



BASEL AL-ARAJ

**ON THE CLAIM THAT THE
INTIFADA HARMED THE
PALESTINIANS**

This is Basil Idris's 2024 translation of Basil Araj's article *On the Claim That the Intifada Harmed the Palestinians*. This is translated from the original in *I Have Found My Answers*, 1st edition by Bissan Bookshop, pp. 122–123.

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Palestinian resistance rocket that struck "Tel Aviv" with Basel Al-Araj's name written on it

Translator's Introduction

Basil Araj **باسل الأعرج** died on the 5th of March, 2017. The date of his biological birth scarcely matters, for he was truly born the day he died, in a hail of bullets, facing the enemy alone.

Basil was an intellectual, a militant intellectual **مثقف مشتبك**. In fact, he was so much so to the point where "The Militant Intellectual" is always understood to refer to him specifically. A militant intellectual is not—necessarily—one who holds a rifle, but one who uses his knowledge to confront the enemy and contribute to the struggle, rather than stashing it away in a corner of his mind, leaving it to molder until it is dusted off at the next trivia quiz game. Basil organized seminars and discussions of revolutionary theory and Palestinian history through the Suleiman Halabi Study Circle for Colonial Studies and Intellectual Liberation [1] (who publish the Babelwad Magazine and are present on Twitter as @decolonizenow1). He also volunteered as a tour guide in trips to educate Palestinian youth about their history. [2]

He was chased, arrested, and tortured by the Oslo Authority. He knew that it would not be too long before the Zionist state came after him, and so he fled, took up his rifle, and became a **muṭārād** **مطارد**, an "outlaw" or a "wanted man." [3] In March 2017, the IDF caught up to him and besieged him for hours before killing him with an ENERGA anti-tank rifle grenade. People flocked to see the scene of his death in Bireh, his blood mixed with his keffiyeh and the shell casings from his rifle.

If one were to visit his Wikipedia page, one would find it completely inadequate. beyond the constant Zionist heckling of the page, it is very short, badly sourced, and does not convey the importance or magnitude of Basil's legacy among Palestinians. A more complete biography of Basil is still unfortunately unwritten.

1. Suleiman Halabi was a student who assassinated the French colonial commander of Egypt under Napoleon, Jean-Baptiste Kléber, in 1800. Halabi was tortured before being impaled to death, and his bones sent to France to be displayed as the "skull of a criminal" in phrenology exhibitions. Halabi's bones are still in France.
2. Here he discusses the Napoleonic invasion of Palestine on a bus tour, here on another bus tour he tells the story of social divisions in the Hebron area before Zionist colonization, here he tells the story of the Iraqi Army's battles during the Nakba while standing at the Iraqi soldiers' memorial, here he gives a lecture on revolutionary action during popular uprisings, here he tells the history of his town, Walaja, and the effects of the occupation on it.
3. During this period, he wrote his famous (and last) essay *Why We Go To War*, which offers a rare glimpse into his soul. In it, he speaks about the liberation struggle. He wears his heart on his sleeve and speaks about the romanticism he always felt. To him, the romance of the struggle is always in the past and the future but never the present; it's something to chase and remember. I intend to translate this piece, as well as some other famous ones such as *Live Like a Porcupine and Fight Like a Flea* and *Leaving the Law and Entering the Revolution*.
4. I intend to write about the liberation of Gaza in 2005 and 2007 and how (and why) Zionist colonies there were dismantled.
5. Here, Basil explains his concept of resistance as an accumulative investment. This clip is almost inescapable today on social media, being reposted frequently by the people he inspired, yours truly included.
6. This is referring to the repeated promises of a "Palestinian state" achieved through negotiations as expressed by the Oslo Authority in the West Bank.
7. Speaking of which, many today are repeating the same mistake when it comes to the Aqsa Flood. The victories and advances of the Resistance today will not be erased by Israeli atrocities. In fact, claiming that civilian casualties are an Israeli victory would mean that every colonizer has a default shortcut to victory: just kill as many people as possible and you win; after all, you have superior military technology by definition, you can subjugate the natives through unlimited carnage. In reality, however, this is not true. The US, France, and Nazi Germany all suffered humiliating losses around the world despite the horrifying massacres they committed.
8. [Trans. note]: Spearheaded by the legendary theologian and guerrilla leader Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, the namesake of the modern Qassam Brigades and Qassam Rocket.
9. [Trans. note]: Basil wrote this in 2013, when the Resistance was considerably weaker than it is today, or even compared to 2014. In the 2014 Gaza War, the Resistance would prove itself beyond any doubt. Israel only comprehended the reality of the long-term threat of the Gaza Resistance due to the latter's performance in 2014. The Aqsa Flood in 2023 and the subsequent Battle of Gaza came as the culmination of this process: the drawn-out process of accumulative investment. The Israeli government relies on massive civilian massacres as way to cover for its failures: everyone from Foreign Affairs magazine to the IDF's own spokesman now admit that Hamas are "neither defeated nor on the verge of defeat".
10. [Trans. note]: A term that is curiously rare in English-language theory, as far as I can tell, while being extremely common in Arabic. a *popular incubator* is the support of the population for the liberation movement. It's the reason why the IDF is having much trouble recruiting informants in Gaza: the popular incubator is simply too strong and well-developed. The concept itself is not obscure: Mao's *Three Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention* are meant to foster the popular incubator.
11. [Trans. note]: Yasser Arafat spent the last 2 years of his life besieged in his compound in Ramallah, the *Muqāṭa'a* building. This was imposed by the Israeli government ostensibly to punish him for the Intifada, of which he was not actually in control. The actual reason was to furnish an excuse to renege on what little the Palestinians were guaranteed in Oslo. Arafat cravenly offered concessions for the siege to be lifted, including handing over the General Secretary of the PFLP, Ahmad Sa'adat, but in vain. He was only allowed to leave in order for him to die in a hospital in France during his final illness.

