

TRANSCRIPT

YOUSEF MUNAYYER - 4/14/13

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Join me in welcoming Yousef to our forum.

(Applause)

Yousef Munayyer:

Well, thank you all. First let me say I'm really sorry I

can't be with you in person. I was very disappointed this morning when I ran into trouble at the airport, but I was very excited when I found out I may be able to do this version. And hopefully the technology will cooperate and we'll be able to do this as close to as good as if I would have been present there with you. So my apologies, and I hope to do my best here with what we have.

I wanted to talk to you from a Palestinian perspective about how we see the situation today, and especially Palestinians see it as an ongoing process of what is called the Nakba from 1947 to 1949. And as I will demonstrate here -- and I think this is critically important because it's in context that perhaps you'll understand really what is at stake here and what the Palestinian experience has been over these years. The U.S. military plays an instrumental role in supporting it.

I'm going to kind of go over the different stages of this map, which more or less depict what was Palestinian held land prior to the creation of the modern state of Israel. In this map here you can see what was the proposed partition plan, then what was left for Palestinians after the creation of the state of Israel, leaving the West Bank and the Gaza. And this is closer to the present state today, which shows you the extent of Israeli colonization into the West Bank. And I'm going to talk about those, those different stages and how Palestinians

understand them.

This is the territory that was, of course, Palestine. This is Israel, and Palestine and the West Bank is here. The Gaza strip is here. Today this area is recognized as Israel. Just for your personal information, I come from a town that is right around here, Al-Layd. I was actually born there, so that makes me a Palestinian citizen of Israel.

And so I want to talk to you about how this territory ended up looking the way that it does today, which is a big mess, if you will. And I'll explain to you, of course, how the United States is helping support that process.

This was the territory that was actually purchased by the Zionist movement prior to the creation of the state of Israel. As you can see, the vast majority of the territory was not owned by Jews. Despite that fact, the international community decided to move forward with a partition plan that would partition the territory like so, where the territory in blue would be the proposed Jewish state and the territory in this pinkish color in here and here and here and this tiny little speck here would be the proposed Arab state.

Now, of course, I think it's pretty clear from this map that the geography of this particular proposal is very much unworkable. Jerusalem, as you can see, in this area was to be a separate territory that was under an international supervision.

It was called the "corpus seperatum." And the Arab state was in this spot, this spot, this spot, and this spot. However, the Arab populations existed inside the Jewish state as well. Forty-five percent of the population of the proposed Jewish state would be Palestinian Arab. The vast majority, 99 percent of the pink area, was Palestinian Arab and a half, if not more, than the population of Jerusalem. And that corpus seperatum was also Palestinian Arab.

So essentially what the international community was proposing was a plan that would create this dismembered Arab state, which essentially divided the Palestinian population into at least three different political geographic entities which included the Jewish state in blue, the Arab state, and of course the internationally governed territory of Jerusalem. And of course, from a Palestinian perspective it's very easy to understand why the Palestinians would be opposed to living in a geographically unworkable state, and one that, you know, gives the majority of the territory to a minority of the population and divides their population three-fold.

Nonetheless, the war that took place from 1947 to 1949 resulted in the creation of a Jewish state, an Israeli state, on all the territory that you see in blue here. And as you can see, the Israelis took more territory than what was allotted to them in the UN partition plan.

Now, during that process what happened was the depopulation of the territory from its native inhabitants, the vast majority of its native inhabitants which were the Palestinian-Arabs, including my grandparents on both my mother and father's side and 800,000 other Palestinians. This happened in stages, and the reason that this is important is because it sort of undercuts the conventional narrative about where Palestinian refugees came from.

What you see here are Israeli conquest operations that took place from November 1947 until March 30th of 1948. So this, of course, is before the creation of the state of Israel on May 15th of 1948. And what you see here at the bottom, if I could point this out to you, is the number of villages that were depopulated during this time, the number of refugees which were created during this time, and the number of dunams -- which is a measurement of territory -- that were conquered by the Israelis during this time period as well.

In the next stage what happened was something quite significant, which very few people actually know about. On March 19th, 1948 the United States -- the country that we're talking about today -- actually withdrew its support for the partition plan because it realized that the partition plan was not going to be accepted, was going to create chaos and favored instead a United Nations trusteeship over the entirety of the

territory, keeping the territory intact as a single unit opposing the separate of two states. But this signaled to the leadership of the Zionist movement at the time that the state that they desired had to be taken by force, and it was after this period through the creation of -- the announcement of the US reversal that Israeli conquest operations increased significantly. And as you can see, by the next stage you had prior to May 15th, 1948 400,000 Palestinian refugees already created and some 200 villages already depopulated by this time.

