

The Power-Oriented Settlement

PLO-Israel:

*The Road to the Oslo Agreement and Back?**

Since the Zionist movement's first attempts to settle the territory known by the Jews as Eretz Israel,¹ Zionists and the pan-Arab movement, and before that, the pan-Syrian movement, have shared a common interest: preventing the rise of a distinct Arab people or entity in Palestine. Both nationalistic movements have stressed that the Arabs of Palestine are an indivisible part of the great Arab nation and their problem, no matter how it is defined, must be solved within a framework of Arab nationalism and Arab space.²

De-Palestinization of Palestinians

Palestinian identity began among parts of the local Arab population who gradually considered themselves a distinct society and polity (*wataniyya*) though like the Arabs of Syria, Iraq, or Transjordan, they were still part of

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the Arab nation (*al-umma al-‘arabiyya*). This dual sense of belonging has made the Palestinian collective identity problematic since its formation.³

The geopolitical situation that the colonial powers created after World War I meant that the Arabs of Palestine could not immediately grasp the options of joining the pan-Arab movement or achieving a separate polity, but the problem of dual identity still existed. As the British colonial state was consolidated, the sense of political and even cultural distinctiveness among the Arab population grew, and the colonial state provided them with their final sociopolitical boundaries and identity. The difficulties the local population had in meeting the challenge posed by the growing Zionist settlement contributed to the local Arab population's feeling that theirs was a unique fate.⁴

Yet after the Jewish-Palestinian civil war and the 1948 war, sociopolitical conditions led to an almost complete disappearance of the Palestinians and a separate Palestinian identity. Several factors contributed to this process of de-Palestinization. Transjordan became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, annexing the lands that remained from the eastern hilly parts of colonial Palestine, now known as the West Bank. As Jordan granted citizenship to the population, which included the original inhabitants and a considerable proportion of the refugees, it claimed to be the only successor of the would-be Palestinian state. The Hashemites used the educational system and techniques of coercive control and surveillance to impose a Jordanian identity on the new citizens. The Israelis treated the Palestinians who remained within the post-1948 boundaries in a similar manner, granting the Palestinians formal citizenship and equal rights, redefining them as Israeli Arabs, as Sammy Smooha says, and making a considerable effort at Israelification.⁵

The Jordanians and Israelis, who then controlled most of British colonial Palestine, had a common vested interest to create and maintain a Palestinian-less sociopolitical reality in the Middle East. The world order generally supported the approach, defining the problem of the Palestinians as a refugee and not a national problem. Within the refugee camps under Egyptian control (in the Gaza Strip), in Syria, and to a lesser degree, in Lebanon, the Palestinian identity was preserved and nurtured, but even in the camps of the late 1950s, pan-Arabism was prioritized. Arab unity was seen as a precondition for solving the Palestinian problem, followed by the liberation of all Arab lands, including Palestine, from colonialism and imperialism. In Gaza the short-lived All Palestine Government was dissolved in 1949 and responsibility for the Palestinian population transferred to the League of

Arab States. Under such circumstances the Israeli claim that “there are no Palestinians” came very close to realization. By 1964 the Arab-Israeli conflict was in a great measure de-Palestinized into a conflict between states.

The Making of a Demonic Image

Small Palestinian groups, consisting mostly of young intellectuals, tried to disassociate themselves from the pan-Arab doctrine. One such group was Fatah,⁶ formed in Kuwait in 1958 by a group of former Palestinian students of the University of Cairo. They tried to reverse the conventional pan-Arab rhetoric and wisdom that Arab unity needed to precede the liberation of Palestine, maintaining that liberation would come from armed struggle, with the Palestinians themselves as a vanguard, regaining responsibility for their own fate. Such ideas were spread by their periodical *Filastinuna* (*Our Palestine*), which has been published since October 1959. They revived an authentic Palestinian voice, but their ideas nevertheless remained a marginal force in Arab politics, pejoratively perceived as separatist. When the first Palestinian National Council (PNC) was convened in May 1964 and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established with the veteran Palestinian diplomat Ahmad al-Shuqairi at its head, the as yet unrecognized Fatah comprised about 10 of the 422 delegates assembled at the Intercontinental Hotel in East Jerusalem.⁷ The newly created PLO drew some attention, but did not manage to achieve independent status beyond the traditional patronage of the Arab states, and its internal divisions reflected traditional Arab rivalries.