Beyond the lack of sufficient consciousness and social and psychological readiness, the lack of proper organization among the armed factions produced leaders without the necessary capacity and skills. The popular incubator [10] was undeveloped, and a wide gap existed between the people and the armed struggle.

Add to that the counterrevolution which arose during Yasser Arafat's siege [11] ; the secret communications and the treasonous deals conducted covertly with the enemy. The leadership's actions were seriously hampered by the lack of preparation, strategy, and military tactics. Their goals never breached the ceiling of Oslo (Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza [i.e. the "Two-State Solution"]). Here, we do not forget the dependence of the Palestinian Authority and its financial, functional, and administrative bodies on Israel and the imperialist camp. Some believed that the armed struggle could never change the realities on the ground, and instead viewed it as a tool to merely improve the terms of negotiations.

To sum up, the first thing that the colonizer does is to define what's possible and what's impossible for the colonized. He is usually aided in this by some individuals in the colonized population, and this is conducted in direct and indirect ways. So, do not believe what is told and retold and planted in our minds, and weigh these assumptions according to the logic of liberation and the strength of the people's struggle.

One of his key ideas, beside that of the militant intellectual, was the idea of resistance as an accumulative investment المقاومة جدوى مستمرة. As Ameer Faleh explained:

[R]esistance is not measured in the contemporary military inferiority, an inferiority that is natural in the context of colonialism; otherwise, colonialism wouldn't exist in Palestine. Resistance should be measured in the painstaking strides taken to improve the efforts of fighters to close the qualitative gap.

Acts of resistance beget more acts of resistance. As the colonizer cracks down on those who fight him, the people must keep the flame alive, investing their blood and sweat into maintaining a baseline of resistance to prevent total collapse, while laying down the ground for future resistance. Hamas began as a small brigade of non-professional fighters, and eventually grew into the force that can cause serious damage to the IDF, through piecemeal "investments": small qualitative and quantitative improvements to equipment, training, and experience. Not only that, but even small acts of resistance can improve the lives of ordinary people over generations. As Basil puts it:

In this area of Jenin, there is not a single colony today ... there used to be four of them ... what happened was that the people of Jenin made a certain investment twice: in the Revolution of 1936, when they fought ferociously [against the British and the Zionists] and made this area into a triangle of fire, thus preventing Jewish settlement in the area. This benefited their grandchildren who, decades later, find that there are no settlements in their area, unlike my village for example, which is choked by settlements. And so, every small price you invest into resistance will yield great returns, if not in your lifetime, then in the lifetime of those who come after you. This is what we mean by resistance as an accumulative investment. By 2005, there had been built four settlements here. When the Jewish settlements in Gaza were dismantled [4], those four in Jenin were dismantled too. They try to give reasons for it ... but it's all nonsense. It was due to the investments of the Second Intifada. [5]

This phrase, resistance is an accumulative investment (much catchier in Arabic) has become a watchword and a defiant slogan raised by many in the face of Israel's collaborators in Palestine and the Arab World.

