

Greetings and good afternoon. I am honored to be a part of this conference as well as this roundtable discussion. In the time given to me to speak, I would like to raise two points in particular:

- (1) the first is, that as Palestinians, Kurds, and nations denied their self-determination, we can not look to imperialistic powers who in the pursuit of their own interests, may use our cause and even promote them but which are certainly not aligned with us with any degree of sincerity.
- (2) Second, in our struggle for self-determination, Palestinians have often looked to Arab nationalism as a solution and this too is an inadequate approach to our struggle at best and a detrimental instrument to the many minority populations in the Arab world at worst.

That said, I would like to suggest that we take opportunities such as this conference to think outside of the box and beyond the paradigms available to us in a quest for self-determination.

We can not depend on Imperial powers for support

As to the first point,

Although it is tempting to accept the support of imperial powers such as the US and Israel, in a context in which our rights are not only neglected but repressed, I believe we must resist this temptation in order to build a stronger coalition and a more revolutionary vision. Consider:

- In their attempt to drum up support for the war on Iraq, Bush, defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and Secretary of State, Colin Powell all cited the infamous use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein's genocidal regime against Kurdish towns including Halabja.

Meanwhile:

- In October 2003, when the designation of the PKK or the Worker's Party of Kurdistan as a foreign terrorist organization was set to expire, Powell re-designated the PKK as a foreign terrorist organization.
- Consider that 75% of Turkey's weaponry is supplied by the U.S. and according to photojournalist, Kevin McKiernan in the March./April 1999 issue of *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, between 1991 and 1999, 100 billion US dollars was spent by Turkey to crush the Kurdish nationalist struggle.
- Most explicitly, in a January 28, 2004 interview with CNN, Wolfowitz said, "Obviously Turkey has very big interests in what takes place [in Iraq] and they're nervous, but we're telling Turkey, a democratic Iraq which will be unified and preserves a territorial integrity will be good for a democratic Turkey." In other words, no independent Kurdish state.

Turkey's alliance with the US and the US's promotion of Turkey as an upstanding democratic regime in a sea of Islamic fundamentalism is very similar to its long-standing relationship with Israel and its budding relationship with India. Consider:

- One of Israel's major concerns is potential water resources. They look to Turkey as a solution to this problem which leads to their alliance. However, Turkey's richest water resources are located in eastern and southeastern Turkey, parts of unrecognized Kurdistan, where the headwaters and tributaries of the Euphrates and the Tigris are located. And even outside of historical Kurdistan, a large Kurdish refugee population is settled in the Cilician plains of Turkey near the sources of the Ceyhan and Seyhan rivers. When calculating its water needs, Israel is not going to think twice about Kurdish self-determination, let alone, their human rights.
- In the aftermath of September 11th and the advent of the "war on terrorism" the US began to embrace Israel, Turkey, and India as their *Axis of Good*. ~~In a visit to Israel, Turkish Prime Minister, Ismael Cem remarked, "We are a forefront of that coalition [Washington based coalition against terror] which is fighting terrorism. No question about it."~~
- On a visit to New Delhi in January 2002, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres has said that Indo-Israeli cooperation is a "coalition without a choice because no country democratic or otherwise, can forgive or be indifferent to the damages of terrorism."
- This tripartate alliance also sheds light on Israel's desire to share anti-ballistic missile technology with both India and Turkey. As well as its policy agenda to undermine Arab nationalism.

Arab nationalism is not the answer

In the face of these forces and a long colonial legacy in Western Asia, Arab nationalism developed as a counter-force. When imperial interests compel imperial powers to divide Western Asia into a series of artificial and arbitrary nation-states, it is natural that the reaction is one of rejection and one that embraces the unity of Western Asia as a historically Arab region.

However, this strategy is inadequate for our struggles for self-determination. While it counters the movement to divide and conquer the Arab World, it also suppresses the self-determination of its minority communities including but not limited to, Kurds, Armenians, Berbers, Tuagers, and Copts.

Consider one of Arab nationalism's most popular icons, past Egyptian president, Gamal Abd al Nasser. As loved as he was, no one was more cruel to the 6 million Coptic Christians in Egypt than he was.

But even progressive thinkers, like Palestinian-Israeli Knesset member, Azmi Bishara touts an Arab nationalist line. Why? Because it best serves Israeli interests to undermine Arab nationalism and Palestinian self-determination. Presently,

- Israel drafts Druze Palestinians into the Israeli army. Not only that but in Israel, Druze history is taught separate of Arab history.
- Also consider its alliances with the Lebanese Phalangists most infamously in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the massacre at Sabra and Shatila as well as its recent occupation of Southern Lebanon and its creation and alliance with the Southern Lebanese Army.
- And now its most recent covert assistance to the Kurdish populations in northern Iraq.

It seems as though we are stuck at best. On the one hand, a strategy of divide and conquer continues to weaken and dilute the struggle for Arab self-determination in general and Palestinian self-determination in particular. And on the other hand, the response to this effort as an Arab nationalist impulse is not only inadequate but it is detrimental to the struggles for self-determination among Western Asia's minority populations.

So where does that leave us?

I believe it leaves us at a point where we must transcend the paradigms of self-determination available to us. We should posture ourselves not in resistance to anything but in advocacy for something revolutionary indeed. I can't possibly address what this looks like in this brief discussion but I will throw it out there to question the viability and benefits of an independent nation-state as the be-all, end-all answers to our struggles as Kurds and Palestinians. Which is not to say that I wouldn't or don't support nation-state sovereignty, I am simply saying that it is not an adequate solution to our struggles in a global or even in a regional context.

Thank you.