

PALESTINE: MEDIA BIAS & THE MISSING CONTEXT

It is admittedly difficult to know what to believe regarding the Israeli-Palestine conflict, given the incredible inadequacy of mainstream media sources, as well as the vested interest of politicians in public ignorance and complacency. Newspaper and television media repeatedly ignore important human rights issues, or offer their own “context” which bares little resemblance to reality. A prominent example of this is the portrayal of Israel as a “helpless” or “besieged” victim, surrounded by “hostile” Arabs poised to destroy “the Jews.” The fact that 3-4 times the casualties are Palestinian civilians is rarely mentioned, though critical to understanding the real nature of the conflict. Viewers without direct personal connections to the issue, or with little time to carry out their own research projects, are overly influenced by media and government perspectives.

Media bias and racism is reflected in obvious ways (these are by no means exclusive):

- Fear of using the very word “occupation;”
- Relentless use of loaded terms such as “extremist” or “fanatic” or “terrorist” to describe Palestinian resistance to an illegal occupation;
- Repeatedly ascribing less-than-human or irrational motivations for Arab behaviour;
- Uncritical acceptance of U.S. and Israeli government perspectives;



- Immediate suspicion of Arab or Muslim sources;
- Trivializing Arab deaths by blaming or ignoring the victims.
- Suggesting that Palestinians are only killed in “crossfires” (where blame is ambiguous), or as “unintended collateral damage,” whereas Israeli deaths are consistently assigned blame, and condemned as “murder.”



SUGGESTED READINGS

One of the most important tasks of CanPalNet-Winnipeg is to offer an alternative perspective, one that rarely enters mainstream discussion and debate. We encourage people to read for themselves, to question sources, and to develop informed and independent opinions. We recommend the following to stimulate debate and aid further research:

- Nicholas Guyatt, *The Absence of Peace: Understanding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (1998)
- Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (2000)
- Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle* (2000, revised & expanded edition)
- Nur Masalha, *Imperial Israel & the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion* (2000)
- Norman Finkelstein, *Rise & Fall of Palestine: A Personal Account of the Intifada* (1996)
- Roane Carey (ed.), *The New Intifada: resisting Israel's Apartheid* (2001)
- Israel Shahak & Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (1999)
- Or try ZNet's very current Middle East Watch site:
<http://www.zmag.org/meastwatch/meastwat.htm>

CONTACT INFORMATION

For information on upcoming events, booking speakers for workshops or panels, or how to get involved, e-mail us at canpalnet-wpg@a-zone.org. For more info, visit www.canpalnet.ca or www.palsolidarity.org or www.electronicintifada.net.

Canada-Palestine Support Network

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WHO IS THE CANADA-PALESTINE SUPPORT NETWORK (WPG)?

CanPalNet-Winnipeg is a volunteer, not-for-profit, solidarity network, made up of concerned citizens and activists living in Winnipeg. Our membership strives to be diverse, and includes Jews, Arabs, Euro-Canadians, muslims, christians, atheists, young and old, men and women, radicals and just plain ordinary folk. We believe that social justice is more important than patriotism or ethnic allegiance — and we welcome new people, regardless of background.

CanPalNet-Winnipeg is not affiliated with any political party, nor does it side with either the Israeli government or the Palestinian Authority (PA). Our principal commitment is to human rights and Palestinian self-determination, and we condemn both Israeli and PA policies which violate these commitments. We believe in the right to resist aggression and occupation, including by means of armed insurrection if necessary (a right recognized by international law). We support the ongoing *intifada* (uprising) of ordinary Palestinians against occupation, dispossession, state terror, exploitation, and racist discrimination.



Photo: A massive concrete wall is being built around the Gaza Strip, making it the largest prison on Earth.



Photo: “Star Over Bethlehem?” An Israeli military flare and rocket light up the sky over the Christian Holy Site.

WHAT DO WE DO ?

CanPalNet-Winnipeg exists to combat media racism and bias in Canada, and to raise awareness about the real cost of Israeli military occupation, human rights violations, as well as the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. We raise funds to aid families and refugees displaced by Israel’s illegal war and expansion into the Occupied Territories (East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza).

Some of our activities include:

- Organizing rallies & demos to protest the crimes of the occupation;
- Conducting workshops and panels to discuss Middle East peace;
- Writing letters to media and politicians;
- Performing “urgent actions” to highlight (and help curb) human rights violations;
- Planning social & cultural events;
- Raising funds for Palestinian refugees;
- Engaging in directed civil disobedience to raise the “social costs” of Israeli apartheid;
- Sending people to support the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) in the Occupied Territories.

BUILDING A MEANINGFUL PEACE

The U.S.-led Middle East “Peace Process” is a sham. No informed observer believes that the United States is a neutral, let alone “honest broker.” The U.S. has always backed the stronger party (Israel) for its own geo-political interests, at the expense of the indigenous people of the region (the Palestinians).

Since the Oslo Agreement of 1993, Palestinian hopes have steadily deteriorated in the face of ongoing settlement, continuing dispossession and degradation, sky-rocketing unemployment, and plummeting standards of living. Israel has repeatedly postponed its promised withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, and has instead expanded its illegal settlements at an unprecedented rate. Its objective has clearly been to create “facts on the ground” which will prejudice both the “final status” talks with the Palestinians, as well as international opinion.

The experience of the last seven years demonstrates clearly that Oslo was never a just solution to the Palestinian question. Its failures are ones of *design*, rather than execution — and the violence of recent months is a *symptom* of the breakdown of peace, rather than its cause. It’s clear that the Israeli conception of Palestinian “self-rule” resembles the *bantustans* of South Africa, more than real self-determination.

Lasting peace in Israel-Palestine must include (at minimum) a return to UN resolution 242 (& other resolutions supporting Palestinian self-determination); complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territory (including East Jerusalem); international peacekeepers to mitigate violence; a complete freeze on (& eventual removal of) settlements; full right of return for Palestinian refugees; reparations for war crimes & dispossession during *Al-Nakbah* (the Catastrophe) & the 1967 occupation; shared sovereignty of holy sites; arms sales to Israel contingent upon human rights & ending the Occupation; and support for a genuine, territorially- and economically-viable state (i.e., contiguous land, control over borders and mobility, not to mention security, water and other resources, citizenship, and foreign policy.)