

Palestine as the barometre of our world

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Ekialde Erdia izan da administrazio neokontserbatzaileak hasitako etengabeko gerra global eta lehentasunezkoaren bihotza. Gerra global honen xedea munduaren birkolonizazio moda bat da. Birkolonizazio honen lehengo lerroa Barak eta Sharonen "bir konkista" da (2000-2004). Bestalde, Palestinaren erresistentzia da oferntsiba global horri herriek egiten dioten erresistentziaren lehen lerroa eta nazioarteko sinboloa.

Giltza-Hitzak: Kolonizazioa. Birkolonizazioa. Okupazioa. Gerra globala. Prebentzioko gerra global amaigabea. Neokontserbadoreak. Intifada.

Oriente Medio ha sido el corazón de la estrategia de la guerra global permanente y con derecho preferente iniciada por la administración neoconservadora. El objetivo de esta guerra global es un tipo de recolonización del mundo. La "reconquista" de Barak y Sharon (2000-2004) es la primera línea de esta recolonización. Por otro lado, la resistencia Palestina es la primera línea y el símbolo internacional de la resistencia de los pueblos a dicha ofensiva global.

Palabras Clave: Colonización. Recolonización. Ocupación. Guerra global. Guerra global preventiva interminable. Neoconservadores. Intifada.

Le Moyen Orient est la cible principale de la stratégie de la guerre globale, permanente et avec droit préférentiel, déclenchée par l'administrtrion néo-conservatrice. L'objectif de cette guerre globale est une nouvelle tentative de recolonisation du monde. La « reconquête » de Barak et de Sharon (2000-2004) est le front de bataille de cette recolonisation. Par ailleurs, la résistance palestinienne est le front de bataille et le symbole international de la résistance des peuples face à cette offensive globale.

Mots-Clés : Colonisation. Recolonisation. Occupation. Guerre mondiale. Guerre mondiale préventive interminable. Néo-conservateurs. Intifada.

Thank you and good morning. I am honored to be part of your conference. This is not my first time in the Basque Country, and it is always a tremendous pleasure to be here and to meet with you, for to my mind you are a very special people. That said and without further ado, I propose to proceed straight to the topic of my presentation as I hope to leave enough time for us to exchange impressions at the end.

Over the last few years, almost every day and in every kind of media – printed, broadcast or electronic – whenever the Middle East and the Palestine/Israel question is raised, the concept of “peace process” comes up. This “Peace process” is at the core of the discourse constructed around Israel and Palestine. It is not always in an optimistic way: sometimes you will read that the peace process is in deep trouble, that President Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority, has threatened to go home because the peace process is not making any progress. But the concept of the peace process is permanent and lasting. So, we must ask: is it real? Or is it virtual?

In order to answer this question, of course, we need to deal with the broader context of the political and social relationships not only between Israel and the Palestinian people and between the Palestinian people and Israel, but throughout the whole of the Middle East. And not only in the Middle East, but in a global context, throughout the whole world. One cannot understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without first and foremost taking into account the United States strategy in the Middle East. To understand this strategy, one needs to go back twenty years, to the time when it was germinated. It was elaborated by what I would call a small “gang” of Americans and Israelis and I must add that most – though not all – of the Americans were American Jews, and most of the Israelis, like Benjamin Netanyahu, were in fact more American than Israeli. And they had done their homework, which at that time we hadn't.

According to their analysis, the collapse of the Soviet Union would bring about a fundamental change and the US would have a new role to play. Indeed, the collapse of the Soviet Union is creating a new framework, in which the American administration has to fix new goals and new methods. The objectives were then formulated by the neoconservatives, under the generic title “The New American Century”. However, their opponents call it “the new American Empire”, a global imperial project, a project that can be summarized as the re-colonisation of the world.

For the “neo-cons” – as they are known for short – the general idea was to bring to a close the fifty year parenthesis following the fall of Fascism in Europe, which they considered to have gone on for too long. After the defeat of Nazi Germany, a sense of humanity led to some vitally important decisions expressed in the one slogan: “never again!” The shock of the mass destruction and the genocides of World War II was so strong that everyone agreed that a new set of rules should be provided for the whole of humankind. That was the moment when the concept of Rights was reassessed because we needed rules and rights after those terrible moments in our modern history where might was replacing right. For the Fascist ideology was based exactly on that idea: we have the might,

therefore we have the right. Post fascism was supposed to redress the balance and uphold human rights, on the grounds that human beings have basic and inalienable rights.

