

# The “Arab Spring” and the Israel-Palestine Conflict: Settler Colonialism and Resistance in the Midst of Geopolitical Upheavals\*

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## Abstract

This article examines the implications of the “Arab Spring” for the Israel-Palestine conflict. It draws on a growing field of critical approaches to consider this question in light of a longer historical trajectory of the Zionist settler colonial project, Palestinian resistance to this project and efforts to pacify this resistance, most recently under the banner of the “Oslo Peace Process”. Therefore, the article rejects mainstream interpretations of the implications of the “Arab Spring” for the Israel-Palestine conflict in terms of either increasing or decreasing the prospects for a negotiated, bilateral settlement based on the Oslo paradigm. Rather, the article argues that the “Arab Spring” constitutes both continuities and discontinuities in the Israel-Palestine conflict: on the one hand, Israel continues and has even intensified its project of settler colonialism; on the other hand, the “Arab Spring” has given impetus to a new movement of Palestinians resisting Israeli occupation and Palestinian dispossession that operates beyond the Oslo paradigm of liberal peacemaking. Whilst the “Arab Spring” heralds the end of the already defunct Oslo Peace Process, it simultaneously highlights the necessity for a more just approach to peace making in Israel/Palestine.

**Keywords:** Israel, Palestine, conflict, colonialism, resistance, Arab Spring

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## “Arap Baharı” ve İsrail-Filistin Çatışması: Jeopolitik Değişimlerin Ortasında Direniş ve Yerleşimci Sömürgecilik

### Özet

Bu makalede, ‘Arap Baharı’nın İsrail-Filistin çatışmasına yönelik olası sonuçları incelenmektedir. Makale bu konuyu Siyonist yerleşimci sömürge projesinin izlediği uzun tarihsel yol ışığında ele almak üzere, giderek artan eleştirel yaklaşım alanlarına; ve son zamanlarda ‘Oslo Barış Süreci’ çerçevesinde ele alınan bu projeye karşı Filistin direnişinden ve direnişi yatıştırma çabalarına dikkat çekmektedir. Dolayısıyla, Oslo paradigmasına dayalı iki taraflı müzakere edilmiş bir uzlaşma beklentisini arttırma veya azaltması bakımından ‘Arap Baharı’nın İsrail-Filistin çatışmasına etkilerine ilişkin yaygın yorumları reddetmektedir. Söz konusu çalışma daha ziyade Arap Baharı’nın İsrail-Filistin çatışmasında hem süreklilik hem de kesiklik teşkil ettiğini savunur: Bir yandan İsrail yerleşimci sömürgecilik projesini sürdürür ve hatta güçlendirirken; öte yandan Arap Baharı da, liberal barış sağlama amaçlı Oslo paradigması dışında işleyen İsrail’in Filistin işgaline karşı direnen yeni bir Filistin hareketini canlandırmıştır. Arap Baharı bir taraftan geçerliliğini yitirmiş Oslo Barış Süreci’nin sona erdiğinin habercisi olurken, aynı zamanda İsrail/Filistin’de barış sağlama amaçlı daha adil bir yaklaşım benimsenmesi gerektiğinin de altını çizmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İsrail, Filistin, çatışma, sömürgecilik, direniş, Arap Baharı

المقاومة والاستعمار : الفلسطيني – الاسرائيلي والصراع «العربي الربيع» الاستيطاني  
في خضم التغيرات الجيوسياسية  
نيكولا برات

### المُلخَص:

يتناول هذه المقالة بالبحث والتمحيص النتائج المحتملة للربيع العربي باتجاه الصراع الاسرائيلي – الفلسطيني. ويقدم المقال تحليلاً نقدياً للموضوع على ضوء الطريق الطويل الذي سلكه المشروع الاستعماري الاستيطاني الصهيوني، مشيراً الى الانتقادات المتزايدة يوماً بعد يوم، وملفتاً النظر الى المقاومة الفلسطينية في مواجهة المشروع، الذي يجري بحثه في نطاق «وتيرة السلام في اوسلو»، ومحاولات اخماد جدوة هذه المقاومة. ومن ثم يرفض المقال التعليقات المتواترة التي تتعلق بتأثير الربيع العربي على الصراع الاسرائيلي – الفلسطيني من حيث زيادة و تقليص توقعات التوافق الميني على المفاوضات الثنائية الخاصة بعملية اوسلو. ويؤكد المقال بصورة خاصة على ان الربيع العربي يمثل وضعا من الاستمرارية والتوقف للصراع الاسرائيلي – الفلسطيني في ان واحد. فمن ناحية، يؤثر الربيع العربي على ديمومة مشروع الاستعمار الاستيطاني الاسرائيلي، بل و يقويه، بينما يحقق الربيع العربي، من ناحية اخرى، احياء الحركة الفلسطينية الجديدة التي تناضل ضد الاحتلال الاسرائيلي لفلسطين خارج عملية اوسلو التي تهدف الى تحقيق سلام ليبرالي. و بينما يخبرنا الربيع العربي بنهاية عملية اوسلو للسلام تلك التي فقدت فاعليتها من جانب، فإنه نفس الوقت يؤكد على ضرورة قيام اسرائيل بتبني مبادرة أكثر عدالة تهدف الى تحقيق السلام في اسرائيل/ فلسطين.

كلمات مفتاحية : اسرائيل، فلسطين، الصراع، الاستعمار، المقاومة، الربيع العربي.

## Introduction

Without a doubt, the popular uprisings, protests, and in some cases, armed insurrections that have spread across the Arab world since December 2010 are reshaping the politics of the Middle East. This article examines the implications of what has commonly come to be called the “Arab Spring”<sup>1</sup> for the Israel-Palestine conflict. It begins by providing an overview of the current understandings of the “Arab Spring” as either an opportunity for or as a threat to Israel-Palestine peacemaking. The next section examines the shared assumptions underpinning these evaluations, which characterise the Israel-Palestine conflict as a struggle between two national movements over the same piece of land. In contrast, building on a growing field of critical scholarship that reconceptualises the conflict as one of indigenous resistance against a foreign settler colonial project, I view the current moment in a longer context of Zionist colonisation of Palestine and resistance to this, in addition to Israeli and Western pacification of this resistance. The following sections examine what such a reconceptualisation of the conflict means for reinterpreting the evolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the wake of the “Arab Spring”. The article argues that the most significant consequence of the “Arab Spring” for the Israel-Palestine conflict is in challenging, both conceptually and in reality, the liberal peace building model of Oslo and offering a new strategy for a just peace.

## Understandings of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the wake of the “Arab Spring”

Discussions of the implications of the “Arab Spring” for the Israel-Palestine conflict focus on specific events that have unfolded, particularly since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak and his regime in February 2011. Commentators and academics speculating about the impact of these events generally fall into one of two categories: viewing the “Arab Spring” as either an opportunity for peace making or as a threat to peace making. I will briefly discuss both these approaches below.