However, the existence of the PLO provided the impetus for the Fatah leadership to establish its own military wing, al-'Asifa (the Storm), and to declare on January 1, 1965 that it was engaged in an armed struggle, or revolution. In their Communique No. 1, it claimed that guerilla action was needed to prove that “the armed revolution is the way to Return and to Liberty . . . and that the Palestinian people remains in the field . . . has not died and will not die.”⁸ Fatah gained a degree of publicity among the Palestinians between 1965 and 1967 because of the guerrilla war they waged against Israel, including several attempts to sabotage Israel's water-carrier project.

Paradoxically, Fatah's glory days were in the aftermath of the decisive and degrading defeat of the Arab states in the 1967 war against Israel. For the first time since 1948, the entire territory of the British colonial state was once again under the auspices of a single ruling power. Three substantial

parts of the Palestinian people—those living in the West Bank, those in Gaza, and the so-called 1948 Palestinians, or Israeli Arabs—were reunited. From a certain perspective, the colonial situation had been reestablished, this time under Jewish control.⁹ Fatah's prediction in the early 1960s of greater Israeli expansion and Arab defeat had come true.

A hinterland population was created that, according to the PLO vision, would support a popular guerrilla war inspired by the doctrine of Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara, and the National Liberation Front (FLN) leaders and ideologues of Algeria. Yasir Arafat arrived almost immediately after the war in the West Bank to establish underground guerrilla cells. The initiative, however, was crushed by Israeli security and intelligence, and the leader of Fatah was forced to establish his headquarters in Jordan. Despite this, an armed resistance and guerrilla attacks against Israeli targets both inside and outside the Green Line—the border established in the 1949 armistice agreement—began almost immediately, partially inspired by Fatah. Between 1967 and 1970, 115 Israeli civilians were killed and some 690 wounded in the guerrilla warfare.

However, Fatah's most influential effort, and the event that for Palestinians put it and Arafat at the forefront of the liberation struggle, was the battle of Karamah. Karamah was a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan, and it was Fatah's headquarters. On March 21, 1968 Israeli troops attacked the camp, but were forced by Fatah guerrillas, supported by Arab Legion artillery, into a day-long battle. The Israeli forces lost some twenty-five soldiers and were only able to continue operations with reinforcements from artillery, armored vehicles, and the air force. If the Palestinians were shamed by the outcome of the 1967 war, they regarded Karamah as a victory over the powerful Israeli armed forces that provided them with a source of pride and hope.¹⁰

A Palestinian hero also emerged—the *fida'i*, or the warrior ready to sacrifice himself for the cause—and quickly gained mythic proportions, sending thousands of teenagers to join the *Asifa* and propelling Arafat to the front of the Palestinian national movement. In July 1968, at the fourth PNC meeting in Cairo, a coalition of Fatah and other smaller guerrilla groups occupied half of the seats and took over de facto control over the organization, reframing the national charter. In February 1968 Arafat was elected as the PLO's chairman.¹¹

To a greater extent than its predecessor, the revised Palestinian National Charter adopted the traditional approach toward the Jewish political pres-

ence in the Middle East and the existence of a Palestinian polity. Framing the conflict as zero-sum, the charter stated that

the establishment of the state of Israel is entirely illegal, regardless of the passage of time, because they are contrary to the will of the Palestinian people and to their natural rights in their homeland, and inconsistent with the principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations, particularly the right of self-determination. (Article 19)

The charter's theological thesis was that "Judaism, being a religion, is not an independent nationality. Nor do Jews constitute a single nation with an identity of its own; they are citizens of the states to which they belong" (Article 20).¹²

