

From: Rob France
: Report From the Field: Sam Bahour
Preview Line:

Dear [NAME],

Our Report From the Field this month is from Sam Bahour, one of our most well-known speakers who resides in Ramallah. I was in the region last week, and was able to connect with Sam as well as some of our other Palestinian friends in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Sam's report touches on the many current events that as Jews we encounter and debate amongst ourselves -namely the raging war in Ukraine and the potential collapse of the Israeli coalition government. He also has interesting insights on the domestic prospects of the Palestinian Authority. It is a wide ranging account of his day-to-day life and the issues on the forefront of his mind.

Yours,

Rob

BRIEF to Encounter Alumni – 2022-04-7

Dear friends,

I hope this message finds you all healthy and well.

I was happy to be asked by the Encounter team to write this short brief to provide you all with a vantage point from the ground in Palestine, more aptly defined as from inside the cage.

First, like the rest of the world, we are watching in horror at Ukraine. No two human tragedies can, or should, be compared, but we are collectively shaking our heads at the West's lightning-fast response. Overnight, terms we have been begging the world for decades to take seriously came to life, such as "international law", the "Fourth Geneva Convention", "boycott", "divestment", "sanctions", and the pinnacle demand that "refugees have a right to go home". Even the UN's Human Rights Council has meaning today. We pray this war stops and are painfully aware of the long road ahead for the civilians, particularly the refugees. The double standards and hypocrisy will have long-lasting ramifications, no doubt.

In Palestine/Israel, the release of the Amnesty International report "ISRAEL'S APARTHEID AGAINST PALESTINIANS: CRUEL SYSTEM OF DOMINATION AND CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY" rocked the boat, yet again, for those who cared to read it. As you are all aware, this is only the latest in a series of similar reports. I hope anyone who cares about Israel--forget Palestinians--reads this report and wakes up to reality. I listed all the reports on my ePalestine.ps blog in the top right column for easy access.

Here on the ground, daily events are overwhelming us.

Nearly every morning we wake up to new episodes of the occupation's aggression – new killings, new arrests, new house demolitions, new settler violence, new settlements, new movement/travel restrictions, new deportations, new checkpoint apparatus, the list seems never-ending. The fallout is expected, an uptick in violence everywhere.

Naftali Bennett's feeble government has added a new twist, damaging occupation policies that are packaged as progress under the slogan of 'shrinking the conflict'. One example of these supposedly positive gestures is the issuing of more permits for Palestinians to enter Israel to work, including from Gaza (yes, that "hostile territory"). I recently wrote about this one for a Jewish newspaper in Australia, [Israel's 'economic peace' is hollowing out the Palestinian economy](#) (Plus61Media and Medium).

As I have stated for years, overwhelming us is a policy in and of itself.

Finally, people are visiting again. I've been flooded with speaking engagements from mostly student groups coming from the likes of Harvard, Yale, MIT, Chicago University, Berkeley, and many others. Interestingly, and troubling, is that the younger generation is reflecting what I hear from our own younger generation, much less tolerance for a negotiated resolution to this conflict. It's as if they are telling me, "Sam, watch the news coming out of Ukraine. Can't you see? Ukrainian grandmothers and mothers are learning how to make Molotov cocktails and the world is applauding them. Can't Palestinians do the same?" I've very worried that without a political horizon this train of thought will just percolate into more violence.

Yesterday, we woke up to a new political reality in Israel, Bennett's coalition losing its razor-thin majority of one. As you are all aware, we follow Israeli politics very closely. Although we are not represented there, it is the Israeli political system that dictates our lives. The straw that broke the "villa in the jungle's" roof was not the 55-year military occupation, not the settlement violence, not the barbaric siege on Gaza, not the budgetary drain the occupation is levying on Israeli taxpayers, nope. It was leavened bread. Reminds me of the Israeli uproar around cottage cheese. Israelis are so out of touch with their reality that it's mindboggling. It seems anything can be a rallying point for Jewish Israelis, except Jewish values and social justice.

Within our community, two major thrusts have our attention.

First, after Abbas (and I do mean the person, not the defunct organization he heads) canceled (officially, "postponed until Israel allows voting in East Jerusalem") national elections, he immediately called for local municipal elections to absorb the outrage of him pulling the rug from underneath 1,390 candidates who desired to be the next leadership. These municipal elections did not take place in Gaza since Hamas refused to allow them.

Second, the Palestinian government is on the verge of financial collapse. The main funder of the Palestinian Authority is the EU and we are entering the second year where no funds were transferred. At first, the EU said it was a technical budgetary issue and would be resolved, but last month the real reason was revealed. One country, Hungary, is refusing to allow this funding to proceed until the Palestinians make reforms in their textbooks. Yes, back to textbooks, ignoring all the independent reviews which already debunked this hasbara theme. The funding requires a collective EU decision. The result of this is serious. Public sector employees have not been getting paid full salaries and many national institutions are feeling the financial crunch. One such

organization is the Lutheran World Federation's Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem, where I serve as an advisory board member. The hospital is the main cancer hospital. It is where the Palestinian Authority refers patients, to the tune of 93% of the hospital's workload. Without external funding, the PA can not pay their patients' bills. To make things worse, the hospital is registered in Israel and the Israeli authorities are discriminating against this hospital, which adds additional (read: major) financial stress. No 'shrinking the conflict' here. I can explain more to any of you who may be interested.

Anyone taking satisfaction that the Palestinian public and social networks are collapsing, I ask them to call me after the fact so we can describe what all-out chaos looks like, from the river to the sea.

I have so much more to say, but I was asked to keep this short. As always, my door is literally and figuratively open for anyone seeking to engage.

I wish you all a meaningful upcoming Passover.

Best,
Sam

Bio

Sam Bahour was born in Ohio in 1964 to a Palestinian father and Lebanese-American mother. After graduating from Youngstown State University in 1989 with a degree in computer technology, he worked for several software development firms. In 1995, he decided to relocate to Ramallah with his family to work on the privatization of the communications sector. Today he is a business consultant and serves as a policy adviser to Al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network. He is managing partner of Applied Information Management, a board member of a leading national bank in Palestine, and chairman of Americans for a Vibrant Palestinian Economy. He blogs at ePalestine.com.

An eternal optimist, Bahour is developing several new business ventures, including a community newspaper publishing house and the Palestinian franchise for an electronic e-commerce platform to increase transparency during the government bidding process.