

THE ZEAL OF THE INTIFADA

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Events Leading to a Major Social Turning Point

There are several key points in the history of the state of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has ensued since the establishment of the state of Israel. In May of 1948, Israel declared independence as a nation on the 15th of the month, the day prior to the expiration of the British Mandate of Palestine. The next day, four Arab countries (Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq) attacked this barely born nation and were defeated. At this point, Israel's strength as a nation had been established and the land had been divided into three key areas: the State of Israel (including West Jerusalem), the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), and the Gaza Strip.¹ In June of 1967, what is informally known as the Six-Day War, Israel once again defeated Egypt, Syria and Jordan and captured the regions of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights.² Then in 1987, Palestinians embarked on their first aggressive resistance movement, known as the Intifada, which led to the introduction of Islam in Palestinian politics through the establishment of Hamas. The objective of this analysis is to track the setting in which the Intifada occurred and the effects which resulted from this Intifada, namely the founding of Hamas.

The Political Organization of Israel Just Prior to the Intifada

To understand the establishment and rise of Hamas in the Occupied Territories, one must first understand the setting in which Hamas was founded. The internal politics and political parties of Israel at this time were a major influence on the policies regarding Palestinians. The 1982 Lebanon Invasion of Israel resulted in the fragmentation of the political system within Israel and spawned an incredible number of many small political parties which took away the votes from the two major political parties, the Labor and the Likud. After the election of 1984, the two parties had to govern together under the

coalition named the National Unity Government.³ These two parties had different platforms regarding the issue of the Occupied Territories, with the Labor Party favoring territorial compromise and the Likud Party completely opposed to giving up the Gaza Strip or the West Bank.⁴ Initially, the leadership of the country was to rotate between Shimon Peres of Labor and Yitzhak Shamir of Likud, but though the Labor party attempted to advocate territorial compromise, the Likud party's influence seemed to be stronger and therefore Israel's actions regarding the Occupied Territories was one of opposition to territorial compromise and willingness to maintain the territory under any circumstance.⁵

The policies which were set on Palestinians by the Israeli government were unjust and severe and seem to serve for a two-fold purpose: to encourage settlement by Israeli settlers into the territories to increase Jewish population and also to make life more difficult for the Palestinians to encourage them to leave the area.⁶ The government of Israel during this time even designated nearly \$300 million for infrastructure projects to support Israeli settlers to migrate into the area. The Likud party held the belief that "all lands of Biblical Israel should be incorporated into the Jewish state" which led to the basis for encouraging Jewish settlers onto the Occupied Territories in order to eventually assimilate the territories under full Israeli control.⁷ Through this justification, the Likud was responsible for abruptly intensifying settlement and construction within the Occupied Territories and integrating into Israeli policy the commitment to incorporating the territories into Israel.

Israeli policies towards Palestinians were known as the "Iron Fist" policies, in that the policies were enforced strictly with little room for leniency.⁸ For example, the Israeli government was notorious for shutting down universities and other schooling institutions under the claim that "instead of pursuing their education students were engaging in political activities and were organizing opposition to the occupation."⁹ As previously stated, Israel was clearly encouraging mass Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories. In order to do this however, Israel would frequently confiscate plots of land belonging to Palestinians to give to the new Jewish settlers, leaving Palestinians landless and homeless.¹⁰ Many other policies were also in effect at this time, including administrative detention, in which it was legal for Palestinians to be arrested without an arrest warrant and to be held in detention for six months without a formal criminal charge.¹¹ Israeli

security services were rapidly deporting an increasing number of suspected political activists, and Palestinians were required to carry identity cards and pay special taxes.¹²

Meanwhile in the Occupied Territories, the main representative of the Palestinian people at this time was the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO had been formed by the Arab League to “control Palestinian nationalism while appearing to champion the cause.”¹³ The Israeli government defined the PLO as a terrorist organization and refused to negotiate with the PLO as a representative of the Palestinian people.¹⁴ The PLO had four branches, the largest of which, with the most followers, was Fateh, which advocated secular nationalism.¹⁵ Fatah had Yasser Arafat as its leader.¹⁶ Even though just prior to the Intifada, the PLO was exiled from the Occupied Territories and Lebanon and was then based in Tunis, the PLO remained active in Palestinian territories right up to the beginning of the first Intifada.¹⁷

