

أشخفت الناس ناعمًا بحُمول  
يتمنى من القوي احترامًا  
(الباس فنصل)

YOUR DAILY ARABIC PROVERB  
*The feeblest of people is one who, in lethargy,  
wishes for respect from the powerful.*

Elias Konsol  
(20th-century Syrian emigre poet)

# Opinion 2023

**TOMORROW**  
Hafed Al-Ghwell on the  
Middle East's need to adopt  
a pragmatic, inclusive  
approach to climate change

## Palestinian resistance undefeated

The dramatic, earth-shattering events in Palestine starting on Oct. 7 have taken many people by surprise. But not attentive observers. Few expected that Palestinian fighters would be parachuting into southern Israel on Oct. 7 or that, instead of capturing a single Israeli soldier — as in 2006 — hundreds of Israelis, including many soldiers and civilians, would find themselves captive in besieged Gaza.

The reason behind the “surprise” is the same reason that Israel is still reeling in collective shock, which is the tendency to pay close attention to political discourses and intelligence analyses of Israel and its supporters, while largely neglecting the Palestinian discourse.

For better comprehension, let us go back to the start.

We entered 2023 with some depressing data and dark predictions about what was awaiting Palestinians.

Soon before the new year commenced, UN Mideast envoy Tor Wennesland said that 2022 was the most violent year for Palestinians in the West Bank since 2005. “Too many people, overwhelmingly Palestinian, have been killed and injured,” Wennesland told the UN Security Council.

This figure — 171 killed and hundreds wounded in the West Bank alone — did not receive much coverage in the Western media. The mounting number of Palestinian victims did, however, register among Palestinians and their resistance movements.

As anger and calls for revenge grew among ordinary Palestinians, their leadership continued to play its traditional role — that of pacifying Palestinian calls for resistance while continuing with its “security coordination” with Israel. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, 88, carried on rehashing the old language about a two-state solution and the so-called peace process, but simultaneously cracked down on Palestinians who dared protest his ineffectual leadership.

Defenseless in the face of a far-right Israeli government with an open agenda to crush Palestinians, expand illegal settlements and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, Palestinians were forced to develop their own defensive strategies.

The Lions' Den — a multifactional resistance group that first appeared in the city of Nablus in August 2022 — grew in power and appeal. Other groups, old and new, emerged on the scene throughout the northern West Bank, with the single objective of uniting Palestinians around a nonfactional agenda and, ultimately, producing a new Palestinian leadership in the West Bank.

These developments sounded alarm bells in Israel. The Israeli occupation army moved quickly to crush the new armed rebellion, raiding Palestinian towns and refugee camps one after the other with the hope of turning this nascent revolution into another failed attempt to challenge the status quo in the Occupied Territories.

The bloodiest of the Israeli incursions occurred in Nablus on Feb. 23, Jericho on Aug. 15 and, most importantly, in the Jenin refugee camp. The July 3 Israeli invasion of Jenin was reminiscent, in terms of casualties and degree of destruction, to the Israeli invasion of that very camp in April 2002.

The outcome, however, was not the same. Back then, Israel, having invaded Jenin and other Palestinian towns and refugee camps, succeeded in crushing armed resistance for years to come. This time around, the Israeli invasion merely ignited a wider rebellion in the Occupied Territories, creating a further schism in the already deteriorating relationship between Palestinians on the one hand and Abbas and his PA on the other.

Indeed, just days after Israel concluded its attack on the camp, Abbas emerged with thousands of his soldiers to warn the bereaved refugees that “the hand that will break the unity of the people ... will be cut off from its arm.”

Yet, as the popular rebellion continued to build momentum in the West Bank, Israeli intelligence reports started talking about a plan composed by the deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, Saleh Al-Arouri, to ignite an armed intifada. The response, according to Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth, citing official Israeli sources, was to kill Al-Arouri.

Israel's attention and counterstrategy was focused intently on the West Bank, as Hamas in Gaza, in Israel's viewpoint, seemed disinterested in an all-out confrontation.

But how did Tel Aviv reach such a conclusion?