Now, the reason this is so important is because the conventional narrative, the Zionist narrative if I might add, on what happened in 1948 and where the refugees came from is that Israel acted in self-defense creating refugees in the course of a war that took place after multiple Arab states invaded the newborn Israeli state, this sort of David and Goliath myth that has become so conventional and so commonly held. But the reality is that when you look at the nuances of this and you look at it at the village level, what you realize is the vast majority -- or at least half of the refugees that were created depending on what final numbers you look at. But 400,000 Palestinian refugees were created before a single Arab soldier from any of the five Arab armies crossed into Israel because the state of Israel had not been declared yet. And in fact, the refugees pouring into these different Arab states were part of

the reasons why the Arab states had to cross into Israel. As you could see, on the 14th of May Israel declared independence. And it was after that, of course the next day, that the interstate war began. The next stages of the war, of course, only resulted in continued conquests and further depopulation of villages, culminating at the end of this period in the depopulation of over 530 Palestinian villages and over 800,00 Palestinian refugees. Now, during this time period there was depopulation that took place not only by the way that it happened in the case of my particular grandparents, whose towns were encircled and they were ordered to evacuate, but there was also a number of people who fled out of fear because of the number of massacres and atrocities that took place. Many of them are indicated here on this map, as you can see.

So the result of this was the Palestinian villages that existed in the territory -- again, this is inside of what is today Israel. The vast majority of them were literally wiped off the map. This is how many Palestinian villages remain from prior to 1948. So what happened to all of the people that lived here? Well, the people that lived in Palestinian ended up in refugee camps throughout the surrounding area, many of them in the West Bank, many of them in Gaza. In fact, many people do not know that the population of Gaza today, the vast majority of them, are Palestinian refugees, most of them from this area in

here. So 80 percent of this population, this very densely populated territory, is not from the Gaza strip.

And so you have this outstanding refugee question, and under international law and human rights law these refugees have a right to return to their homes and villages. And the state of Israel has objected to and rejected these rights and these claims based on the principle that it wants to maintain a Jewish majority. So that's how we got to the stage that you see here. But after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel began colonial expansion through the creation of Israeli settlements into the West Bank and the Gaza strip.

This is a map of the West Bank, which is fairly recent. It is from within the last ten years. It shows you in the areas in blue here and in here and in here and so on where these Israeli settlements exist. And what you can see very clearly is the dismemberment of this territory, making the creation of a viable Palestinian state within it practically impossible.

I just want to show you a couple of examples of why colonial expansion matters. For example, in 2008 -- and all of these examples that I show you of expansion come from the period of around 2008. To make a very simple point, our first panelist talked about the signs of hope from the new Israeli government. I strongly disagree with that assessment. But this was during a time when the Kadima government was in power. This was, of

course, Olmert's government not the more right wing Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

And of course, there was the expansion of this small settlement but nonetheless a settlement deep inside Palestinian territory inside the West Bank. You had the expansion of Maale Adumim, which is a city by any standards of some 30,000 Israeli settlers that is in a particularly sensitive geographic area around Jerusalem that would effectively bisect the West Bank. And you also had expansion in Frat, which is a settlement block that cuts deep into the West Bank as well, south of Bethlehem and further encircling Bethlehem as well. And so, again, this is in 2008 during time period when you had what is thought to be a more cooperative Israeli government.

And to show you at a closer level sort of the effect of Israeli settlement expansion on any possible outcome that results in a two-state solution, I wanted to focus in on the area of Jerusalem because it becomes very clear when you see what is going on here at the microlevel exactly what the policy is and how destructive it is as well. What you see here is a map of the governaret of Jerusalem. A governaret is essentially like a district. So this black line here outlines the governaret of Jerusalem in 1967, prior to the Israeli occupation. This territory in here is the West Bank, and this green line is the armistice line which separated Israel from the

West Bank. Jerusalem, the old city of Jerusalem, is in this area in here. And the areas that are in this bold color are areas that represent towns and villages and neighborhoods that are densely populated by Palestinians.

So this was the municipality of Jerusalem prior to the occupation in 1967 with the area in brown being West Jerusalem, the area in green being East Jerusalem. And this small square in here being the old city of Jerusalem where the holy sites are, like the Dome of the Rock and the Wailing Wall and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Just before I continue I just want to make sure you can all still hear me, or else I've been going on for a long time for no reason.

(Audience confirms.)

So what happened after this point, of course, with the occupation of the territory is the unilateral annexation and expansion of the municipality of Jerusalem to envelop several dozen extra square kilometers and all of this Palestinian population in the Israeli enclosed municipality. Of course, this included the occupation of the entire territory here. But we began to see shortly after the occupation the establishment of these Israeli settlements, and as I go through these different times periods what you'll see -- and this time period is 1967 to 1970. You'll see exactly how the pattern speaks to

the policy that was involved.

Here are settlements that were created from 1971 to 1980. And what you can see happening is a ring developing around the city of Jerusalem, making its connection to the West Bank more and more difficult and placing more and more obstacles in the way. Again, here's 1981 through 1990. All of this, of course, while the U.S. is continuing to pour aid into Israel, defending the Israelis, and international diplomatic forms as well.

