



**BREAKING THE BETRAYAL OF SILENCE:
ENDING THE SUPPRESSION AND SUFFERING OF PALESTINE**

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Dr. Martin Luther King comes to mind in so many questions of life and struggle, not only in this his month of birth, but also in critical times like these of transition and trial, imperial wars and continuous liberation struggles against all odds. In his speech condemning the Vietnam War, King reaffirmed an essential insight that “a time comes when silence is betrayal”. Indeed, he said, “I have moved to break the betrayal of my own silence and to speak from the burning of my heart, as I have called for radical departures from the destruction of Vietnam”. For he reasoned, “my conscience leaves me no other choice”. And so it is now time to speak the truth, tragedy and struggle of Palestine.

Seeming to learn little from its destructive failure in Lebanon and its inability to break the will of the Palestinian people after 60 years of unrelenting oppression and 41 years of brutal occupation, Israel has launched another deadly and devastating campaign against the people of Palestine. The U.S. government and its pliant politicians have lined up in lockstep and unreflective support, while around the world, Israel’s invasion is being characterized and protested as a massacre, slaughter, genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Preempted from putting forth a new initiative, President-elect Obama is now saddled with a mindset and behavior belonging to another administration and government, and is forced into a problematic silence. But we must speak, for only then can we, King tells us, move from the lowlands of cowering collaboration and coerced conformity “to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history”.

It is, then, of great moral importance to stand up in solidarity with the Palestinian

people in their struggle to liberate themselves and reveal the key and continuing source of violence in the Israeli occupation itself. Surely there is no ethics, reason or reality to a conversation that begins with the claims of an attacker and ignores or denies the claims of the people attacked; that grants greater moral status to the oppressor than to the oppressed and argues self-defense for occupiers while denying the right of resistance for defense and freedom to the occupied people.

King called on us to be sensitive to the suffering of the peoples our government and allies call enemy. He notes that “as I ponder the madness in Vietnam and search within myself for ways to understand and respond in compassion, my mind goes constantly to the people”. Thus, he says, “I speak now not of the soldiers of each side, nor the ideologies . . ., but simply of the people”. And he, of moral necessity, identifies with the “suffering, helpless and the outcast”. Indeed, “We are called on to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers (and sisters)”.

So, as King suggests, let’s look beyond the soldiers who are trained to make war and welcome death and think of the Palestinian children bombed and dying in their mothers’ arms, or blown to bits on the way to school; of parents digging their children from rubble and ruin; of the constant mourning of fathers, mothers and other relatives for the dead and dying; of the sorrowful health statistics of the children with acute anemia and iron deficiency; widespread deafness among the people from bombs and sonic booms; the malnutrition and trauma; the deliberate Israeli denial of food, fuel, water, electricity, medical supplies and other material necessities; and the

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2

imprisonment of 11,000 political prisoners, including democratically-elected members of Parliament.

And let's think of the tons of bombs dropped on this densely populated region, killing in the first 10 days over 500, and wounding 4,000 and destroying homes, hospitals, schools, mosques, apartments, universities and their dormitories, government buildings, fire and civil defense stations, power plants, and human possibilities. Surely, this can in no way be called self-defense, proportionate response, or a sane solution.

The media has noted that Obama said "If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I'm going to do everything in my power to stop that and I would expect Israel to do the same thing". But the question becomes what would he or we do to stop the invasions, bombings, assassinations and other assaults on the lives, freedom and dignity of Palestinians cited above? And is the same expected of the Palestinians and do we concede a similar right of self-defense to them?

Israel says it's threatened and a victim, but it's the strongest military force in the region, has the fifth largest military in the world and is the fourth largest exporter of arms. Palestine has no army, navy or air force, no heavy weapons or protector and patron like the U.S. Israel says it's not against the Palestinians just Hamas, but it occupies, bombs, kills and imprisons the whole people. It says Hamas broke the truce, but its assassinations and failure to lift the siege, and

finally the November 4th killings of six Palestinians led Hamas to deem the truce no longer viable or valid.

Clearly against all violence, King nevertheless understood the need to look to the original act of violence of oppression that provoked and required the defensive violence of resistance, as Nelson Mandela also argued. King pointed out the contradiction, even hypocrisy, of daring "to charge them with violence while we pour every new weapon of death into their land". Continuing, he says "Surely we must understand their feelings, even if we do not condone their actions. Surely we must see that the men we supported pressed them to their violence. Surely we must see that our own computerized plans of destruction simply dwarf their acts".

As Archbishop Tutu and Mandela have argued, Israel's apartheid-like oppression of the Palestinian people will never achieve for it recognition, peace or security. It cannot bomb its way to peace and security, break Hamas or the will of the Palestinian people for freedom. The need is for an immediate ceasefire, quick delivery of humanitarian aid, an end to the siege and occupation, reconciliation of the leadership, freedom of political prisoners, return of the refugees; reparations and international aid, an independent and viable Palestinian state, the difficult negotiation and work of peace, an international force to guarantee the peace, and space to reimagine and rebuild the lives and futures of every people in the region.

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