

OCCUPATION? OPPRESSION? LOOK AGAIN! by Si Frumkin

"In wounded Palestine, the resistant Palestinian people are still suffering from oppression and occupation, deprived of their right to independence and to have a country." King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, March 28, 2007

Oh yeah?

Actually, the people who lived there have been living under occupation for many centuries. For the last several hundred years, under the Ottoman Turks, then, after World War I, under the British. Between 1948 and 1967 the West Bank and East Jerusalem were occupied and ruled by Jordan, and the Gaza Strip by Egypt. There was never "independence or having a country". It was never mentioned, discussed, demanded or offered. This was the situation for about 20 years, until 1967.

During that time there was no trade or other contacts between the two sides. Arabs did not have jobs in Israel, visit Israel or buy Israeli goods. All Jews who had lived in the West Bank, Gaza or East Jerusalem were expelled without compensation and banned from even praying at the sacred Jewish sites in Jerusalem.

But all of this has been forgotten. What is acknowledged – this is what you read in the media, see on TV and learn in college - is that in 1967 Israel won the 6-Day War and occupied the territories whose populations – henceforth known as "Palestinians" - were oppressed, impoverished, persecuted and ruled by the cruel, racist and tyrannical Zionists.

This should have been exposed as evil and ridiculous nonsense a long time ago because it is just that: nonsense! But it was – and still is - believed by millions of intelligent but ignorant people. This isn't really surprising; in the Middle East facts do not create reality, rhetoric and fantasies do.

And to quote Albert Einstein, "Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I am not sure about the universe." The Middle East is often described as the place where civilization was born and wisdom was generated. The problem is that all of that wisdom was used up over the millennia and the

region is now the ultimate repository of inexplicable, boundless and incomprehensible stupidity.

So, let's take a look at the facts of the oppressive and cruel Israeli occupation, OK?

- In 1967, when the “cruel occupation” began, most of the working age population in the territories was unemployed, living on international humanitarian handouts.
- Within 20 years, close to 2000 industrial plants, employing almost half of the work force were established. The number of Palestinians employed in Israel rose from zero in 1967 to 66,000 in 1975, and 109,000 by 1986; this accounted for 35% of the employable population in the West Bank and 45% in Gaza.
- During the 1970s, the West Bank and Gaza constituted the fastest growing economy in the world – ahead of such “wonders” as Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea, and substantially ahead of Israel itself. The GNP expanded tenfold between 1968 and 1991 from \$165 to \$1,715 – *compared to Jordan's \$1,050, Egypt's \$600, Turkey's \$1,630 and Tunisia's \$1,440*. By 2000, Palestinian per-capita income was almost *double Syria's, more than 4 times Yemen's, and ten times that of Jordan*.

But man doesn't live by bread – or earnings - alone – what about health, education, living conditions?

- During Israeli occupation, mortality rates fell by more than 2/3rds. Life expectancy rose from 48 years in 1967 to 72 in 2000 (compared to 68 in all Middle East and North Africa). Infant mortality was reduced from 60:1000 live births in 1967 to 15: 1000 in 2000 (*Iraq-64; Egypt – 40; Jordan – 23; Syria – 22*).
- In 1986, 92.8% of West Bank and Gaza had electricity around the clock as compared to 20.5% in 1967; running water in dwellings: 85% in 1986 and 16% in 1967; gas ranges: 83.5% in 1986 and 4% in 1967.
- The number of school children grew by 102%, number of classes by 99% - while the population grew only by 28%! By 1990, there were 7

universities where there were none before and illiteracy dropped to 14% of adults (*Morocco-69%; Egypt – 61%; Tunisia – 45%; Syria – 44%*).

And so on, and so forth – life was better, people were healthier and better off – so what's the problem, you may ask? Is this what a cruel and oppressive occupation is?

And how have things changed since the current intifada began?

Here is a quote Salam Fayyad, the minister of finance in the Palestinian unity government in a L.A. Times column on March 31, 2007: "*Today, almost two-thirds of the Palestinian population lives in poverty, with per-capita income at 60% of its level in 1960.*" So wasn't it stupid to kill the Israeli cow?

Well, if you believe Einstein, human stupidity can be infinite, especially in the Middle East. In a recent article I quoted the joke about the man who is upset that his neighbor has a cow and he doesn't. He asks God for help? When an angel shows up and asks if he would like God to give him a cow he scoffs: "No. Just kill the neighbor's cow, OK?" The joke is much more sad than funny because it is so very true.

There was a recent "feces tsunami" in Gaza. A sewage reservoir collapsed and flooded the area. People drowned in their own feces because the system hadn't been repaired or maintained. I now expect a campaign to blow up Israeli waste processing plants in retribution. I also am sure that the offer of help from the Israeli army will not be accepted or appreciated, and that expensive weapons, rockets, antitank mines and explosive devices will continue to be purchased while the population drowns in its own toxic waste.

Another recent evidence of infinite stupidity is the destruction of hothouses built and managed by Israel that provided flowers and fruit for export to Europe and elsewhere. They were purchased by well-meaning American Jews and transferred to the Palestinians in pristine condition only to be destroyed, mutilated and stripped when the Israelis withdrew.

Israeli withdrawals and corrupt self-rule brought the conditions almost all the way back to where they were prior to 1967, when occupied by their Arab Muslim brothers. Currently, a major complaint by Palestinians and their supporters is that

Israel will not permit them to freely work in Israel where they tend to blow up innocent Jews. Hardly anyone asks how they coped during the time when not one Arab from the territories worked in Israel, enjoyed Israeli medical help, or attended Israeli universities.

No one asks why Jews are not allowed to live, work and provide jobs in Arab territories – it is taken for granted that this is so obvious that it needs not be discussed. And there is international criticism when Israel builds a fence to protect its citizens from suicide bombers and uses foreign workers from Africa, China and Philippines to replace the Palestinians who had overwhelmingly elected a terrorist organization to lead them.

It is sad indeed that the Arabs appear to prefer losing the cow they already had, in fact, one that was given them by Israel, in order to, at any cost, destroy the Israeli cows.

Einstein was right. Human stupidity is infinite.

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