In fact, after World War II, and throughout the whole of the 50s, 60s, 70s, even into the 80s, we have witnessed what, in my opinion, have been some major steps forward. Examples of such progress are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions and the hundreds of resolutions made by the United Nations General Assembly, to make accessible rights for peoples, groups and individuals; women's rights, children's rights, diversely able people's rights; rights of self-determination, rights of minority languages and minority communities. In short, a whole series of rights was reassessed by the international community. Now, some might say yes, OK, it's on paper, but in actual fact nothing has really changed. I think, however – and I am sure you will agree with me – that it is always better to have rights recognized on paper than not to have them at all.

Moreover, the fact that the international community has ratified the existence of these inalienable human rights – through the United Nations and through many international treaties – represents huge progress for humanity. Sometimes, it has taken major struggles to implement these rights; sometimes, as I just said, these rights remain only on paper.

Neoconservatism, then, came about in order to close this parenthesis. "Enough is enough!" they said, "all these rights are preventing us from weighing up the power of the Empire and from calculating the power of the market. George Bush, who was definitely not the most intelligent of these neoconservatives, used to say things which were on the neoconservative agenda but which it would have been better not to have said in public. For example, when he suggested annulling the Geneva Conventions in a bid to wipe out one of the biggest achievements of the Post-Fascist period. Bush was called to order by his Secretary of State, who said: "Shhh! Don't say that! It is not politically correct". But George Bush's slip of the tongue reflected a wider will, which for the neoconservatives signified the possibility of ending this period of privileging rights.

So when I say a re-colonisation I don't mean only in the narrow sense, that is, to take back the freedoms, the self-determination and the independence of once colonised peoples. I take re-colonisation in a much broader sense: to reconquer – a kind of *Reconquista* if you will – to win back achievements obtained in the form of rights ceded on all levels. Social rights, women's rights and all kinds of rights gained during the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s. The end goal was the re-colonisation of the world in order to instate the New American Century.

The means to achieve that goal was what they call the "global, permanent and pre-emptive war". Global in that it was a world-wide war strategy, and pre-emptive in that you don't have to be attacked first in order to launch this war. And you can launch it anywhere and everywhere including within the developed countries, contrary to the interests of the people themselves and especially detrimental to the social gains of the working people. And detrimental to the peoples of the world as a whole in terms of human rights.

When you launch a war, and all the more so a global scale war, you need to identify an enemy. In the 50s, 60s and 70s Communism was the global enemy but with the collapse of the Soviet Union there was no longer any enemy. That is why the US Empire needed to identify a new global enemy: an enemy who was redefined three times.

Initially, the enemy was defined as “international terrorism”. We have a new global enemy: it is international terrorism. Under this one heading everything was mixed up together and sometimes even presented as one big secret organisation where the PLO and the IRA and ETA in the Basque Country and liberation movements in South America and democratic movements in Africa were part of a new international terrorist network. Benjamin Netanyahu was one of the most eloquent ideologists of the “global terrorism” construct, and I suggest that the students amongst you and those of you who have time go back to the first articles of Benjamin Netanyahu in the 80s, to see how obsessively he spoke in every speech he made about how terrorism should be the main concern of the international community. Whether Palestinian terrorism or global terrorism, terrorism became the key word to define the global enemy.

So, at first, the enemy was defined as terrorism, then, gradually, it became Islamist terrorism. And finally, since the beginning of the year 2000, the enemy was re-defined as Islam. Islam as terrorism. It is no longer Islamic groups, but rather Islam as a whole which is presented as the threat to our civilisation. In fact, the world according to the neocons, was the exact parallel of the world of the Cold War, as it was then in the 50s and 60s: on the one hand, the free world; on the other hand, Communism. Now this parallel division of the world sets apart the new barbarians, situated on one side of the wall and identified with Muslim society, starting in Palestine, and extending to Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan... lumped together as the “Axis of Evil”; and places on the other side of the wall, starting in Israel, the civilised nations: reaching from Israel to Europe and North America. The global war is then a war between these two worlds, separated this time not by the iron curtain of the Cold War but by the wall of apartheid in the Palestinian occupied territories. The Middle East – and in the heart of the Middle East, Israel and Palestine, was the new frontline of the global war.