The Beginnings of the First Intifada

On December 8th in the year of 1987, an IDF tank transport vehicle crashed into a civilian car carrying workers from Israel back home to the Gaza Strip; four of the Palestinian men died, several others were injured. That night, at the funeral for three of the men, what was originally intended to be a mourning ceremony quickly turned into a mass demonstration.¹⁸ This led to a protest by Palestinians which resulted in the Israeli army shooting some of the protestors in an attempt to suppress the protests. After the Israeli shootings, the rest of Gaza began passionately revolting. Armed protestors then began marching in the West Bank a few days later.¹⁹ These scattered protests soon turned into an organized movement known as the Intifada. Then the PLO formed the Unified National Leadership to take the reins of the uprising.²⁰ Several of the demands that the Palestinian elite, the PLO and the UNL, claimed the Intifada to be fighting for were: the halt of settlement building by Israelis on Palestinian land, the cancellation of Palestinian taxes and restrictions, and the reorganization of an independent Palestinian state under the leadership of the PLO.²¹ The Israeli leaders soon came to realize that the consistent riots were no scattered coincidences but an actual organized movement with leadership, and this frightened the Israelis enough to increase their suppression tactics against the protestors. However, the more Palestinians were shot and killed, the more frequent and intense the riots became.²² The Israeli

militia began demolishing and blowing up the houses of Palestinians within the Occupied Territories under the guise that the buildings were housing protestors who had “thrown stones at the Israeli soldiers.” Even curfews were instated which would be in place for sometimes an entire week, in which citizens of the Occupied Territories could not leave their houses at any point, even to obtain food.²³ The Israeli Minister of Defense, Yitzhak Rabin, would even order the bones of demonstrators to be broken as punishment to put down the demonstrations.²⁴

However, Palestinians consistently fought back through forms of civil disobedience as well as an attempt to make the continued occupation as much of a financial burden on Israel as possible, such as massive demonstrations, strikes, refusal to pay taxes, boycotts of Israeli products in an effort to become more economically self-sufficient, political graffiti, underground secret schools, and towards the end they became violent with stone throwing, Molotov cocktails and the putting barricades in place to increase the difficulty of movement for Israeli soldiers.²⁵ Though these demonstrations and events were generally planned by the PLO’s Unified National Leadership, another strong organization was also emerging into the Occupied Territories to lead the Intifada: Hamas.

The Emergence of Hamas

Formally established in January 1988 (with the charter being introduced on August of 1988), Hamas (which is Arabic for the word “zeal”) is most easily defined as an off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁶ Earlier on in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, prior to the Intifada, the Muslim Brotherhood was socially active in the Occupied Territories but was not active in the Palestinian conflict like the PLO in regards to fighting directly against Israeli occupation.²⁷ The Muslim Brotherhood’s goals were aimed at “the upbringing of an Islamic generation” and that is why the Muslim Brotherhood spent many resources to establish social welfare institutions such as schools, charity associations, social clubs, and other establishments.²⁸ Prior to the Intifada, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin (who will become one of the founders of Hamas) established Al-Mujamma ‘al-Islami, the Islamic Center. This is the base of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza. Though the Islamic Center was intended to be established as a mosque, there was also a medical clinic, a youth sports club, nursing school, zakat committee, and a center for women’s activities.²⁹ This Islamic Center will eventu-

ally come to play a big role in the establishment of Hamas as a solid alternative to the PLO as it begins to provide services to Gaza citizens which either Israel or PLO have failed to provide, thus winning the loyalty of these citizens.

