

*Letter from Gaza:
The Last Tango*

It is no exaggeration to say that Gaza is traumatised.

The impact is relative and so is the mechanism of coping. But the effects will last for a long time. The images of Israeli missiles rushing glaringly through our sky will not be easily erased.

The violent energy, the anger and the bitterness are on a new scale, as the expectations and the long waiting were turned sour. Chaos, lack of clear vision, and confusion has precipitated despair and helplessness.

It is clear as much as it is sad that politicians on both sides have failed to reach a conclusion to the 'peace of the brave'. Indeed there will never be peace except with brave leaders. Both sides wanted to dance a Tango, but each was complaining that there was no partner.

Palestinians today are cornered, almost trapped, so they think that they have no choice but to shoot. In fact, this was typical of the years of struggle. Which makes you wonder if we were 'studied' and prompted always to do two things; saying a loud NO, and shoot.

There are some enlightening examples. Ben Gurion publicly accepted the partition plan of Palestine in 1947 but admitted in his memoirs that Israel would struggle to have the

whole land. His plan was to let the Arabs refuse the plan. The Palestinian reaction was the same again at Camp David in 1979 and in the last year. In all we were offered something we would have no choice but to say no. Look at the Syrian front where Syria was offered all the Golan Heights except for a small strip on Tiberius. The Syrians, as expected, said NO. We always suspected that Israel was not really sincere, but we never called its bluff.

On the other hand sometimes I sometimes think that Arafat is trying to achieve an Israeli withdrawal without an agreement. He simply can't sign off the refugee right of return. What struck him perhaps was that Israel withdrew from Lebanon without a peace agreement. But does it not mean that Israel can come back any time?

I wrote a note to Yasser Arafat two weeks into the Intifada, urging him to launch a peace initiative and halt the violence and let the world see that we are not violent, but simply are brutally oppressed. I even urged him in a public article to lead a demonstration and throw the arms in front of the world and ask for freedom, an end to the occupation.

The problem with the Palestinian Authority is that it has too many tongues. Some say peace while others say war. Some say both. This is how they lost the confidence of the Israeli public. They could not get the confidence of the Palestinians, the Arabs or the world. All said, Arafat is seen as the only Palestinian who could make peace.

When I was studying psychology, I was introduced to the laboratory of human behaviour. In one experiment, a poor guinea pig was to learn how to die. It was repeatedly given a piece of cheese. When the animal tried to taste the cheese, it was given an electric shock. The guinea pig would go then into frenzy, rocketing himself against the cage in a desperate attempt to escape. After few episodes the miserable animal would be frozen by terror in his cage. His earlier attempts at rebellion were futile, and his rage could not persuade his masters to give him a respite.

A few days later it would die, and dissection of his body revealed severe internal haemorrhage of his suprarenals, which have been producing serious amounts of adrenaline. The experiment was about the effects of stress, we were told. You can apply it to the world we live in; human relations, power and powerlessness.

The Palestinians are engaged in their own land, while the Israeli military marches towards the complete and final 'victory'.

What we are observing is a Palestinian violent reaction to an Israeli active attempt of domination and submission, with or without cheese.

The Israeli plan to achieve 'victory' is not very difficult to understand, especially if you belong the club of Israeli generals. The plan is based on the following:

- Always offer the Palestinians something that they will not accept.
- Incite the Palestinians; make them react violently, so Israel is seen as the victim.
- Talk about peace and the future, and let the Palestinians talk about history and liberation.
- Let the world know that Israel seeks security, while Palestinians pose as terrorists.
- Make the world believe that Israel is eager to solve the problem by negotiation while Palestinians are trying to impose solutions under their fire.

From that logic Israeli soldiers are projected as defending themselves, and Palestinian children are killed because they are careless and their families are inhuman.

The same logic implies that Israel has no hesitation to demolish Palestinian homes, while talking about its desire to improve their life.

She has the nerve to seize land on the West Bank and Gaza and tell the world that Palestinians have twenty-two Arab countries while Jews have only one Israel.

If the Israeli military establishment is allowed to pursue its final victory this will produce a new exodus. The Palestinians in Gaza will have to leave, and those who would remain in the West Bank would have to accept Jordan as their state.

To achieve its goal Israel will have only to commit a savage war, and massacres. As in Deir Yassein, Israeli 'defence' forces will kill few hundreds or thousands, possibly by 'mistake'! They will open the border to Egypt, and Palestinians will flee.

Victory in the eyes of Israelis is peace and security. But in the eyes of the military establishment, it is not. Clearly and increasingly it is about eating up the rest of Palestine.

And what can we do?

We can try for once to think, to explore ideas, to democratise our system, to try non violence, to put a new message to the world about Palestine, Arabs and Islam, and much more. If only Israelis and Palestinians can learn from history and from their tragedies. And if we, and them, can only speak the truth!

Then, only then, we may find a dancing partner before we miss the last Tango.

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EYAD ELSARRAJ is a Palestinian psychiatrist and director of a clinic in Gaza.



RPE, « Jugglers, Cumbria ».