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1 I place the term “Arab Spring” in scare quotes to indicate that this is a contested term. I use it as an easily recognisable short-hand for the popular uprisings, revolutions and protests that have taken place across the Arab world since the end of 2010.

### ***Peace Now?***

Those who view the “Arab Spring” as heralding a new impetus for peace making between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as the wider Arab world, generally emphasise the need to adapt to the rise of people power and respond to its implications for the Palestinian leadership, for the Israeli government and for Western governments. Hanan Ashrawi, speaking at a seminar organised by the US think tank, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, characterised the “Arab Spring” as illustrating a new mood amongst Arab citizens, who are frustrated with the status quo, whether that is oppressive dictators, blatant corruption or continuing indignities and humiliation, including Israel’s occupation of Palestine.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, like their counterparts from Morocco to Bahrain, have been protesting against the failures of their leadership, rising unemployment and costs of living. These protests, in the West Bank, Gaza Strip as well as by Palestinians in other Arab capitals, began as demonstrations of solidarity with the Egyptian uprising in January 2011. Both the Fateh-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip tried to suppress these protests, fearing the implications of people power for their own governments. There have been no elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since the elections that brought Hamas to power in 2006. The term of office of the Palestinian Legislative Council (the PA legislature) expired in 2010 and no elections have been held since (whether in the West Bank or Gaza Strip—except for municipal elections in the West Bank in 2012).

Palestinian demonstrations in solidarity with the Egyptians turned into calls for political reform of the Palestinian leadership. On 21 February, the Palestinian NGO *Network* called on Fateh and Hamas to reconcile “to ‘secure and defend the Palestinian people’s inalienable right to freedom, independence and return to their lands’”<sup>3</sup>. On 15 March, youth groups led organised protests in several Palestinian towns and cities calling for reconciliation, new elections in the

2 Hannan Ashrawi, “Palestine and the Arab Spring”, Summary of discussion hosted by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, 27 May 2011. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/05/27/palestine-and-arab-spring/1qb> (accessed 21 June 2013).

3 “81 NGOs Urge Rival Factions to Reconcile”, *Ma’an News Agency*, 21 February 2011. <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=361995> (accessed 17 June 2013).

Occupied Palestinian Territory and the inclusion of all political factions in a restructured Palestine Liberation Organisation, under the slogan of “End the division. One people against Zionism”.<sup>4</sup>

Pressure from the street, combined with the loss of external patrons (Mubarak, in the case of Fateh and the Syrian regime, in the case of Hamas) undoubtedly pushed Fateh and Hamas to enter into talks. A reconciliation agreement, brokered by the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, newly established as Egypt’s rulers, was signed in April 2011, stipulating that elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (the legislative body of the Palestinian Authority) and Palestinian National Council (the legislative body of the Palestine Liberation Organisation) should be held no later than one year later. The Carter Center hailed the reconciliation, viewing it as “part of the larger democratic trend sweeping the region” and as increasing “the likelihood of a two-state solution and peaceful outcome”.<sup>5</sup> Despite the EU’s position against Hamas, EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton also cautiously welcomed the reconciliation as a step in the right direction for peace negotiations.<sup>6</sup>

Some commentators see an inescapable logic in the wake of the “Arab Spring” pressuring leaders to respond to popular expectations of peace. As one commentator argues, “Israel signed political agreements with authoritarian regimes. Now the people have a say in politics for the first time, which means that Israel has no choice but to fulfil its responsibilities according to the agreements because the people will no longer be silent or turn a blind eye to Israel’s inability to fulfil its agreements, including the Camp David Accords with Egypt which requires Israel to move on the peace process with the Palestinians”.<sup>7</sup> Along similar lines, the Emir of Qatar told a conference in May 2013 that, “the Arab Spring has today put Israel in direct confrontation with the Arab people, not only with their rulers.

4 P. Bailey, “Palestinians call for unity protest on 15 March”, *Electronic Intifada*, 28 February 2011. <http://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinians-call-unity-protest-15-march/9249> (accessed 17 June 2013).

5 N. Mozgovaya, “Carter Hails Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation”, *Haaretz.com*, 29 April 2011. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/world/carter-hails-hamas-fatah-reconciliation-1.358895> (accessed 21 June 2013).

6 A. Eldar, “EU’s Ashton: With its Changing Neighbourhood, Now is the Time for Israel to Move”, *Haaretz.com*, 24 June 2011. <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/eu-s-ashton-with-its-changing-neighborhood-now-is-the-time-for-israel-to-move-1.369401> (accessed 21 June 2013).

7 W. Salem, “The Arab Revolutions from a Palestinian Perspective”, *Palestine-Israel Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2012. <http://www.pij.org/details.php?id=1419> (accessed 21 June 2013).

These people will no longer accept that negotiations are the goal in themselves”.<sup>8</sup> The EU’s Ashton also recognises these new dynamics, telling an Israeli journalist in 2011, “Your neighbourhood has changed [...] Then they [political leaders] have more responsibility than ever for the people of Israel and the Palestinian people to actually do it [make peace]”.<sup>9</sup>

With the assumption that Arab governments would become more accountable to their citizenry and with the rise of more powerful popular (mainly Islamist) movements, some commentators believe that solving the Israel-Palestine conflict is in Israel’s security interests. In the words of one author, “If Israel fails to engage with the new realities in its neighbourhood, it could conceivably find itself in a situation similar to the pre-1979 Middle East, when all of its neighbours were in an open state of war with it”.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, some writers believe that the “Arab Spring” should lead Western governments to also reconsider their policies towards the region. As an Op Ed in the *Financial Times* in 2011, responding to the waves of popular uprisings in the Arab World, argued, “The international community’s old approach was to prioritise stability over democracy and pursue Israeli-Arab peace on a totally separate diplomatic track. This policy proved to be a failure – stability over democracy brought neither and isolated peace efforts went nowhere”.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, William Quandt, a veteran expert on US policy and the Arab-Israeli conflict, writing about US diplomacy towards the Israel-Palestinian peace process, argues that the uprisings actually “make it all the more important that the U.S. aligns itself with both democracy and peace in a vital part of the world”.<sup>12</sup> Another writer warns Western governments that, “an important stumbling block [in a dialogue with the new democracies of the region] could

8 R. Doherty, “Qatar: Arab Spring makes Israeli-Palestinian peace more pressing”, *Reuters*, 20 May 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/20/us-qatar-arabs-israel-idUSBRE94J0NW20130520> (accessed 21 June 2013).

9 A. Eldar, “EU’s Ashton: With its Changing Neighbourhood, Now is the Time for Israel to Move”.

10 A. Dessi, *Israel and the Palestinians after the Arab Spring: No Time for Peace*, IAI Working Paper 1216, May 2012, pp. 12-13.