Several major events — the kind that would usually have pushed Hamas to retaliate — had taken place without any serious armed response by the resistance in Gaza. Last December, for example, Israel had sworn in the most right-wing government in its history. Far-right ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich arrived on the political scene with the declared objectives of annexing the West Bank, imposing military control over Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Palestinian Muslim and Christian holy sites and, in the case of Smotrich, denying the very existence of the Palestinian people.

Their pledges were quickly translated into action under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Ben-Gvir was keen on sending a message to his constituency that the seizure of Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israel had become imminent. He repeatedly raided or ordered raids on Al-Aqsa at an unprecedented frequency. The most violent and humiliating of these raids occurred on April 4, when worshippers were beaten up by soldiers while praying inside the mosque during the holy month of Ramadan.

Resistance groups in Gaza threatened retaliation. In fact, several rockets were fired from the Strip toward Israel, merely serving as a symbolic reminder that Palestinians are united, regardless of where they are in the geographic map of historic Palestine.

Israel, however, ignored the message and instead used Palestinian threats of retaliation, along with occasional so-called lone-wolf attacks — like that of Muhammad Al-Mazaraa at the illegal Ma'ale Adumim settlement — as political capital to ignite the fervor of Israeli society.

Not even the death of Palestinian political prisoner Khader Adnan on May 2 seemed to shift Hamas' position. Some even suggested there was a rift between Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad following Adnan's death as a result of his hunger strike in Ramleh Prison.

On the same day, Palestinian Islamic Jihad fired rockets into Israel, as Adnan was one of its most prominent members. Israel answered by attacking hundreds of targets inside Gaza, mostly civilian homes and infrastructure, which resulted in the deaths of 33 Palestinians and the wounding of 147 more.

A truce was declared on May 13, again with no direct Hamas participation, giving further reassurance to Israel that its bloody onslaught on the Strip had achieved not just a military purpose — often referred to as “mowing the lawn” — but a political one too. However, Israel's strategic estimation proved to be wrong, as attested by Hamas' well-coordinated Oct. 7 attacks in southern Israel, which targeted numerous military bases, settlements and other strategic positions.

But was Hamas being deceptive? Hiding its actual strategic objectives in anticipation of that major event? A quick examination of Hamas' recent statements and political discourse demonstrate that the Palestinian group was hardly secretive about its future action. Two weeks before 2023 commenced, Hamas' leader in Gaza Yahya Sinwar had a message for Israel: “We will come to you in a roaring flood. We will come to you with endless rockets; we will come to you in a limitless flood of soldiers ... like the repeating tide.”

The immediate response to the Hamas attack was the predictable US-Western solidarity with Israel, calls for revenge and the complete destruction and annihilation of Gaza, and revitalized plans for displacing Palestinians out of Gaza into Egypt and out of the West Bank into Jordan.

The Israeli war on the Strip, also starting on Oct. 7, has resulted in unprecedented casualties compared to all previous Israeli wars on Gaza and, in fact, on Palestinians during any time in modern history. The word “genocide” was soon used, initially by intellectuals and activists, but eventually by international law experts too.

Despite this, the UN could do nothing. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Nov. 8 that the UN had “neither money nor power” to prevent a potential genocide in Gaza. This effectively meant the disabling of the international legal and political systems, as every attempt by the UN Security Council to demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire has been blocked by the US.

As the death toll mounted among a starving population in Gaza, Palestinians resisted throughout the Gaza Strip. Their resistance was not confined to attacking or ambushing invading Israeli soldiers, but was predicated on the legendary steadfastness of a population that refuses to be weakened or displaced.

This “sumud” continued, even when Israel began to systematically attack hospitals, schools and every place that, in times of war, should be seen as “safe” for a beleaguered civilian population.

On Dec. 3, UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk said “there is no safe place in Gaza.” This was repeated by other UN officials, along with other phrases such as “Gaza has become a graveyard for children,” which was first noted by UNICEF spokesperson James Elder on Oct. 31. This left Guterres with no other option but to invoke Article 99 of the UN Charter, which allows the secretary-general to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.”