This is why the conflict in Palestine became not only the most emblematic one, but in fact the nub of international relations (Barak Obama, in his speech in Cairo in June 2009, has repeated that point again, although not in its neo-con conception). This is where the fate of the world will be decided. The Middle East is not only the laboratory of the global conflict, it is right where it is happening: the frontline. The Greater Middle East, as George W. Bush used to call it, from Turkey to the far reaches of Afghanistan, has been the battlefield where the global war is fought out: in Afghanistan, in Iraq, against Syria, in Lebanon and in Palestine.

After the war had been going on for more than 10 years and in some places for 15 years, the US administration or the US military and political elites reached the conclusion that the attempt to implement global war in the greater Middle East was a failure. The global war had failed to obtain the results laid out in the original plan.

Afghanistan is a disaster, Iraq is a total fiasco for the North Americans and Lebanon was a shameful defeat for Israel despite the fact that Lebanon is nothing but a small country with no army and yet the Israelis were defeated twice in Lebanon. Even the Palestinian arena has not proved the battle success expected, although there have been certain successes I will now address.

The strategy of implementing US hegemony in the world failed in the Middle East. It also failed in Latin America, but I will not speak about Latin America today. It has had some success; it has certainly been successful in Europe in the re-colonisation of workers' rights where several defeats have been suffered – not total but partial defeats – in the loss of some of the rights that your parents had fought for and won 30 or 40 years ago. The defeat of George Bush and the neo-conservatives in the last US elections reflected not only what the US people and US public opinion felt about the neocon policy but also what most of the US ruling elites felt about this policy. The United States of America, after 10 to 15 years of global war, are today weaker than they were before. They have grown weaker to the point of defeat precisely because the way they waged war was a failure. Consequently, it has become Barack Obama's mandate to maintain and strengthen US hegemony through other revised means,

I believe that Barack Obama and the new administration have adopted a different strategy today, in pursuit of the same goal. Open war has been replaced by a peace process, because sometimes negotiations are more efficient in the imposition of policies and interests than direct military confrontation. Sometimes neocolonial rule is more efficient than direct colonisation. The new administration's mandate is first to stop the decline of the US Empire and second, to try and launch a counter offensive to reaffirm its power in a totally new context. And I would say that somehow they missed the boat.

The 80s and 90s were the years when the US was the only major power. And this is why the neoconservatives were dreaming of imposing their hegemony, by force and as fast as possible, not in a very intelligent way but in a very brutal way. Today they are thinking up much more subtle, more sophisticated and in many places much less brutal strategies, in a situation in which the US are no longer the sole major power. Russia is becoming a power to be contended with once again; China is definitely the up and coming power; India is emerging as another powerful player, and Europe – when Europe wants to – can be a major power too. So the game is much more complicated now. In that sense, I think we can really say that they missed the boat. The failure of the neoconservative offensive, of the neoconservative strategy, was the result of peoples' ability, from Iraq to Palestine, to say "no!" to the re-colonisation of their countries or their areas.

In the framework I have just described, the Palestinian resistance has a very special place and it could be very interesting to reflect together on why that is. Why is Palestine so emblematic? Why does Obama say "It is in Palestine, or Israel/Palestine, that US strategy and with it the fate of the whole world will be decided?" It is not immediately obvious. Palestine is not the place where the conflict is the most bloody: in the Congo, one and a half million people were killed in the war in the Great Lakes, while in Palestine, thank God, we are still far

from such figures. So then it is not the most bloody nor the most violent. Neither is it a place where there are important natural resources. In fact the only place in the whole of the Middle East where there is no oil is Palestine or to be more precise, it is one of the few places where there is no oil and no natural resources. Palestine is not a big place. You know, I was thinking about it while I was in India recently, if you take together all the Palestinians, all the Israelis, all the Jordanians and all the Lebanese, you have less people than in Mumbai. There are more people in Mumbai than in all these countries put together but these countries are taken to be the real troublemakers of the world! Now why is that?