11 M. Muasher and J. Solana, “Push Ahead Now For A Solution In Palestine”, *The Financial Times*, 9 March 2011.

12 W. Quandt, “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Now”, *Cairo Review of Global Affairs online*, 2011. <http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/CairoReview/Pages/articleDetails.aspx?aid=1> (accessed 21 June 2013).

be the Palestinian issue and the role of a growing chauvinist Israel in the region. ... If they do not change their course, the “Arab Spring” could become not only a lost opportunity, but also a source of new tensions”.<sup>13</sup>

### **Peace Later?**

However, for Israel and some of its supporters, the uncertainties of the “Arab Spring” make it unwise to pursue peace with the Palestinians at this moment. Indeed, the Israeli government has watched the so-called Arab Spring unfold with some dismay. In November 2011, PM Binyamin Netanyahu attacked the “Arab Spring”, as an “Islamic, anti-western, anti-liberal, anti-Israeli, undemocratic wave”.<sup>14</sup> It is concerned that Islamist groups have emerged as the strongest political force in neighbouring countries. The Muslim Brotherhood has won elections in Egypt, thereby ending Hamas’s isolation in the Gaza Strip; Islamist groups dominate the opposition in Syria; and, in Jordan, the Islamic Action Front leads calls for political reform.<sup>15</sup> As Daniel Byman argues, “Israel is a status quo power in many ways. [...] So change, even if it means the toppling of regional foes, risks rocking this prosperous boat”.<sup>16</sup>

The most significant consequence of the “Arab Spring” for the Israeli government has been the overthrow of the regime of Hosni Mubarak. The 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt has been strategically important to Israel’s security (by removing the largest Arab army from the Arab-Israeli conflict) and the lynchpin of Western security strategy towards the region. From 2006 until the overthrow of the old regime, Egypt cooperated with Israel to maintain the blockade of the Gaza Strip and agreed with Israel over the need to contain Hamas and to prevent Iran from increasing its influence throughout the region. Israel’s alliance with Egypt became even more important after its relations with Turkey (a long-time ally) became increasingly frosty as a result of the Gaza war—compounded by Israel’s killing of Turkish citizens on a ship carrying aid in May 2010.

13 R. Aliboni, “The International Dimension of the Arab Spring”, *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 4, p. 9.

14 H. Sherwood, “Binyamin Netanyahu attacks Arab spring uprisings”, *Guardian Online*, 24 November 2011. (accessed 4 March 2012).

15 “Gloom and Bloom: Eyeing the Arab Spring”, *The Economist*, 11 February 2012, p. 50.

16 D. Byman, “Israel’s Pessimistic View of the Arab Spring”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 3, Summer 2011.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, which took over power after Mubarak stepped down until presidential elections were held in May 2012, signalled its break with the Mubarak regime and its responsiveness to popular opinion with regard to its policies towards the question of Palestine. It did not cancel the peace treaty but it opened the Rafah crossing, albeit sporadically, (thereby breaking the international blockade of the Gaza Strip) and successfully brokered reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fateh. The Israeli government opposed both of these moves, which effectively ended the political and geographical isolation of Hamas. Netanyahu told Fateh, in May 2011, that it had to choose between peace with Israel and peace with Hamas and withheld \$100 million of taxes collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

Israel has also been concerned by what it regards as a security vacuum along the Egyptian-Israeli border and the Sinai Peninsula more broadly. In August 2011, suspected Palestinian gunmen conducted a cross-border raid into Israel and, in Ramadan 2012, another attack along the Egyptian-Gaza border (which resulted in the deaths of 16 Egyptian soldiers). In addition, there have been repeated acts of sabotage of the gas pipeline between Egypt and Israel since Mubarak stepped down. In 2011, Israel responded to the cross-border raid immediately by pursuing the attackers into Egypt, resulting in 5 Egyptian policemen being killed. This outraged Egyptian public opinion and hundreds of Egyptians protested outside the Israeli embassy in Cairo, and then stormed the embassy, leading to Israeli embassy staff being evacuated.

Yet, it would be erroneous to evaluate the “Arab Spring” as a categorical threat to Israel’s security. Following the Ramadan 2012 attack, the Egyptian government, by then, headed by the newly-elected Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, held Hamas responsible for the killings of Egyptian soldiers and began security cooperation with Israel. This illustrates perhaps that, “the reality is that the Arab Spring hasn’t changed Israel’s regional position or strategic calculus to any great degree [...]. Instead, the challenges the Arab Spring poses for Israel are no different from the broader cyclical challenges Israel has been facing since 1948”.<sup>17</sup>

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17 B. Sasley, “Israel and the Arab Spring: But the Season Doesn’t Matter”, 28 December 2011, Huffington Post on-line (accessed 4 March 2012).



Despite the fact that both the ‘peace now’ and the ‘peace later’ approaches offer different interpretations of the events that have unfolded since the beginning of the “Arab Spring”, nevertheless, both share a set of assumptions about the nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Having briefly examined the different interpretations of the “Arab Spring” in this section, the following section discusses and critiques their shared assumptions that the Israel-Palestine conflict represents a struggle between two national movements that can only be solved through the “compromise” of a two-state solution.

### **Zionist Colonisation, Resistance and Pacification**

The main actors in the international community (US, EU, Russia, China, UN, WB, etc.) as well as a significant part of scholarship on the subject, view the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as a conflict between two national groups (Jews and Arab Palestinians) over a circumscribed piece of territory (historic Palestine).<sup>18</sup> Having characterised the nature of the conflict thus, the solution is identified as a “compromise” between the two conflicting national groups by partitioning the land between them, enabling both national groups to achieve their goals of self-determination within a sovereign state.

The goal of the internationally-sponsored peace negotiations since 1993 has been to transform the Israelis’ and Palestinians’ perceptions of a “zero-sum game”<sup>19</sup> into a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship (i.e. a liberal peace building model). This is the thinking behind the Oslo process, which, most anticipated would result in a “two-state solution”. Even realists believe that a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, through the implementation of a two-state solution, is in the interests of the US, Israel and the Palestinians.<sup>20</sup>

Writings in the wake of the “Arab Spring” share these assumptions about the Israel-Palestine conflict and its solution. Their concerns

18 Among others, for example see, J. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); C. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, (Bedford:St. Martin’s Press, 2010).

19 Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, p. 256.

