**Dying to be free**

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There is a reason why Palestinians are keen on releasing their prisoners, despite the heavy price they continue to pay for their freedom.

It may seem rational to ask the question: what is the point of releasing a few Palestinian detainees from Israeli prisons, if the price of doing so is the death of over 15,000 Palestinians in Gaza? In fact, even if all Palestinian prisoners – numbering about 7,000 – are released, they would not even amount to 30 percent of the total number of Palestinian dead and missing, so far, in the ongoing Israeli genocide in the Strip.

The logic may sound even more puzzling when we consider that, between October 7 and November 28, Israel has detained over 3,290 Palestinians in the West Bank and Occupied East Jerusalem.

Namely, the number of Palestinian women and children detainees released – following several prisoner swaps between Palestinian Resistance and the Israeli army, in the period between November 24 to November 30 – is insignificant compared to those who were detained during the same period.

But mathematical equations are irrelevant in liberation wars. Because if we resort to this kind of logic, then, perhaps, it is more rational for colonized nations and oppressed groups not to resist in the first place, because doing so could multiply the harm inflicted upon them by their colonizers and oppressors.

While Israelis see their captives, whether civilians or military, held in Gaza in terms of numbers, Palestinians approach the issue from an entirely different perspective.

All Palestinians are captives, according to the reality on the ground, because all Palestinians are victims of Israeli colonialism, military occupation and apartheid. The difference between being a prisoner in Megiddo, Ofer or Ramleh prison, for example, and being a prisoner in an isolated, walled-off Palestinian town under Israeli military Occupation in Area C in the West Bank, is rather technical.

True, those in Megiddo are subjected to more violence, torture even. They are denied proper food, medicine, and the freedom to move about. But how is that fundamentally different from the incarceration of 2.3 million people living in Gaza now?

Some would even argue that living in Gaza during a time of genocide is more confining and far less safe than being a political prisoner in Israel, under ‘normal’ circumstances.

So clearly, the issue is not related to numbers, but to power relations.

Under international law, Israel is the Occupying Power. This entitles Israel to certain rights per, for example, the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also numerous responsibilities. For decades, Israel has abused those ‘rights’ and completely ignored all its responsibilities. Over the same period, Palestinians have appealed to – even implored – the international community to enforce international law on Israel, unsuccessfully.

This was illustrated in the pitiful display by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas during a speech at the United Nations General Assembly on May 15. “Protect us,” he said, repeatedly, before making an analogy between Palestinians and animals. “Aren’t we human beings? Even animals should be protected. If you have an animal, won’t you protect it? Protect us!”

Most Palestinians know well that the US, West-dominated international institutions will not provide protection for Palestinians based on any kind of moral rationale or even their love for animals.

This realization dawned on Palestinians generations ago, when the international community failed to enforce a single UN resolution on Israel. Regarding the ongoing Gaza genocide, it proved particularly irrelevant, to the extent that UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pronounced it outright when he said, on November 8, that the UN has neither “money nor power” to prevent genocide in Gaza.

Guterres and other top UN officials must be aware of the marginal role that the international community is able to play in the Israeli war on Gaza because of the strong US stance in support of Israel. As long as Washington continues to serve the role of the vanguard of Israeli war crimes in Palestine, Tel Aviv has no reason to stop.

So, Palestinians do what every other occupied, colonized people did in this situation. They resist. Through their resistance, they hope to introduce a new factor to a long-skewed equation, largely controlled by Israel and its Western allies.

By releasing their prisoners, as a direct result of their own resistance, Palestinians are, therefore, able to influence outcomes. It means that they are political agents; in fact, political actors who can redefine the rules of the game altogether.

Indeed, Palestinians approach the issue of prisoners as part of a larger campaign of liberation struggle. Those who can free 100, or 7,000 detainees would, then, set a historical precedent that would, eventually, allow them to free the whole Palestinian people.

Israel is fully aware of the power and representation of the prisoners’ issue because Israel imprisons Palestinians as an expression of power and control over every aspect of Palestinian lives. Though some of the Palestinian detainees are considered, in the eyes of Israel, ‘security prisoners’, many were detained for social media posts, for WhatsApp status, or for no reason at all.

Many Palestinian women were detained for visiting the families of other prisoners, or for mourning the deaths of Palestinian youths killed by Israel. Israel detained these women for the same reason that far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir had outlawed the rights of Palestinians to celebrate their children’s freedom.

Excerpted: ‘Dying to Be Free: Releasing Palestinian Captives is Not a Numbers Game’. Courtesy: Counterpunch.org