What does Palestine tell us about the humanitarian agenda?

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What does Palestine tell us about the humanitarian agenda?

• The role of state interests and great powers has ALWAYS been dominant. Aid deeply political. ‘Chequebook diplomacy’.

• Different international peacebuilding strategies since Oslo, but one CONSTANT underlying policy: to create acceptable ‘partners for peace’ for Israel. Negative humanitarian and socio-political impacts.

• Increasingly legitimate to use violence in the name of furthering peace. ‘Sanctions’ 2006. Critique of this by Dugard and De Soto.
The context

• Long-term occupation, asymmetrical conflict, lack of political settlement, human rights situation.

• Highly dependent on aid: $1bn a year — but Israel receives $3bn per year from USA.

• Some agencies (e.g. UNRWA and ICRC) have operated there for 50+ years.

• Impact of ‘war on terror’ agenda.
The context

• Increasing disconnect between political, military & humanitarian strategies. Aid as ‘smokescreen/sticking plaster’ for colonisation and occupation.

• “The US decides, the World Bank leads, the EU pays, the UN Feeds” (Ann Le More).

• ‘High’ (diplomatic) politics of US and Israel not challenged by ‘low’ (development) politics of other actors i.e. EU could do more.

• Larissa Fast: ‘aid in a pressure cooker’.
Peacebuilding strategies since Oslo

  - ‘Security first’ for Israel. Assumption that Arafat could keep lid on internal dissent.
  - ‘chequebook diplomacy’ i.e. economic development would ensure development, thus creating ‘moderate’ leaders.
Peacebuilding strategies since Oslo

• ‘Roadmap’ period 2002-2006: ‘peacebuilding via democratic reform’:
  – Good governance and democratisation. Arafat to be replaced by ‘new partners for peace’.
  – Chequebook diplomacy intact.
  – Outcome – election of Hamas.
15 years of peace process...

- Oslo Accords: 1993
- The myth of Camp David
- The ‘Roadmap’: 2002
Peacebuilding strategies since Oslo

Now: no coherent strategy. ‘Crisis-related relief’. Three current dominant discourses (2 official, 1 unofficial) of externals:


– ‘working around the occupation’ – development and aid workers, and unofficial position of Quartet.
Peacebuilding as exclusion & fragmentation

- **Exclusion**: with implications for Palestinian citizenship and regional stability.

  - Oslo left out East Jerusalemites & refugees. (Initial PLO move to 2-state solution excluded Arabs in Israel.)
  
  - June 2007 coup: Gazans left out of statebuilding project;
  
  - ‘Separation Barrier’ affects over 250,000 Palestinians (on ‘Israeli’ side of barrier and in ‘seam zones’).
Peacebuilding as exclusion & fragmentation

• *Fragmentation*: PA = interim administration. Restrictions on sovereignty.
  
  – West Bank divided into Areas A (PA control), B (civil: PA, military: Israel) and C (Israeli control); Israel controls 70% of land in WB; development affected.
  
  – Budget – dependent on revenues collected by Israel (75%) + foreign aid.
  
  – No control over borders, movement of peoples etc.
  
  – Borders, refugees, East Jerusalem, etc, left to final status negotiations.
Impact of ‘war on terror’

- Palestine a key issue for groups such as Al-Qaida.
- Demonization of Hamas: sanctions since Jan 2006.
- Humanitarian agencies subject to funding and partnership restrictions. NGOs become implementers of foreign policy agendas.
- Justification for Israel’s extreme ‘security measures’:
  - ‘Separation Barrier’
  - 500-600 barriers in West Bank (checkpoints, roadblocks, earthmounds etc).
  - Night-time raids on Palestinian villages/towns in West Bank; sonic booms and airstrikes in Gaza.
Aid as seen from ‘below’

• Palestinians favourable. Aid for political guilt. Israelis: unfavourable. Aid agencies seen as ‘pro-Palestinian’ and biased; UN viewed with suspicion and hatred.

• Difficulty of sticking to ‘impartiality’ and ‘neutrality’. Some aid workers expressing feelings of ‘solidarity’ with Palestinians.

• Dilemmas of aid under occupation: should humanitarian agencies support the building of a clinic to service Palestinians affected by ‘wall, or does this help solidify Israel’s occupation policies?

• Aid very political: used to control Palestinians. 2006 elections.
Creating ‘partners for peace’ through violence

- Withholding of aid and prohibition of money transfer to PA from 2006 was, in effect, economic sanctions.

- First time an occupied people, supposed to be protected by the Geneva Conventions, subjected to economic sanctions (Dugard). TIM: very political.

- “Unattainable preconditions for dialogue”; UN reputation will be damaged (De Soto).