20 S. Walt, “The Boston Study Group on Middle East Peace”, *Foreign Policy online*, 15 March 2010. Available at: [http://swalt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/03/15/the\\_boston\\_study\\_group\\_on\\_middle\\_east\\_peace](http://swalt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/03/15/the_boston_study_group_on_middle_east_peace) (accessed 14 June 2013).

revolve around whether the “Arab Spring” renders the necessary compromise more or less likely. Those who regard the “Arab Spring” to be an opportunity for peace making believe that events make a compromise more necessary, not necessarily for the sake of peace but for the sake of regional stability and Israeli and Western security interests. Those who regard the “Arab Spring” as a threat to peace making believe that events make the compromise too risky for the Israelis (and possibly also for the US and its allies) and undermines the sort of trust necessary for peace making. However, they all continue to assume that the two-state solution is the only paradigm for resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Since 2000, many observers have called time on the Oslo Peace Process. This process was supposed to lead to an end to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians by finding a way to share the land and solve key problems, namely: refugees, Jerusalem, settlements and security. At the end of this process (due to conclude in 1997), it was implied that a Palestinian state would be created, existing side by side with an Israeli state. This never happened. Following the failure of the 2000 Camp David talks between Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat, a last ditch attempt by then President Bill Clinton to reach a negotiated settlement, the Second Intifada broke out. President Bush’s Roadmap to Peace explicitly attempted to create a two-state solution by 2005 by pressuring the Palestinians to reform and stop violence and by requesting that Israel stop military incursions into Palestinian areas and freeze settlement building. This did not happen either. Under the Obama administration, there have been no direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians, except under a Jordanian initiative in January 2012, which failed to achieve any progress and was met by popular protests in Ramallah and condemnation by the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip.

Jonathan Rynhold has summarised understandings of the failure of Oslo as either, a) a flawed process (because the liberal principles of the Oslo peace process were not implemented); or, b) flawed accords (because the accords contained ‘destructive ambiguity’ regarding the nationalist aspirations of each group).<sup>21</sup>

21 J. Rynhold, “The Failure of the Oslo Process: Inherently Flawed or Flawed Implementation?”, Working Paper, The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, March 2008.

A growing body of literature on the history of Palestine has reconceptualised the Israel-Palestine conflict, thereby offering an alternative explanation for the failure of the Oslo peace process. A number of scholars view the conflict as rooted in indigenous resistance to the Zionist colonisation and ethnic-cleansing of Palestine, which is not limited to the period before 1948 but continues until this day, under the banner of the so-called peace process.<sup>22</sup> From the dispossession of Palestinians in the 1948 war, the implementation of the absentees property law, the prevention of the return of Palestinian refugees, the appropriation of Palestinian lands inside the Green Line, the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, to the on-going settlement building project, restrictions on Palestinian home building, the strangulation of Palestinian economic activity through checkpoints and closures, the building of the Wall and the siege on the Gaza Strip, Israel enacts a slow motion ethnic cleansing aimed at driving out as many Palestinians as possible whilst segregating (or “warehousing”)<sup>23</sup> the remaining Palestinians within Bantustans, behind Walls and under blockade. Joseph Massad, comparing Israel to the United States, South Africa and Rhodesia, argues that “[these states] instituted themselves as postcolonial states, territories, and spaces and instituted their political status as independent in order to render their present a postcolonial era. Yet the conquered people of these territories continue [...] to inhabit these spaces as colonial spaces and to live in eras that are thoroughly colonial”.<sup>24</sup> Unlike other previously colonized countries across the Arab world, Asia and Africa, Palestine has never experienced decolonisation. Therefore, this is not a struggle between two national groups, with equally legitimate rights to the same piece of territory. Rather, this is a struggle between colonizers and colonized.

Amongst those who use a colonial lens to view the conflict, there are some (but not all) who oppose the “two-state” solution as a

22 For example, N. Abdo, *Women in Israel: Gender, Race and Citizenship*, (London: Zed Books, 2011); J. Massad, “The “post-colonial” colony: time, space and bodies in Palestine/Israel”, in FawziaAfzal-Khan and KalpanaSeshadri-Crooks (eds.), *The Preoccupation of Postcolonial Studies*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); L. Taraki (ed.), *Living Palestine: Family Survival, Resistance and Mobility under Occupation*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006); O. J. Salamanca, et al., “Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine”, *Settler Colonial Studies*, Vol. 2, No.1, pp. 1-8.

23 Jeff Halper, “Warehousing Palestinians”, *Counterpunch*, 16 September 2008: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2008/09/16/warehousing-palestinians/> (accessed 27 June 2013).

24 J. Massad, “The “post-colonial” colony: time, space and bodies in Palestine/Israel”, p. 311.

just solution to the conflict, particularly from amongst the Palestinian diaspora/refugees and Palestinian citizens of Israel. This opposition has increased since the release of the “Palestine Papers” in early 2011, where it became clear that the PLO leadership was willing to compromise significantly on the “right of return”—long a central aim of the Palestinian national struggle—as well as to agree to possible land swaps along the 1967 borders that could have included Palestinian citizens of Israel in return for a Palestinian state.<sup>25</sup> This discontent with the two-state solution, as it has been pursued through the Oslo process, has led to a growing movement calling for a one-state solution, in which Israelis and Palestinians would have equal rights within a democratic and secular state.<sup>26</sup> However, it should be noted that the one-state proposal appears to be a project promoted more amongst the Palestinian diaspora rather than amongst Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As one academic notes, it is unrealistic to expect that Palestinians would be willing to swap the struggle against Israeli occupation for yet another struggle for equal rights in a shared state where Jewish Israelis would have the upper hand.<sup>27</sup>

Whether the end game is two states or one state, the significance of a colonial lens is to reconceptualise the conflict as a product of Zionist colonization. Indeed, the PLO charter of 1968 declared its resistance to Zionist colonization, but this conceptualisation of Israel (and resistance to it) was abandoned by the PLO when it signed the Oslo Accords in 1993. An understanding of the conflict as rooted in the Zionist project eschews both realist and liberal conclusions about the need for a two-state solution, instead, it sees a just solution as the halt to Israel as a project of ‘settler colonialism’.

In addition to enabling Israel’s continued colonization of historic Palestine, the Oslo Accords have succeeded in pacifying the PLO

25 Amongst other articles on Al-Jazeera English’s Palestine Papers pages, see G. Carlstrom, “Expelling Israel’s Arab population?”, *AlJazeera.com, The Palestine Papers*, 24 January 2011 (accessed 4 March 2012); A. Howeidy, “PA relinquished right of return”, *AlJazeera.com, The Palestine Papers*, 24 January 2011: <http://www.aljazeera.com/palestinepapers/2011/01/2011124121923486877.html> (accessed 4 March 2012); L. Al-Arian, “PA selling short the refugees”, *AlJazeera.com, The Palestine Papers*, 25 January 2011 (accessed 4 March 2012).

26 Amongst others see, A. Abunimah, *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); S. Makdisee, *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008).