The PLO essentially became an umbrella organization for diverse Palestinian political and guerrilla organizations, with Fatah as the predominant force. For the Israelis, the PLO signified the reappearance and revival of the Palestinians as virtually independent political actors on the scene of the Arab-Jewish conflict.¹³ At the Rabat summit of Arab states in October 1974, the PLO was recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Internal power and ideological struggles fueled the competition over extremist positions and the need for military success; such struggles appeared within the PLO and its executive committee, and between the mainstream Fatah and the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), headed by George Habash, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) of Na'if Hawatmah and several other groups.¹⁴

Beginning in 1974, one of the controversial issues within the PLO was its so-called external operations, which struck Israeli and non-Israeli civilian targets outside of Israel and in the occupied territories. Airline hijackings were the most visible and popular. Among the more spectacular operations were those at the 1972 Munich Olympics, in which most of the Israeli athletic team was taken hostage and later killed, and the May 1972 collaboration between a Japanese Red Army group and the PFLP in mounting an attack on Ben-Gurion airport, murdering twenty-six civilians. These actions put the Palestinian issue on the top of the world agenda, but at the same time, they left the Palestinians demonized as cruel terrorists.

Inside operations also intensified, leading to an uneasy coexistence between the conquerers and the conquered. After 1971 most of the attacks

came from Jordan and later Southern Lebanon. Fatah and other guerrilla organizations exploited the weakness of the Lebanese state by establishing a state within a state, building complex social, political, and military infrastructures.¹⁵ This occurred after the abortive attempt to overthrow the Jordanian Hashemite regime in September 1970. By and large, Palestinian guerrilla warfare met with relative success.¹⁶

Between 1971 and 1982 the Palestinian guerrillas killed some 250 Israeli civilians and wounded more than 1,500. All of these traumatic events were absorbed by the Israeli collective memory. As a consequence, the basic sense of internal and individual security among Israelis was heavily damaged, and the distinction between strategic versus individual security was blurred. Israeli Jewish society began to see the Palestinian guerrilla organizations as a ferocious enemy whose goal was to destroy the Jewish state and “throw the Jews into the sea.” The Jews sometimes equated the Palestinians with the Nazis, who “killed Jews simply because they were Jews.” Such a construction of reality was referred to rather elegantly by one Israeli scholar as “politicide.”¹⁷ Although overused, the term had some foundation, increasing collective frustration and a tendency toward military solutions.

Under such circumstances, the specific history and tragedy of the Palestinian people were completely erased from Israeli collective memory, history, and awareness, to the point of denying the existence of the Palestinians while at the same time perceiving them as the greatest danger that the Jewish state faced. Such feelings were also used for internal political gain by right wing or hawkish Israeli politicians. Israel conducted one limited military operation—Operation Litani in 1978—and one full-scale, bloody war in June 1982 on Lebanese territory against the Palestinian military and political infrastructure. The objective of Operation Litani was to halt the guerrilla war and the bombing of northern Israeli settlements by establishing a limited buffer zone. The 1982 war was conducted in the hope of destroying the PLO, not only militarily, but politically.

Israeli Political Culture

Usually, both the media and the intellectual community depict the Jewish Israeli political scene, in the context of the Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as divided between right and left, doves and hawks, with the addition of a recent third category of Jewish religious fundamentalists. The discourse of a more subtle sociological analysis describes the scene as uni-

versalistic versus primordial or particularistic orientations.¹⁸ These cleavages certainly exist, but mainly as self-identities in the ongoing domestic *kulturkampf*. However, they are highly simplistic, stereotyping a social order and attempting to manage a complex situation of quasi-external conflict that lacks clear-cut and permanent boundaries or easily identifiable rules.

Israeli political culture is characterized by a mixture of a permanent anxiety and a power-oriented culture. On one hand, the Jewish-Israeli polity is driven by a code of self-perceived weakness, permanent wretchedness, and existential threat. A sense of permanent siege and potential annihilation in a hostile, gentile world of anti-Semites—be they Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, or agnostics—is perceived as the state of nature or the cosmic order. Two or three thousand years of Jewish persecution, culminating in the Holocaust, are offered as final proof of the eternal relevance of the particularistic interpretation of history and collective memory, and its relevance to the present.

