause gathered in the UN General Assembly's grand hall to listen to music and testimonies and view photos and videos conveying the Palestinian experience during these 75 deadly, destructive, trying, and tragic years. This was a key event in the long campaign to overcome hostility to Palestinians generated by the Zionists, Israelis and their uncritical supporters who want to erase the Nakba and deny the Palestinians their identity and right to self-determination. Israel and its chums know that even the mention of Palestine and Palestinians has the effect of undermining Israel's legitimacy.

Earlier in the day, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas — a refugee from Safad in Palestine — called on the UN to revoke Israel's membership due to its treatment of the Palestinians. He did not, however, say that Israel is the only UN member admitted on condition that it would abide by General Assembly resolutions 181 — the partition plan restricting the "Jewish state" to 55 per cent of Palestine — and 194 — which called on Israel to repatriate Palestinian refugees and compensate them for their losses.

UN agencies, relief organisations, investigators, journalists, and others are now ready to speak openly about the Palestinians and their terrible fate. Thanks to Israel's B'Tselem rights organisation which first demonstrated that Israel has adopted the illegal practice of apartheid for dealing with the Palestinians, this has been picked up by Human Rights Watch the Amnesty International and other rights organisations.

The vote on May 8th by Arab League foreign ministers to rehabilitate Syria has taken early effect. Syrian ministers of the economy and foreign trade have attended the May 15th Jeddah meeting of the League's Economic and Social Council which is making preparations for the Arab Summit tomorrow. The invitation issued by Saudi Arabia to Syrian President Bashar Assad to attend the Summit has given a major boost to the Emirati-Saudi effort to return Syria to the Arab fold and bring Assad in from the cold. The Emirates, which reopened its Damascus embassy in 2018, has followed up the Saudi invitation with an invitation to Assad to attend the climate summit (COP28) to be held in Dubai from November 30 to December 12. If he attends, Assad will be in the company of Western leaders who continue to call for his ouster and impose sanctions on Syria although such measures are illegal as they constitute collective punishment under international law.

These two developments herald the re-establishment of Palestine as an international cause and issue to be resolved and the rehabilitation of Syria in the Arab region, which must initiate the process of Syria's normalisation with ostracising and sanctioning Western powers.

They cannot continue to ignore either Palestine or Syria. Individual Palestinians have mounted their personal intifadas against Israeli rule and are dying while fighting Israeli troops and colonists at an average rate of a Palestinian a day. Post-war Syria's absence at the centre of the Eastern Arab World weakens and destabilises the entire region and undermines Arab efforts to end regional rivalries and conflicts in order to focus on economic development and social advancement.

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