27 G. Karmi, “The One-State Solution: An Alternative Vision for Israeli-Palestinian Peace” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2011, p. 72.

and led to the further fragmentation of the Palestinian people. Since 1993, there has been a bifurcation of the Palestinian national movement. One wing (Fateh, exercising power as the Palestinian Authority) can be considered to have adopted what Rima Hammami has termed an “earned sovereignty” approach.<sup>28</sup> This approach aims at demonstrating to the international community that Palestine “deserves” sovereignty by abiding by the donor-imposed state-building process. A central element of externally-driven state-building has been the pacification of Palestinian resistance to Israel through reform of the Palestinian security services, whose main job is now to crackdown on Palestinians.<sup>29</sup> The ‘Road Map’ in 2002 ushered in increased donor pressure on the Palestinian Authority to ‘reform’ (that is, bring in neo-liberal and good governance reforms) in order to become a ‘suitable’ partner for peace (that is, as Mandy Turner argues, suitable to the Israeli government).<sup>30</sup> The failure of these reform efforts to address the growing impoverishment of Palestinian society and the continuing Israeli occupation contributed to the election of Hamas in 2006.<sup>31</sup> Whilst there has been discussion over whether Palestinians voted for Hamas because of its anti-corruption stance or because of its resistance to Israel, in effect these two are greatly intertwined because of the link between corruption, state-building and capitulation to Israeli interests within the Fateh-dominated Palestinian Authority.

Hamas, together with Islamic Jihad, as well as some factions of the PLO, represent the resistance approach, and believe that negotiations with Israel have failed to achieve Palestinian rights and, therefore, violence is the only way to achieve Palestinian self-determination. Consequently, following the election of Hamas to the Palestinian Authority, the international community boycotted the PA and supported President Mahmoud Abbas (Fateh). This resulted in the political and geographical fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement—with Fateh taking control of the PA in the West Bank and Hamas forming a new administration and taking control

28 R. Hammami, “Neo-liberalism, Good Governance and ‘Earned Sovereignty’ in Palestine”, paper presented at a workshop, ‘Reconceptualising Gender: Transnational Perspectives’, Institute of Women’s Studies, Birzeit University, April 2011.

29 Ibid; Y. Sayigh, “Policing the People, Building the State: Authoritarian transformation in the West Bank and Gaza”, Carnegie Papers, Beirut: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010.

30 M. Turner, “The Power of “Shock and Awe”: the Palestinian Authority and the Road to Reform”, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.16, No.4, 2009.

31 Ibid.

of the Gaza Strip in 2007. Since then, the international community has supported Fateh as the “suitable partner for peace” and continued to support its state-building project in the West Bank, whilst boycotting Hamas and tacitly supporting Israel’s blockade on the Gaza Strip as well as its military onslaught on the Strip in 2008/09.

Oslo has not only led to the bifurcation of the Palestinian national movement and the separation of Palestinians in the West Bank from those in the Gaza Strip. The Oslo Accords contain within them the separation of Palestinians in the West Bank between Areas A, B and C, with only Area A being fully under PA control. This has not only enabled Israel to impede Palestinian freedom of movement, making social and economic activities difficult and costly. In addition, it has created a differentiated regime of occupation across the West Bank. Palestinians in Areas A benefit from the Oslo process to the degree that they are dependent upon the PA for jobs and security and, therefore, have a vested interest in its continued existence. Those Palestinians who protest against the PA or try to hold the PA to account are usually met with repression. Meanwhile, Palestinians in Areas B face continuing settlement encroachment, land grabbing and settler violence without experiencing the benefits of the PA. Their weekly protests are met with repression by Israeli security services. Finally, Palestinians in Areas C face on-going ethnic cleansing, as Israel continuously demolishes homes and denies Palestinians basic services. Palestinians are even dependent upon Israeli settlements as practically the only source of employment. The Palestinian Authority has no presence or jurisdiction in Areas C.<sup>32</sup> The situation in East Jerusalem is different again, although not too dissimilar from Areas C. Palestinians are being pushed out of their homes and face increasing impoverishment, whilst Jewish settlement building continues. In addition, Palestinian Jerusalemites face the possibility of their residency being withdrawn by the Israeli authorities. Palestinians in Hebron also face particular challenges, living in a divided city and in fear of settler violence. Not to mention the specific situation of Gazans living under economic blockade and subject to sporadic military conflict, resulting in a high number of civilian casualties and destruction of civilian infrastructure. This fragmentation of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories,

32 Mandy Turner, “The State-building Programme of the Palestinian Authority: Achievements and Challenges”, paper presented to the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, Helsinki, 28 & 29 April 2011.

adding to the different experiences of Palestinians inside the Green Line as well as the diaspora, constitutes a severe challenge to the unification of the Palestinians behind a single strategy.

The Oslo peace process, the Road Map and the reactions of the international community to the election of Hamas have all had devastating consequences for the Palestinian national movement and for the Palestinian people. Israel has been able to further entrench its occupation<sup>33</sup> and apartheid rule.<sup>34</sup> Occupation and apartheid may be considered as a continuation of the conquest and control of land and the transformation of the ethnic structure of society that is central to the settler colonial project of Zionism.<sup>35</sup> How has the “Arab Spring” changed this on-going process of colonization and pacification?

### Israel and the “Arab Spring”: Zionism renewed

The uncertainty thrown up by the “Arab Spring” may be represented by Israeli officials as a serious challenge to the country’s security but, arguably, this uncertainty has been an opportunity for Israel. The “Arab Spring” has provided a pretext for Israel to further its policy of separation and disengagement from the Palestinians and the Arab world. One Israeli writer has characterised Israel’s response to the “Arab Spring” as a form of “winter hibernation”, arguing that, “Like a polar bear, Israel retreated into its cave, withdrew into itself and waited until the rage passed. Building security barriers on the border with Egypt and Jordan, enlarging the security budget and abstaining from any gesture toward the Palestinians have been only some of the steps taken”.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, events in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and particularly Syria have potentially distracted the international community away from the

33 See for example: J. Halper, “The 94 percent solution: A Matrix of Control”, *Middle East Report*, No. 216, 2000; N. Gordon, *Israel’s Occupation*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

34 O. Yiftachel, “Creeping Apartheid in Israel-Palestine”, *Middle East Report*, No. 253, 2009; U. Davis, *Israel: An Apartheid State*, (London: Zed Books, 1987/2003).

35 M. Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?*, (Pathfinder Press, 1973); P. Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2006, pp. 387-409; O. Yiftachel, “Ethnocracy: the Politics of Judaizing Israel/Palestine”, *Constellations: International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1998, pp. 364-390.