The transition from Muslim Brotherhood to a separate organization named Hamas was due to immense concern over the reputation of the Muslim Brotherhood. Up until the Intifada, the Muslim Brotherhood had abstained from becoming involved in actively protesting against the Israeli occupation. Due to mounting criticism on the Muslim Brotherhood's nonparticipation in armed struggle, the Muslim Brotherhood decided to become politically active. However, the problem which the Muslim Brotherhood faced was that to become politically active would be to recount their policy of remaining on the sidelines when it came to the direct physical occupation of Israel. The solution which was proposed and accepted was the creation of a separate organization. This way, if the organization failed, the Muslim Brotherhood could disclaim the organization, but if the organization succeeded, the Muslim Brotherhood could claim the organization as its own.³⁰

Hence, the Muslim Brotherhood created Hamas, whose active role in the Intifada gave the Muslim Brotherhood a much needed credibility within the Arab community and combated the PLO's criticisms of the Muslim Brotherhoods inactivity.

Hamas Charter and Hamas's Relationship with the PLO

The Hamas Covenant of 1988 gives insight into many of Hamas's beliefs and policies regarding Palestine as a state, territorial compromise and its view on the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Even though Hamas is an off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, there are a few differences such as the fact that Hamas first places emphasis on the Palestinian problem and Islamic jihad as a solution before focusing on transforming society; meanwhile, the Muslim Brotherhood orders the transformation to an Islamic society as ultimate priority.³¹ After careful analysis of the charter, outsiders have a better understanding of the radicalism and strict ideas Hamas seems to emulate. Key points which support Hamas's Islamic standing and the extent of which Hamas wishes to incorporate Islam as a solution to the Intifada as well as beyond the Intifada are herein described.

Articles 1 and 2 within the Covenant (also referred to as Hamas

Charter or Charter) right off the bat state blatantly that Hamas's (translated in the Charter as the Islamic Resistance Movement) ideological starting-point is Islam. Islam is the guide to the Movement's ideas, understandings and way of thinking.³² To further associate the organization with Islam, the Charter states that Hamas is an off-shoot of the Muslim brotherhood which is "a universal organization which constitutes the largest Islamic movement in modern times."³³ Even the last article in the section of the charter elaborating on the "Definition of the Movement" recaps the Islamic theme by claiming Hamas's slogan to be: "Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Koran its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes."³⁴

The objectives of the Hamas organization, as described in Articles 9 and 10, are that without Islam, the world is reduced to chaos, and that Islam is what will encourage justice and save the world from chaos.³⁵

Article 11 is more specific and addresses the issue of Palestine in that it deems Palestine an Islamic Waqf, a land to be designated sacred for the future until Judgment Day. The evidence and support given for this statement is a story regarding Umar, the second caliph after his conquest of this land. He is claimed to have been asked who is to receive the land and his alleged answer is that the land should be "left with its owners who could benefit by its fruit. As for the real ownership of the land and the land itself, it should be consecrated for Muslim generations till Judgment Day."³⁶ To elaborate, this means that Palestine, as an Islamic Waqf, can only be owned by a Muslim, and to have Jews owning this sacred territory is a sin and wrong; therefore a two-state solution was impossible.³⁷

Article 13 is interesting and important in the sense that one learns of Hamas's belief that international conferences and other outside mediation is a contradiction to the principles of Hamas since these conferences are "only ways of setting the infidels in the land of Muslims as arbitrators. When did the infidels do justice to the believers?"³⁸ Then the charter states that the only solution Hamas deems acceptable to the Palestinian question is through Jihad. The idea of Jihad is later expanded upon in Article 15 when the Charter states that Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine is an individual duty, especially since it was the Jews who usurped Muslim land which makes this Jihad a defensive Jihad.³⁹

The last article which will be expounded upon is Article 27

describing Hamas's view towards the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Summed up, the Article roughly says that Hamas feels as though it is kin to the PLO (like a brother, a cousin, a friend, etc.), but that they feel the Palestinian Liberation Organization is misguided in trying to be secular.⁴⁰

The PLO, at best, has an apprehensive relationship with Hamas mainly due to the differing ideologies of the organizations. As noted, Hamas staunchly believes in Islamic principals to rule in the government while the PLO is a huge proponent of secular nationalism. Because of Hamas's Islamic principles, this makes it heresy to suggest that they consider territorial compromise, while the PLO is more willing to accept territorial compromise for Palestine. These discrepancies in ideology suggest that even if Israeli withdrawal was to actually occur, Hamas and the PLO would continue to disagree on whether the Palestinian government should be an Islamic state or a secular state.