On the other hand, Jewish Israelis are well aware of their country's status as a military power, with one of the best-equipped and trained armed forces in the region. Military service is an important component of Jewish Israeli life, as men and women serve in both regular and reserve duty, or are the parents of soldiers, and so on. The new Israeli—as opposed to the Jew of exile, shaped and disdained by Zionist ideology and mythology—is first and foremost a warrior. Jewish Israelis adore *macht* (action); they are confident that force, now that they have the ability to use it, will solve most societal and political problems, making power orientation the touchstone of their political culture.¹⁹ There is a deep conviction that Arabs in general, and Palestinians in particular, “only understand the language of force.” Former Prime Minister Levy Eshkol coined the expression of the “poor Samson” syndrome to describe this Janus-faced character of the Israeli political culture.²⁰ The perceived weakness and power-oriented components of the culture complement each other, yet they also cause internal strain within the Jewish-Israeli collective identity.

In Jewish Israeli culture, the Jewish Israeli man—especially the Ashkenazi native-born man—is depicted as modern, educated, sophisticated, highly skilled, motivated, and an omnipotent warrior, as opposed to the Arab in general and the Palestinian in particular, who is seen as primitive and backward, uneducated, unsophisticated, unskilled, unmotivated, disabled, and militarily inferior. Poor work is labeled as Arab work, and the language, especially Hebrew slang, was once filled with degrading and pejorative stereotypes of

Arabs.²¹ The wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967 strengthened these stereotypes. A slight change occurred following the 1973 and 1982 wars, accelerating after the popular uprising in the occupied territories.

Jewish Israelis interpreted the reappearance of the Palestinians as independent actors on the stage of the Jewish-Arab conflict, embodied by the PLO, to fit perfectly with both components of their political culture. Israeli overreaction was one of the factors that helped to both give the Palestinian organizations publicity and reconstruct Palestinian identity and nationalism. Al-'Asifa's first guerrilla attack, an attempt to install a bomb into a reservoir of the Israeli national water carrier, had been preceded by several abortive attempts to infiltrate Israel,²² which the Israeli government gave a great deal of publicity. On May 1, 1965, Levy Eshkol, the Israeli prime minister and minister of defense, warned the Arab countries not to shelter Palestinian guerrillas, and he filed a complaint to the UN Security Council. Fatah then requested that the United Nations consider its captured gunmen to be prisoners of war, to be treated according to the Geneva Conventions and international law. Fatah not only gained relatively rapid worldwide recognition, but moreover, this small group was presented and constructed by the Israelis as a major danger for Israel. This alone operated as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, and lay the foundations for a new Palestinian pride.

The Israeli oversensitivity was not completely baseless. As mentioned above, both Israel and some Arab states sought to de-Palestinize the Palestinians.²³ Any deviation from this process was considered by the Israelis and the Jordanian regime as dangerous; any Palestinian claim as such was perceived in terms of a zero-sum game for both the Israeli and Jordanian polities. Ahmad al-Shuqairi, the founder and first chairman of the PLO and the man who gave the organization its initial shape, declared Jordan to be a part of Palestine.²⁴

From a political and institutional point of view, the Israeli reaction to the reappearance of a partially independent, Palestine-centered organization and leadership may have been exaggerated, but from a behavioral point of view, the reason for anxiety was evident. From the outset, the PLO, constitutionally at least, continued the traditional Palestinian denial of any collective political rights for Jews in Palestine.

The PLO's argument with the central assertions of Zionist doctrine is also understandable, given the history of both collectivities and the catastrophic outcome for the Palestinians of the encounter with the Jewish national movement. In view of the Israeli public's acquaintance with the PLO

Charter, Arafat's 1994 call for a *jihad* (holy war), which he later attempted to explain as "jihad for peace," and his definition of the post-Oslo Israel-PLO agreements in terms of Muhammad's Treaty of Hudaibiyya, immediately touched the most sensitive Israeli nerves.²⁵ The real conflict over a piece of land became a cosmic collision between supernatural powers, uncontrolled by human beings. The Palestinian National Charter's direct assault on the very *raison d'être* and identity of Jewish collectivity reflected the nature of the communal conflict, based on a mutual game of delegitimation. Later, both the nature of the conflict and the delegitimation drove the partners toward mutual accommodation.