36 B. Ravid, “The Arab Spring and Israel’s winter hibernation”, *Haaretz.com*, 8 December 2011 (accessed 4 March 2012).

Israel-Palestine conflict. This has been to the benefit of Israel's continuing settlement building and colonisation of Palestinian lands. Since 2011, there have been increasing numbers of demolitions of homes in Area C of the West Bank, which represents 60 per cent of the West Bank and is under Israeli control (according to Oslo II), a move that was supposed to be temporary until a full peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinians was reached. This area is considered strategic for Israel's security and also contains the very fertile agricultural and horticultural land of the Jordan Valley, which is home to several Israeli settlement companies, such as, Carmel. The Israeli authorities employ discriminatory planning regulations against Palestinians in Area C. Israeli authorities destroy any structures, including schools, which have not received the required permit. However, they rarely grant Palestinians the required permissions. According to the UN Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "the approved planning schemes for Palestinian communities encompass less than 0.6 per cent of Area C. This is in contrast to the 8.5 per cent of Area C where planning schemes have been approved for Israeli settlements and the additional 61 per cent of Area C land which comes under the jurisdictional areas of the settlements' local and regional councils and which can be made available for settlement planning and development in the future".<sup>37</sup> OCHA reports that, in 2012, Palestinian-owned structures demolished in Area C comprised 165 residential structures and 375 livelihood and animal structures, infrastructure and other structures. This resulted in the displacement of 815 people, including 474 children.<sup>38</sup> OCHA states that these numbers "were almost as high as 2011, the highest since OCHA started systematically collating statistics in 2008".<sup>39</sup> In effect, these measures amount to forced displacement for Palestinians living in Area C, many of whom are forced to migrate to other areas of the West Bank in order to secure their livelihoods. Bedouin are particularly targeted by Israeli authorities for forced displacement. This displacement of Palestinians facilitates Israel's possible future annexation of the Jordan Valley<sup>40</sup> as well as the expansion of Maale

37 OCHA, *Fragmented Lives: Humanitarian Overview 2012*, (Jerusalem: OCHA, 2013), p. 20.

38 Ibid, p. 21.

39 Ibid.

40 F. Barat and J. Halper Israel's gone way beyond apartheid: an interview with Jeff Halper", 12 April 2012, *New Internationalist online*. <http://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2012/04/26/jeff-halper-interview-israel-palestine/> (accessed 19 June 2013).



Adumumin settlement and its linking to Jerusalem, leading to the cutting off of East Jerusalem from the West Bank.<sup>41</sup>

Palestinian Jerusalemites (living under illegal Israeli annexation) also face similar obstacles to those in Area C in terms of difficulties of obtaining permits to build, obliging individuals to build without permits and risk demolitions. OCHA reports that house demolitions in East Jerusalem increased in 2012 compared to 2011.<sup>42</sup> In addition, OCHA reports an increased number of evictions by settlers of Palestinians from their East Jerusalem homes in 2012 compared to 2011 as well as an increased number of revoked residencies in 2012 compared to 2011.<sup>43</sup> Overall, Israeli controls on building as well as under-funding of those municipalities where Palestinians are in the majority is helping Israel to achieve demographic supremacy in Jerusalem (East and West).<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in November 2012, Israel announced new settlement building projects around Jerusalem (in the so-called E1 area and in the south of the city), which threaten to cut East Jerusalem off from the West Bank and to smother Palestinian neighbourhoods.<sup>45</sup>

Settler harassment is also a serious problem for Palestinians and appears to be increasing.<sup>46</sup> In 2012, OCHA recorded 98 settler violence incidents resulting in 150 Palestinian injuries, in addition to 268 incidents resulting in damage to Palestinian private property. This represents a decrease compared to 2011, but still an increase over 2010, in which there were 69 Palestinian casualties and 243 incidents of property damage against Palestinians by Jewish settlers.<sup>47</sup> Settler damage to private property jeopardises Palestinian

41 ICAHD (Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions), *Nowhere Left to Go: Arab al-Jabal Bedouin Ethnic Displacement*, (Jerusalem: ICAHD, 2011).

42 OCHA, *Fragmented Lives: Humanitarian Overview 2012*, p. 25.

43 Ibid, pp. 25-26.

44 ICAHD (Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions), *No Home, No Homeland: A New Normative Framework for Examining the Practice of Administrative Home Demolitions in East Jerusalem*, (Jerusalem: ICAHD, 2011).

45 ICG (International Crisis Group), *Extreme Makeover? (I): Israel's Politics of Land and Faith in East Jerusalem*, 20 December 2012. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/134-extreme-makeover-i-israels-politics-of-land-and-faith-in-east-jerusalem.aspx> (accessed 21 June 2013).

46 Y. Knell, “Bedouin oppose Israeli plans to relocate communities”, *BBC News Online*, 11 November 2011 (accessed 4 March 2012).

47 OCHA, *Fragmented Lives: Humanitarian Overview 2012*, pp. 9-10.

livelihoods, for example, by destroying olive trees, which provide 14% of the agricultural income of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.<sup>48</sup>

Israel has also continued to appropriate Palestinian land through settlement building, despite demands from the PA that a settlement freeze be a prerequisite for re-starting peace negotiations. Indeed, Peace Now reported in 2013 that new constructions in settlements in the first quarter of that year witnessed a 176 per cent increase, reaching a seven-year high, “whilst those in the same period inside Israel decreased 8.9% despite continued public outcry over increasing economic hardship and the cost of housing”.<sup>49</sup>

The spirit of Tahrir Square appeared to spill over into the streets of Tel Aviv in the summer of 2011, as Israelis took to the street in large numbers to protest against their government’s economic policies, which have led to increasing costs of living, squeezing the middle classes.<sup>50</sup> Some protesters made a link between the government’s willingness to spend on the settlements and the lack of funds available for social welfare programmes. However, most protest leaders have limited their demands to socio-economic grievances and avoided what they see as the politically divisive issue of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank.<sup>51</sup> One commentator has accused the protests of failing to go beyond the demands of the Ashkenazim middle class to include the demands of others on the periphery of Israeli society, including Palestinians inside and beyond the Green Line.<sup>52</sup> The tensions within the protest movement over whose justice and what sort of justice was illustrated in a discussion between different Israelis, including a co-founder of the protest movement and a Palestinian-Israeli member of the Knesset, during The Cafe programme on Al-Jazeera English network.<sup>53</sup>

48 OCHA, *Olive Harvest Fact Sheet*, (Jerusalem: OCHA, 2012).

49 Peace Now, “Construction Starts in Settlements Reach 7 Year High”, 9 June 2013. <http://peacenow.org.il/eng/ConstructionStarts1-3-2013> (accessed 19 June 2013).

50 H. Sherwood, “Israeli protests: 430,000 take to streets to demand social justice”, *Guardian Online*, 4 September 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/04/israel-protests-social-justice> (accessed 19 June 2013).

51 J. Beinun, “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Arab Awakening”, *MERIP Online*, 1 August 2011. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero080111> (accessed 19 June 2013).

52 L. Grinberg, “The success of Israel’s social protest failure”, *Haaretz Online*, 23 January 2013. <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/the-success-of-israel-s-social-protest-failure.premium-1.495740> (accessed on 19 June 2013).