To go back to what I said before, it is because this is where two worlds meet, where – to use their own words – global terrorism and so-called Judeo-Christian civilisation meet. They meet exactly where the wall was built. In fact, I said the same thing several years ago to the Mayor of the Palestinian town of Qalqilieh, close to the Israeli border, while we were organising a solidarity visit to his city which is completely surrounded by the wall and has only one gate! That day we were on the balcony of the town hall, so close we could almost touch the wall with our finger, it was three or four meters away, no more. And I said:

You see what kind of responsibilities you carry on your shoulders? You are right at the very bottom of a terribly long list of peoples lumped together under the name “international terrorism”! There are the Palestinians, the Syrians, the Afghans and the Iraqis... and of all of these, you are at the frontline! The first trench of the war! Like in 1914-1918! And your friend, the mayor of the Israeli city Kfar Saba is just on the opposite side of the wall, protecting the so-called Judeo-Christian civilization of Israel, Europe and North America. You and your colleague from Kfar Saba are the two front lines of this global confrontation, of this global war!

At the end of the day, I think that Palestine has become and remains so emblematic in the whole global political relation of forces because of Palestinian resistance. They put up direct resistance to the Empire, because in resisting Israel they resist the United States. Israel in that sense is the United States and the United States are Israel. They are one and the same thing: one strategy, one leadership, one ideology, one policy and I would even say, one budget. The Palestinian resistance has been able to make a stand at the very gates of the enemy.

One example of this resistance has been the success of Hammas in the last elections. Now, you don't have to like Hammas, its ideology nor its policies to recognize this very simple fact: the victory of Hammas was the greatest provocation in the last 20 years against the Americans in the Middle East! All the elections and all the policy orchestrated by the neocons and by Israel was aimed at forcing the Palestinians to change Yasser Arafat's excessively radical leadership for a more moderate one. And the answer of the Palestinian people was crystal clear. You want us to have more moderates? We will vote for Hammas! And voting for Hammas has very little to do with religion and fundamentalism... it was an act of resistance! I have very many friends who are not Muslim believers, and some who are even Christians, who voted for Hammas as an act of resistance! Hammas was identified as the one who said “no!”, one who could not be obliged to bend the knee.

The problem with which the Palestinian people and the Palestinian national movement are confronted today is how you go from resistance to liberation. The battle for resistance has been won, despite all the aggression. Take the aggression in Gaza last winter, take the aggression against Lebanon and against the Palestinians in Lebanon in 2006: in both cases it was a fiasco and a failure for Israel. There is no Israeli journalist who would dare to say the opposite: it was a failure. A shameful failure in Lebanon and a less shameful failure in Gaza. The Palestinian and the Arab resistance in general have been able to repel Israel's offensive and broadly speaking, the Americans'. But resisting is something basic: you resist, you thwart your enemy in their attempt to win. But this is not yet liberation. The Palestinian people have not been able to liberate their territory. Gaza is not liberated but has rather become a huge prison. The life in Gaza is free of Israelis but not of Israeli interference. Israel decides what goes in, what goes out in terms of everything – medicine, food, construction material and, most importantly, people. People cannot leave, people cannot enter. So Gaza is totally controlled, it is not a liberated territory, even if it is good not to see Israeli soldiers in the street. But still, it is a big prison. The West Bank is not in prison, it is several prisons: 10 or 12 prisons or cantons, with limited access from one canton to the other. It is totally controlled by the Israeli army from the outside and in the evenings, in some places like Nablus, from the inside too. Or in Bethlehem where they enter, arrest people and go out again. So it is not liberation. The resistance has been successful enough to make the Israeli plan fail but not enough to achieve liberation. And this is today the most important discussion among the Palestinian people and inside the Palestinian national movement. How to develop a strategy from resistance to liberation. It is a very difficult debate. The military struggle was not a success. Negotiations were not a success either. And today they are a total failure. Civil resistance? What does it mean? How can it be done?

The village of Bil'in, on the border of the huge settlement block of Modiin, is a wonderful example of resistance. A whole village resisting the wall was built on their land and organised demonstrations once and sometimes twice a week, capable of attracting the attention and support of international public opinion. Many people today know what Bil'in is and even if it would be a little bit of an exaggeration to say that saying that Bil'in is the Hanoi of Palestine, there is no doubt that it is nonetheless a firm symbol of resistance.