Personification

The Israeli approaches toward the Arabs, the Palestinians, and the conflict were embodied in the personality and figure of Arafat, Fatah's leader and later the PLO's chairman. This perception was fueled by Arafat's self-presentation as an ascetic man of the people, completely dedicated to the revolution. Most of the Jewish Israeli media perceived and presented him as a caricature, an appalling but ridiculous terrorist, a cunning conspirator with a limited performance record, a loser survivalist, an untrustworthy and inconsistent pragmatist, and, above all, the personification of ultimate evil. However, just as Arafat preferred, he remained for most Palestinians and Israelis an enigma. From his installment in Gaza and the attempt to establish and efficiently manage the Palestinian National Authority and its routinization to his death in 2002, Arafat's enigmatic image to a large measure disappeared, with his limitations overemphasized both by the Palestinians and Israelis.²⁶

Israeli Policy and the Palestinian Response

According to Israel's original field policy, formulated immediately after 1967, the country was to be that contradiction in terms, an enlightened conqueror. On the West Bank this meant "open bridges" over the Jordan River and what Moshe Dayan called "functional division." Functional division assumed continuous control, surveillance, and co-opting of the Palestinian population by Jordan, with Israeli controlling land and water usage. The rules of the game were explicit almost from the beginning. The Israelis wanted to keep all or most of the territories of the West Bank and Gaza

because of, as Eshkol, the pragmatic and dovish premier, put it, “the roots of the Israeli people in this land, as deep as ancient days.”²⁷ However, for the Israelis, formally annexing the occupied territories was out of the question, with the exception of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, where most of the Syrian population had left or was forced to leave. Such an annexation would have changed the entire demographic balance between Jews and Palestinians, transforming Israel into a binational political entity. Even the right wing regime that came to power in 1977 was unwilling to fulfill the expectations of elements of its constituency by formally annexing the occupied territories.

However, even though the territories were not formally annexed, they were opened up as settlement frontiers²⁸ and incorporated within a single economy and military control system. In the first period of Jewish settlement, a grassroots movement sprang up, which the government sporadically supported, or better put, made no serious effort to halt. Later, the government openly supported and encouraged the settlements within the framework of the so-called Allon Plan.²⁹ From 1977 to 1987 a concentrated effort was made to create an irreversible territorial *fait accompli*³⁰ by creating Jewish settlements within a densely settled Arab areas.³¹ At that time, the West Bank had about 120,000 Jewish settlers spread over forty major settlements.

One of the Palestinian responses to the invasion of their land reservoir and the attempt to suffocate any possibility of future self-determination was to attempt a process of rapid internal institutional and local leadership building,³² or what Salim Tamari perceives as the creation of a Palestinian civil society.³³ The new local leadership was also supposed to prevent any possible settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, such as between Israel and Jordan, without PLO involvement. Initially, the process of local leadership formation did not contradict Israeli policy, which tried not to interfere with Palestinian internal affairs, at least on a local or municipal level. The idea of indirect rule was built into the situation from the beginning of the occupation, but the actual nature of its application varied from time to time. Most of the mayors elected in the 1976 municipal elections were “nationalist”³³ supporters of the PLO, replacing the traditionalist pro-Jordanian leadership.³⁴ Together with other notables, intellectuals, and professionals, the new mayors tried to establish an inside leadership, supposedly subordinate to the outside leadership, by forming the National Guidance Committee (NGC). Israeli outlawed the NGC in 1982, and most of its principal members were dismissed from their offices or exiled. Two others were attacked

by a Jewish underground group. In short, the occupiers could not allow the creation of a countrywide independent Palestinian leadership that was perceived as a kernel of state and nation building, and an extension and arm of the PLO.³⁵

However, the Palestinians' complete economic dependence on Israel prevented any real development of the economic and social infrastructure of local institutions. Almost no investments were made in economic or social development. In addition, employment in Israel undermined the traditional family structure; youngsters and women were now earning money outside the control of their elders' traditional authority. The hopes of certain intellectuals of building a genuine civil society on the ruins of traditionalism and fueled by the intifada—the uprising that demanded a separation from Israel—also evaporated. The social outcome of the uprising was an internally weakened and divided society.