53 “Transcript: The Cafe, Tel Aviv: The enemy within?”, *Al-Jazeera*, 8 January 2013. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/thecafe/2012/10/20121099127566396.html> (accessed: 19 June 2013).

The failure of Israeli protesters to oppose wider government measures is particularly alarming given that some of these are against Israeli citizens. These discriminatory measures do not constitute a trend emerging only since the “Arab Spring”. Israel has been termed an ‘ethnic democracy’, that is, a democracy with ethnic dominance for the Jews guaranteed.<sup>54</sup> Others have criticised the ethnic democracy label and termed Israel an ‘ethnocracy’, that is, a democracy only for Jews. Adalah, an NGO that addresses discrimination against Palestinians in Israel, reports that there are more than 50 laws that discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel, “including their rights to political participation, access to land, education, state budget resources, and criminal procedures”.<sup>55</sup> Arguably, the trend towards the increasing ‘ethnicisation’ of Israel is related to a number of factors including the “ethnic security regime” that has emerged as a result of Israel’s occupation since 1967<sup>56</sup>, the right-wing shift in Israeli politics and the growing demands of Palestinians within Israel for equality as citizens of the state since 1967.<sup>57</sup>

This discrimination is obvious in the passage of laws that disproportionately impact upon Palestinian-Israelis or are targeted against those who advocate for Palestinian rights. In 2010, a series of proposed bills in the right-wing-dominated Knesset sought to punish many of the activities of Israeli human rights organisations, such as reporting war crimes, supporting calls for boycotts of Israel, assisting refugees and receiving foreign funding.<sup>58</sup> One of those laws was passed into law in July 2011, punishing any Israeli individual or group calling for a boycott of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. In January 2012 the Israeli Supreme Court upheld a 2003 law prohibiting Israelis from living with their West Bank/Gaza spouses in Israel, a law that almost uniquely affects Palestinians of Israeli citizenship. *The Telegraph* reported that, “The Israeli right has defended the

54 S. Smooha, “Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy: The Status of the Arab Minority in Israel”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1990, pp. 389-413.

55 Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, “Discriminatory Laws in Israel”, *Adalah.org.n.d.* <http://adalah.org/eng/Israeli-Discriminatory-Law-Database>, accessed 17 June 2013.

56 M. Klein, *The Shift: Israel-Palestine, from Border Struggle to Ethnic Conflict*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

57 S. Smooha, *Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2010).

58 HRW (Human Rights Watch), “Israel: Withdraw Legislation Punishing Human Rights Activists”, 25 July 2010. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/07/23/israel-withdraw-legislation-punishing-human-rights-activists> (accessed 17 June 2013).

moves, saying they are needed to protect the Jewish identity of the state”.<sup>59</sup>

Another on-going trend in Israel has been the appropriation of Arab/Palestinian lands inside the Green Line. This is not a recent phenomenon but dates back to the establishment of Israel in 1948. Then, land was confiscated from Arabs/Palestinians by the Jewish National Fund, to be used exclusively by Jews in Israel. Israeli state controls on land use by Arabs have prevented Arab towns and villages from expanding in line with their population. The Praver Plan, approved by the Israeli cabinet in 2012, threatens to displace up to 30,000 Bedouin by forcibly evicting them from their historic lands and obliging them to move to a handful of towns recognised by Israel. According to the human rights NGO Adalah, “While the Arab Bedouin population in the Naqab stands at around 170,000 persons, or 14% of the total population in the Naqab, the combined areas of the government-planned and newly-recognized Arab Bedouin towns and villages in the Naqab account for just 0.9% of the land in the district”.<sup>60</sup> The Bedouin village of al-Araqib, one of several ‘unrecognised’ Bedouin villages, has been repeatedly demolished by authorities and rebuilt by its residents since 2010. Both the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the European Parliament called on the Israeli government to withdraw the Praver Plan.<sup>61</sup>

It is not possible to establish a causal link between the “Arab Spring”, on the one hand, and Israel’s policies against Palestinians inside and beyond the Green Line, on the one hand. Nevertheless, it can be argued that Israeli political leaders and commentators have framed the “Arab Spring” as a potential threat to Israel (which has thrived on the status quo ante), thereby providing a legitimising discourse for its continuing colonization and ethnic cleansing measures, as well as its military threats against Iran, which fit into a Zionist worldview of the need to secure Israel as a Jewish state at any cost. In other words, the “Arab Spring” represents an opportu-

59 A. Blomfield, “Israel’s Supreme Court accused of racism over residency ban on Palestinians who marry Israeli Arabs”, *The Telegraph online*, 12 January 2012 (accessed 4 March 2012).

60 Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, *The Inequality Report: The Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel*, (Haifa: Adalah, 2011), p. 10.

61 J. Khoury, “European Parliament Condemns Israel’s Policy towards Bedouin Population”, *Haaretz.com*, 8 July 2012. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/european-parliament-condemns-israel-s-policy-toward-bedouin-population-1.449687> (accessed 17 June 2013).

nity for, rather than a threat to, the continuation the Zionist settler colonial project, and the latter poses the biggest obstacle to peace making in Israel/Palestine.

### The Palestinians and the “Arab Spring”

As noted above, the Palestinians have raised demands for reconciliation between Hamas and Fateh and for reform of the PLO. Despite reconciliation agreements between Hamas and Fateh existing on paper, neither side wishes to make concrete moves, which would compromise their respective power.<sup>62</sup>

Notwithstanding the failure to achieve their demands for Palestinian political reforms, the ‘15 March’ movement has evolved. It is leading direct action against Israeli occupation, from campaigning for Palestinians to abide by a boycott of Israeli goods to protesting outside Israeli prisons in solidarity with Palestinian hunger strikers and condemning normalisation by Palestinian politicians and business elites. Although it is not an aim of the movement to oppose Fateh or Hamas, for many of these activists there is little love for either party and their positions against Israel definitely put them at odds with the West Bank leadership. As Noura Erakat argues, “The movement’s horizon may render existing political parties meaningless as invigorated youth activists search for creative ways to shatter the stagnation of their domestic condition in an effort to buttress their ongoing struggle against Israeli colonization”.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, it remains to be seen not only how Fateh and Hamas may put aside their political rivalries but, more significantly, how they will reconcile demands for a new political leadership with their own promises to hold elections, which will surely bring their popularity into question as well as raise questions about which strategies should be pursued to end Israel’s occupation.

One example of creative efforts by Palestinians to resist Israel’s occupation was the declaration of a ‘third intifada’ for 15 May 2011 –the anniversary of the *Nakba*. In line with much of the social media oriented activism of the “Arab Spring”, a group of Arab and Pal-

62 A. Tartir, “Fatah and Hamas: An Elusive Reconciliation”, *opendemocracy on-line*, 2012. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ala-tartir/fatah-and-hamas-elusive-reconciliation> (accessed 5 November 2012).

