

International Progress Organization



Organisation Internationale pour le Progrès

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**SELF-DETERMINATION VS. REALPOLITIK:
PALESTINE AND THE ELUSIVE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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The Palestinian Issue – Where to

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OUTLINE

“(…) the precondition of peace is justice. When we have achieved justice we will have achieved peace in the Near East.”

King Hussein I, Address to the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 26 June 1967

In spite of lofty declarations by the victors of World War I, self-determination was effectively denied to the people of Palestine when the territory was put under British Mandate, almost a century ago (although Palestine was classified as category [A] territory by the League of Nations, which meant an expectation of early independence). The incorporation of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 into the wording of the Mandate constituted a blatant violation of the League’s professed commitment to self-determination and destroyed the very credibility of the mandatory régime. (The Declaration’s proviso that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine” was never acted upon.)

70 years ago, upon the end of the British Mandate, the Jewish people invoked the right to self-determination. Its implementation – by use of armed force – meant the denial of that very right to the Arab people in Palestine, and the expulsion from their homeland. Although the United Nations Organization, through the General Assembly’s “Partition Plan” of 1947, had envisaged self-determination for both, the Jewish and Arab peoples in Palestine, the world organization was an impotent observer of events in 1948 and has remained so in the years that followed. The paralysis of the Security Council – due to the veto provision of the UN Charter, an instrument of power politics of the victors of World War II – made it effectively impossible to reverse the Israeli aggression and revoke the expulsion of the native population. Because of this provision, no binding (i.e. coercive) Chapter VII resolutions have ever been adopted since the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The inefficiency of the collective security system of the UN became painfully obvious in the adoption of resolution 242 (1967) as of several other resolutions, the most recent one 2334 of 23 December 2016. All these resolutions did only “affirm” or “reaffirm,” by reference to the UN Charter’s “principles,” the illegality of Israeli occupation, annexation, etc., but – not being based on Chapter VII – did not trigger the coercive powers of the Council.

This will continue to be the case as long as the position of the most influential member of the Security Council – the United States – does not change. There must be no illusion about one basic fact of realpolitik: As regards the Palestinian issue, that country’s policy is essentially determined by the dynamics of *domestic politics*. In the meantime, the situation has become much more serious. Through occupation, annexation and the creation of ever more and larger Jewish settlements, Israel has pursued

a policy of *faits accomplis*. Lacking a credible commitment to *justice*, the so-called “Peace Process,” initiated after the Gulf War of 1991 and the regional Arab crisis that resulted from it (i.e. in a period of Arab weakness), has reached a dead end. One of the main reasons of this stalemate is that a country that is aligned with an occupying power – a party to an international dispute – can never be a credible peace mediator. This has also been the problem of the so-called “Middle East Quartet.” Furthermore, because of weakness and disunity in the Arab and wider Muslim world, the old colonial policy of *divide et impera* (divide and rule), a legacy of the Sykes-Picot Agreement upon the end of World War I, is now again being applied. Largely due to the unresolved Palestinian problem, the entire Middle East is undergoing a period of profound instability and disintegration.

It is easy to state the requirements of a solution: namely, implementation of all UN resolutions and respect of international law. It is next to impossible, however, to enforce those rules under conditions of international realpolitik (including the provisions of the UN Charter). The situation may only change when the *power balance* changes at the global level (towards a new multipolar constellation), and when Arab countries will again be able, and willing, to act as a cohesive and unified group – instead of being divided along sectarian lines or ad hoc alliances. In the meantime, the only hope is in the Palestinian State’s ability to further build on its recognition by a large majority (more than two-thirds) of UN member states, and to create a “critical mass” of international treaties, legal instruments or organizations of which the State of Palestine is a party or member. (The accession of Palestine to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court has been an important step in that direction.) The integration of Palestine, as a State, into the ever more complex system of international relations, will, over time, make it more difficult for the occupying power to continue, and get away with, its policy of *faits accomplis*. As long as this is not the case, peace in the wider Middle East will remain elusive and the neighboring regions, including Europe, will suffer profound destabilization – not to speak of the adverse implications for the global (i.e. United Nations) system of collective security.