Israeli violence and Palestinian sumud also extended to the West Bank. Aware of the potential for armed resistance in the West Bank, the Israeli army quickly launched major, deadly raids on countless Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps, killing hundreds, injuring thousands and arresting thousands more.

But Gaza remained the epicenter of the Israeli genocide. Aside from a brief humanitarian truce, coupled with a few prisoner exchanges, the battle for Gaza — in fact, for the future of Palestine and the Palestinian people — continues and at an unparalleled price of death and destruction.

Palestinians know full well that the current fight will either mean a new Nakba, like the ethnic cleansing of 1948, or the beginning of the reversal of that same Nakba — as in the process of liberating the Palestinian people from the yoke of Israeli colonialism.

While Israel is determined to end Palestinian resistance once and for all, it is obvious that the Palestinian people's determination to win their freedom in the coming years is far greater.

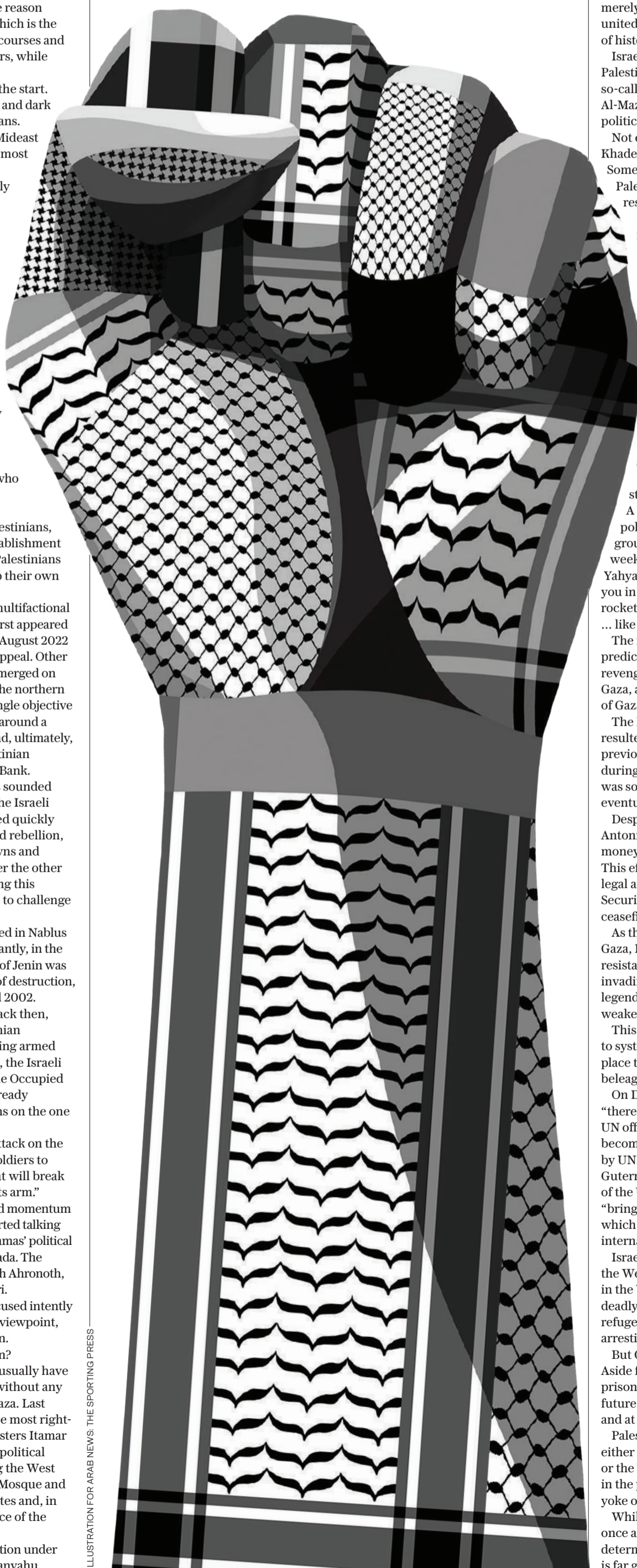


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