63 N. Erakat, “Palestinian Youth: New Movement, New Borders”, *Jadaliyya.com*, 6 May 2011. (accessed 4 March 2012).

estinian activists created a Facebook page in March 2011 (which was initially removed by Facebook, for allegedly inciting violence). Nevertheless, the page reappeared and attracted hundreds of thousands of followers. The Third Palestinian Intifada called on all Arabs, not just Palestinians, and internationals to protest peacefully outside Israeli embassies and consulates globally against the occupation and for the implementation of the right of return for Palestinian refugees. A number of protests took place in Arab countries, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel. Marches in Egypt and Jordan were prevented by security forces from arriving at the borders of historic Palestine as planned. However, in unprecedented images, protesters from Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip marched towards the ceasefire lines (de facto borders with Israel) and thousands of protesters breached the border between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.<sup>64</sup> As one Egyptian wrote: "It is very true that the whole Arab spring [...] has nothing to do with Israel as far as motivation is concerned, but that doesn't mean that Israel is immune from its ripple effect. ... If the Arab people decided to address 60 years of unmet socio-political demands then the Palestinian issue should undoubtedly come on top of that list".<sup>65</sup>

Until now these acts of resistance have not evolved into a mass movement. Palestinians are aware of the challenges: separation of Palestinians living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel as well as fragmentation within the West Bank as a result of checkpoints and settler only roads; and separation between Palestinians in historic Palestine and those in the diaspora. The militarisation of the "Arab Spring" in Libya and Syria has made Palestinian refugees vulnerable to further displacement. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip face poverty and unsustainable livelihoods as the result of a 5 year blockade. Even West Bank Palestinians are facing threats to their livelihoods as a result of the combination of neoliberal economic policies slavishly followed by the PA and Israel's continuing control of the economy. In September 2012, thousands of Palestinians protested across the West Bank against rising living costs.

Yet despite these challenges, and despite the efforts of Israel and

64 H. Sherwood, "Thirteen killed as Israeli troops open fire on Nakba Day border protests", *Guardian Online*, 15 May 2011. (accessed 4 March 2012).

65 Ashraf Ezzat, "Third Intifada Underway", *Dissident Voice*, 9 May 2011. <http://dissidentvoice.org/2011/05/third-intifada-underway/> (accessed 4 March 2012).

Western donors (and also Gulf donors) to pacify the Palestinians, Palestinian resistance continues. The use of social media is a significant tool enabling Palestinians to overcome geographical dispersion.<sup>66</sup> Whilst protests and other direct action since 2011 have not led to a “Palestinian Spring”, we are witnessing the voicing of different positions within the Palestinian movement and these are no longer along the lines of Fateh vs Hamas. Instead, voices, predominantly from amongst young people independent of these two parties, are calling for non-violent resistance against Israel and greater democracy within the Palestinian movement in order to end the occupation. This is a rejection of the ‘earned sovereignty’ approach of Fateh and the armed resistance approach of Hamas. Both approaches have failed to end Israel’s occupation, whilst both parties are currently without a democratic mandate (which expired in 2010). These new Palestinian voices are potentially supported by a re-energised Arab solidarity movement,<sup>67</sup> as well as a growing international solidarity movement focused around Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS). It is this reinvigorated resistance and the failure of Western countries until now to pacify it that represents the greatest challenge to Israel’s continued colonization.

## Conclusion

The “Arab spring” does not immediately benefit the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict—at least as the process is currently conceptualised. If we conceive of the conflict-resolution process as one in which two national groups, Jewish and Palestinian, engage in negotiations on how to “compromise” to share historic Palestine, then the “Arab Spring” appears to have thrown up more barriers to this already difficult endeavour. Israel has retreated to its bunker and has not ceased those policies that are damaging to a two-state solution (primarily, settlement building), whilst further eroding the trust of Palestinian citizens of Israel in the democratic nature of the state. Meanwhile, unity talks between Fateh and Hamas have not reconciled the two different strategies of the two parties (diplomacy vs. armed struggle), let alone reconciled the parties themselves, al-

66 L. Alsaafin, “Linah Alsaafin on Social Media and Palestine”, *Jadaliyya.com*, 7 June 2013. <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12099/linah-alsaafin-on-social-media-and-palestine> (accessed 27 June 2013).

67 R. Abou El-Fadl, “The Road to Jerusalem through Tahrir Square: Anti-Zionism and Palestine in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution”, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol 41, No. 2, Winter 2012, pp. 6-26.

though it may represent a tacit acknowledgement by Hamas of the two-state solution.

However, the “Arab spring” has shaken things up. It has highlighted the need for a new strategy to replace the Oslo process in solving the Israel-Palestine conflict. It has given impetus to new political actors (particularly from within the Palestinian diaspora and amongst Palestinian youth, supported by reenergised Arab and global solidarity movements), creating new ways to resist Israel’s settler colonial project. The new methods of non-violent resistance, including protests against Israeli land expropriation, for the rights of Palestinian prisoners and against normalisation activities by the PA as well as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign, challenge the legitimacy of Israel’s settler colonial project. Noura Erakat sounds words of caution, arguing that there is a need for the articulation of a political programme and not merely the use of new strategies to achieve Palestinian self-determination.<sup>68</sup> Yet, by challenging Israel’s settler colonial project, Palestinian activists are also challenging the assumptions and parameters of the Oslo peace process and, implicitly, proposing a new paradigm for bringing about a just peace in historic Palestine.

### **Postscript**

Since completing this article, Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi was deposed by the military on 3 July 2013, following massive popular demonstrations against his presidency and his Muslim Brotherhood backers. In addition, the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority announced the resumption of peace negotiations on 30 July. These events pose new opportunities for Israel to continue its project of settler colonialism and new obstacles to the achievement of Palestinian rights.

Despite Israel’s concerns about the instability that the ouster of Morsi may bring, the military-backed Egyptian government will undoubtedly continue, if not strengthen, security cooperation with Israel in the name of waging its declared ‘war against terrorism’. Morsi’s departure is a blow to Hamas in the Gaza Strip as well as potentially undermining Egyptian popular solidarity with the Palestinians, who have been represented in the media as allies of the deposed president and threats to Egyptian security.

<sup>68</sup> N. Erakat, “Palestinian Youth: New Movement, New Borders”.



With regards to the resumption of peace talks, these will not lead to a just peace in which the human rights of Palestinians are fully addressed. US Secretary of State John Kerry announced that all final status issues are open for negotiation, meaning that the PA will be forced to negotiate over rights that are already enshrined in international law. These talks can be considered to be a conflict management strategy on the part of Washington, rather than a move towards real peace.

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