Here you see settlement expansion from 1991 to 1996. And even in the heyday of the Oslo Peace Process the first Netanyahu government established this settlement here, which effectively cuts Bethlehem -- which is down here off from Jerusalem, which had been connected for two millennia essentially -- from being able to connect to each other.

So these are settlements during this time period. These are areas that have already been slated for future settlement expansion, including the notorious E1 area in here which would connect the massive Israeli settlement of Ma'ale Adumim with the remainder of municipal Jerusalem, effectively bisecting the West Bank. And you also have the monstrosity of the Israeli apartheid wall here outlined in red, which separates not only Israeli Jews and Israeli settlers from Palestinian Arabs but it also separates perhaps most importantly Palestinians from Palestinians, and of course Palestinians from their ancient and

historic capital in Jerusalem.

But the wall itself is not the only thing that is preventing Palestinians from accessing the city. You also have areas that are slated here for future settlement expansion. You can see the goal is essentially to fill up any remaining gaps. On top of this you have, of course, a system of checkpoints. And you'll see where all the checkpoints are. Checkpoints are, of course, military installations along roads or pathways that prevent Palestinians from crossing. And so these are all the checkpoints in the area of municipal Jerusalem, and you can see they pretty much go around the Palestinian areas preventing access to the municipality or around it.

But on top of the different obstacles preventing Palestinians from entering Jerusalem we also have an ongoing effort to force Palestinians out of Jerusalem, including three different policies. One is home eviction. One is residency revocation. And perhaps the most egregious is home demolition, and these yellow areas will show you areas in which the Palestinian communities have been targeted for home demolition in the years that was 2009 and 2010.

And so you can see there is an ongoing and severe effort here to make this as indivisible as possible through the process of settlement expansion and segregation. And so when I talk about the ongoing Nakba as part of the Palestinian experience,

this is precisely what it is that I'm talking about. You can see that the images of the Palestinian experience in 1948 mimic very much the images of the Palestinian experience of Palestinians losing their homes in many parts of the West Bank as recent as the current period.

So this is, in fact, what it is that the United States is supporting, and here is where I would take the argument beyond just presenting the Palestinian perspective but also saying when we're talking military aid we're talking, as Josh said, about carrots. What I think is the problem is that ending U.S. military aid to Israel is something we should have done -- is a conversation we should have had many, many years ago. Today I think it's almost moving to the point of being not irrelevant but really a very obvious thing that we should do. But ultimately, what we're talking about is changing Israeli behavior in this territory. And I no longer think ending Israeli military aid on its own is sufficient to change Israeli behavior. Let's just go over a few basic numbers -- and some of this was mentioned in the past.

The Israeli defense budget for 2012 was \$14.5 billion. Defense consumption in Israel as a percentage of GDP is the lowest that it's been since the period of 1973, during the war in 1973. It is currently six percent of Israeli GDP today, defense consumption is. And that number itself has halved since

the beginning of the Oslo Peace Process, and so it's become a lot easier economically for Israel to defend itself. So even if we're talking about ending U.S. military aid to Israel that is merely providing the end of a carrot. But it's clear that with the deep interest Israel has invested in the occupation it is going to take a much stronger position than merely ending carrots, but it's also going to take introducing sticks. And this means sanctions to move Israel into line with international law, to get Israel to abide by international law as it relates Palestinian refugee rights and as it relates to Palestinian human rights in the occupied territories as well when it comes to freedom of movement and freedom to self-determination.

We're also talking about -- when we're talking about the case of Israel the largest per capita nuclear arsenal in the world. So I don't buy for a moment that ending U.S. military aid to Israel means that suddenly Israel is abandoned and no longer capable to defend itself. Israel is currently capable of destroying every single state around it with a nuclear device in a very short period of time. So Israel's security is more or less guaranteed without the measly \$3 billion that the United States is giving it. It's going to take a lot more than U.S. military aid. It's going to take sanctions. It's going to take -- and I think we have to applaud this movement. It's going to take boycott divestment and sanctions as well. Because

right now states are not in a position, have not indicated that they're in a position, to end any sort of aid to Israel and are, in fact, only continuing to support this system of apartheid. And so it's fallen onto civil society, and civil society actors within Palestinian civil society but also global civil society, to call for a boycott divestment and sanctions movement.

I think it's very clear that Israel does not need military aid from the United States because it is also the second largest per capita exporter of weapons in the world, only behind Sweden. So not only is the United States supporting this system with our tax dollars and our weapons and its weight in international diplomatic forum, but Israel is also benefitting tremendously and economically from all of that while oppressing the Palestinian people.

The point that I simply wanted to make is that this is an important discussion. I applaud you all for being involved in it, but military aid is merely the first step. It's going to take a lot more to change Israel behavior because they are very much invested in an apartheid system. And so I hope this leads to a continued discussion of how we get to that point. Thank you.