The pro-PLO Unified National Leadership even tried to discredit the Hamas movement by saying that if the opposition realized there was a divide in the unity of Palestinians, they would thus be helping the enemy.⁴⁴ However, Hamas stuck firm to its beliefs.

Surprisingly, what the UNL feared would occur (that enemies of Palestine would use the group division against each other) did, but this only greatly helped Hamas succeed as an organization. At the time of the first Intifada, Israel viewed only the PLO as any major resistance in regards to its occupation of West Bank and Gaza strip. Thus, they not only disregarded Hamas as a valid adversary but also allowed Hamas to continue in assimilating into society in hopes that the Islamism of Hamas would clash with the secularism of the PLO and that the two would weaken each other immensely. This ironic freedom granted to Hamas by the Israelis to continue to operate was exactly what led to the rapid growth of the organization, and what allowed Hamas to be a strong organization with as much influence in Gaza as the largest PLO party (the Fateh party) had.⁴²

The Effects and Results of the Intifada

During the Intifada, Likud leaders attempted to convince the Israeli nation that the uprising was not an accurate representation of the entire Palestinian population because most of the Palestinians were appreciative of the Israeli help in developing the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and that it was due to the Israelis that their quality of life

and improved. The Likud party said that the riots were the cause of a few PLO radicals, not the entire Palestinian population. This created a divide within Israel between the Jewish citizens who were not sure whether to believe the Palestinian protests regarding their oppression, or to believe the Likud statement that these protests represented the few, not the many.⁴³ Socially, the Israelis experienced rising discontent regarding the treatment of the Palestinians during the Intifada, even within the ranks of the militia.⁴⁴

Politically, the uprisings had an effective influence on Israel by generating arguments within Israel over whether the Occupied Territories were worth the cost of this uprising. Even IDF officers began to believe that the decision to stay in the territories was resulting in a higher security risk than the security risk involved with withdrawing from the Occupied Territories would be.⁴⁵

On the other side of the sea, the Intifada had also influenced Americans on their view towards Palestinians. Americans had actually become more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and during this time they had begun to question Israel's commitment to compromise and peace. A New York Times-CBS poll conducted just after the 1987 Intifada found that 64% of Americans were in favor of having contact with the PLO, while only 23% were opposed. This poll was regarding Israel's refusal to negotiate with the PLO. The same poll counted 52% of Americans who believed that Israel was uninterested in compromise while only 28% truly believed that Israel was making an effort to make concessions.⁴⁶

By 1990, the dust stirred up during the Intifada was about ready to settle as at this point, most UNL leaders had been arrested which led to the Intifada reverting back to a disorganized movement which led to its decline.⁴⁷ At this point, the numbers show that between 1987 and 1990: 1,025 Palestinians had died, nearly 250 of these killed by other Palestinians who had accused them of collaboration with occupation authorities. Furthermore, 56 Israelis died, 37,000 Arabs were wounded and between 35,000 to 40,000 Arabs were arrested.⁴⁸

Due to the emergence of Hamas, after the Intifada Palestine became a much more conservative society, even spreading to the PLO who began using Koranic verses and religious expressions in statements released by UNL.⁴⁹

As a society, the main message Palestinians wished to convey through the protests and uprisings was: "We exist and have political rights, and there will be no peace until these rights are recognized."⁵⁰

This message defines the essence of the Intifada: that prior to the uprising Palestinians had been seemingly submissive towards the Israelis, such as being unable to stop the Israelis from confiscating Palestinian lands, and that this uprising was the turning point in which the Palestinians would be submissive no longer. Islam also comes to play an extensive role in Palestine from this point and on, due to the emergence of Hamas and Hamas's justifications for fighting the occupations and all Israelis until the entirety of Palestine is returned. As a result, the peace process between Palestine and Israel has become nearly impossible. This is due to both Israel's strict policies regarding the territorial dispute as well as the introduction of Hamas's hard-line demands for the return of the Palestinian land. This is the "zeal" of the first Intifada.

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