He said in 2014, as Gaza faced the worst (now second-worst) Israeli attack in its history:

All the phrase-mongering of pacifist ideology is now being exposed as a fraud. The claim that "the armed struggle is useless" has now fallen; Gaza is trying to snatch true liberation from the jaws of the enemy. It can indeed achieve this in the not-too-distant future; this here is the investment it's making ... Gaza, with the tactics of the resistance, is smashing the weapons of the enemy, which renders moot the pacifist argument that we are hopelessly outmatched by Israel's technology. The tunnels, the IEDs, and the snipers are all currently neutralizing the enemy's advantage. The conditions of Gaza are ten times as harsh as those in the West Bank, and yet here is Gaza achieving miracles, while the people of the West Bank are being sold illusions by charlatans [6] ... the West Bank's realities are the result of Oslo, and Gaza's realities are the result of the Second Intifada, which itself rose up against Oslo. The Oslo Authority begs Israel for 3G mobile networks, while the Gaza Resistance smashes the army of 4G.

In this article, Basil defends the Second Intifada as a part of the process of accumulative investment in the Resistance against those with superficial understanding of its results, who only saw the brutal Israeli response [7] and not the real, tangible outcomes, the least of which is the liberation of Gaza.

I translate this piece because much of Basil's work remains untranslated and obscure to those outside the Arab World, even to those in the international Palestine movement. Basil's works, articles, and even social media posts were collected and published in Arabic by as "I Have Found My Answers: Thus Spoke the Martyr Basil Araj" in 2018. The title comes from Basil's handwritten last will and testament:

[...] It is very difficult to write your own will, and for years I read the wills of martyrs. These have always confused me—they were always terse, quick, devoid of literary merit or answers to my burning questions about martyrdom. And yet, here I am, walking to my own death, satisfied, convinced, having found my answers! Oh, woe betide me, is there a more elegant answer than that of the martyr's action! ... Why should I answer this for you, you living people; you go find your own answers! As for us, the dwellers of the graves, we only seek God's mercy.

“On the Claim That the Intifada Harmed the Palestinians” by Basil Araj

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Black Hand revolt [8] began in Palestine, but it was suppressed and crushed in a matter of four months, and the insurgents were all dead, imprisoned, or exiled. Also during that time, the Communist Party in Vietnam attempted to launch a revolt, and it too was suppressed, almost causing the destruction of the Party.

The important point is that these revolts led to some of the greatest achievements of mankind: the Black Hand revolt was a direct catalyst for the 1936 Palestinian Revolt, and the Communist Party's revolt was also a catalyst for the Vietnamese revolution against the French; the leadership in both nations learned the lessons of the past attempts, avoiding mistakes and adjusting their tactics.

People at that time did not reject armed struggle and didn't swallow the colonialist propaganda that claims that the armed struggle is useless and doomed to failure. Instead, they analyzed the experience and used the knowledge to launch new revolutions. In contrast, some Palestinians regurgitate the refrain that the Second Intifada brought destruction upon us, and this leads them to dread future Intifadas in fear of similar consequences.

I have no idea when those people had the chance to sit down and evaluate the results of the Second Intifada and its military experience in a scientific way. Usually, when you hear someone speaking of the destruction and the horrors and the losses and the futility, he is simply rephrasing Zionist propaganda in his own words. This propaganda has several mechanisms aimed at influencing the Palestinian mind, and is not constrained to official Oslo Authority statements (and the speeches of Mahmoud Abbas). The war on Palestine continues, symbolic and hidden violence is the paradigm of the day. What they usually do when an experiment fails is that they constrain their criticism to shortcomings in practice and not to the ideology or theory that stood behind the experiment.

Furthermore, the results of the Second Intifada are not as they always portray. Was every last settlement in Gaza not dismantled? Didn't the Resistance in Gaza not gather enough strength to enable it to entrench itself and even reach a level of hybrid warfare [9] as a result of the gains of the Second Intifada? Is the Resistance not currently striking Tel Aviv and Jerusalem with rockets whose first iterations virtually resembled fireworks? Is it not true that some settlements in the West Bank (around Jenin and Nablus) were dismantled because the cost of protecting them became too high? Didn't the Intifada cost Israel billions of shekels? Do you not know what horrors our people avoided due to the Intifada? I personally believe that the Intifada delayed a planned ethnic cleansing operation.