If Bil'in is a symbol of resistance, and this will be my last point, I would say BDS is the symbol of a counter-offensive. What is BDS? B stands for Boycott, D for Divestment, S for Sanctions. BDS is a campaign that all the Palestinian organisations started up in Palestine. In 2005 a call raised by all the Palestinian civil and political organisations went out to the international community to boycott divestment-sanctions (BDS). After 5 years, BDS is a worldwide and increasingly successful campaign able to do two things: first, for the first time in many years – I would say for the first time in 20 years – it was able to unite around one strategic target all the components of resistance and solidarity in Palestine and across the world, even inside Israel where we have Boycott from Within. Secondly, it is not only denouncing occupation and denouncing colonisation, it has launched a counter-offensive to demand sanctions against those who are failing to respect international law. To sanction Israel for violating almost every single

United Nations resolution concerning Palestine, for violating the basic rules of international law, starting with the Geneva Convention. And to make clear that there should be no impunity for those who violate the law.

It is true in your country, it is true in my country and it is true internationally. It is, first of all, a cry for Justice for Palestine. Justice for the men, women and children of Palestine who are suffering Israeli occupation, who are suffering Israeli colonisation and who should hear from the world, from the world's international community, from civil society, from the governments as well as from the peoples that those who violate the rights of the Palestinian people are not to be considered representatives of a regular, respectable state. Rather they represent a state in breach of the law, a state which should be sanctioned because it is breaching the law. It is also – and for me personally this is of utmost importance – a matter, as I call it, of public health. Of public hygiene. I don't want to live in a world where there is no difference between right and wrong. Between just and unjust. Between respecting the law and not respecting the law. That is jungle law. That is the law of the mighty. That is the ideology of Fascism! I have the might, I have the right. The BDS campaign is here to say "no!": if you violate the rights of the others, if you violate the law, if you violate the agreements that you yourself have signed, you must be sanctioned.

In four years, BDS has already had more successes than the boycott campaign launched by the South African liberation movement which took 20 years before it achieved any major results. We have already had some significant results and in that sense BDS is an extremely important element in the Palestinian strategy. Just in the last few months we have had several victories. The first victory is the speed with which the campaign is reaching Israeli public opinion through the Israeli media for in this kind of thing, four years is nothing! The evidence is that the Israeli government has felt obliged several times, even just two days ago, to react to BDS. And BDS is exactly that! To create awareness in Israel that you will not be considered a "normal" state if you don't act like a "normal" civilised country. You want to behave like savages? Then you will be cast out of the international community.

Now it is time for us to take a deep breath.

A campaign like this is not like a demonstration where you take action and after six months you have a result. It is a campaign. A long-term campaign. But it is the first time in decades that the Palestinians are on the offensive and not simply on the defensive. They are out to make the Israeli state and Israeli colonialism pay for its policy.

What makes this campaign successful is what will make any campaign concerning the fulfilment of the Palestinian rights successful. I call it the "winning triangle". We need three components in this struggle. First of all we need the Palestinians to resist, because if they don't, why should anyone else care? So we need the Palestinian resistance to be one side of the triangle. Then we need the international dimension: global support, international solidarity, the pressure of

the international community. Thirdly, we need resistance from within Israel itself. When part of Israeli society is opposing the policy of colonization and war, your work in Europe will be easier and more efficient.

Last in this campaign, is the issue of fighting impunity and here, in the Spanish state, you have a special role and a special responsibility: not allowing war criminals in uniforms or in suits, ministers or generals or colonels, to go around the world as normal tourists or students or politicians. You have to say to our political and military leaders: you are under suspicion of having blood on your hands, of having organised, participated in or ordered war crimes in Gaza, in Lebanon or in Jenin. We do not have enough evidence to say you are guilty but we do have enough to bring you to trial. One of the achievements of the post-fascist period was the Nuremberg Tribunal and its rationale: the right and duty of the international community to judge war criminals. It was true in Germany, it was true in Yugoslavia and it was true in Rwanda: so there is no reason for Israel to be kept in immunity and placed outside this basic public health measure of judging people suspected of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Spanish state has been the first to take the initiative on that level. Unfortunately, it has backed off under pressure and there has been a certain regression in the progress made. I believe it is your duty as part of the civil society of the Spanish state, in Spain, in the Basque Country, in Catalonia, all over, to put the question of ending the impunity of the Israeli leaders on the agenda of public debate and public policies. This would be your contribution to this triangle, where we will be able to work together in harmony and with great offensive spirit. With the three sides of the triangle – the Palestinian Resistance, the international solidarity movement and the solidarity within Israel – moving together and working in cooperation, then it is only a matter of time until we will be able to claim our victory.