Under Israeli military government, two kinds of Palestinian heroes developed in the West Bank and Gaza—the abovementioned holy warrior or *fidai*, ready for self-sacrifice, and the steadfast one (*samid*), who endured the hardship and humiliations the conqueror imposed, staying on the land at all costs to avoid a repetition of the 1948 *nakba*. The invention of *sumoud* (steadfastness) in the 1970s as a response to intensive Israeli settlement, created a limited and conditional legitimacy for cooperating with the conqueror and not escalating guerrilla resistance within the territories.³⁶

Despite the asymmetrical relationship between ruler and ruled, Palestinian society received a high level of exposure to Israeli society. Many learned Hebrew, consumed Israeli mass media, were employed by Israelis in Israel or in the occupied territories themselves, and formed business ties with Israelis. In addition, generations of young Palestinians spent varying periods in Israeli jails and detention camps. Jewish Israelis encountered Palestinians mainly as employers or during their army service, policing and maintaining security in Gaza or the West Bank. The Palestinians learned the advantages and disadvantages of the Israeli system, while the Jews strengthened their stereotypes of Palestinians. As the political stalemate continued, the process of Jewish colonization advanced. Palestinians' standard of living rose slightly while the traditional family structure was weakened, and the education level rose dramatically. In addition, the Palestinian resistance to the occupation became more sophisticated. The *sumoud* civil society became more active and viable, reaching the level of a popular uprising and mass resistance by the end of 1987. The images of the *samid* and the *fidai*

merged into the image and social role of *shahid*, the martyr who sacrificed his (sometimes her) life for the sake of national liberation.³⁷

The Uprising

A revolutionary situation has existed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the beginning of the occupation, as the local population never recognized the legitimacy of the occupier. This was expressed by sporadic violence and resistance directed against Israel. Israelis conveniently interpreted these events as disturbances of public order and marginal phenomena. It took time for the Israelis to understand the nature and scope of the grassroots uprising. The popular uprising, carried out by youth (the so-called children of the stones) exemplified a “paradox of the power”:³⁸ A fundamentally weak partner in a conflict can gain an advantage over a much stronger entity that is limited by the political and moral constraints of its own superior position. The territories became ungovernable and, for the first time since 1967, the cost of holding them exceeded the benefits for most Israelis.³⁹ Creeping penetration of the guerrilla warfare into the Jewish Israeli territories created a picture of the relations between the Jewish Israelis and Palestinians of the West Bank similar to that of intercommunal warfare in such places as Northern Ireland or the former Yugoslavia. The focus of the armed struggle shifted inward and the salience of external operations decreased correspondingly.

In Israel the difference between front and rear was blurred, with individual members of each collectivity becoming potential soldiers and victims. Israeli men and women on the streets anxiously began to carry weapons routinely, recruiting themselves into the war by expecting sudden involvement at any time. The Israeli Jewish population was thrust onto the same plane of communal warfare that the Palestinians had been living with since the beginning of the Israeli and maybe the Jordanian occupation.

For the first time since 1967, the Green Line boundary reappeared on the cognitive map of the Jewish population because of extended closures and curfews. The necessity of separating Israelis from Palestinians crept into Jewish Israeli awareness, though without a concrete specification of how, where, and when. It simply became a desired political option; yet the first stage was not necessarily linked in the public mind with the possibility of withdrawing from the territories or dismantling the settlements, let alone establishing a Palestinian state.

Within the Palestinian population, the scope of recruitment for the uprising expanded tremendously. One of the most fundamental developments of the popular uprising was the amalgamation of Islamic elements into the violent struggle and the consequent formation of Hamas. Originally the Islamic elements, the most prominent of which was al-Mujamma' al-Islami in Gaza, were an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had sponsored sporadic social activities in Palestine following its founding in 1945. The Mujamma' concentrated efforts on religious and social activities, building mosques, community centers, and youth clubs, and fighting against drugs, prostitution, and other social maladies as it defined them. In 1979 the Israeli military government officially recognized it as a religious association, and until 1983 it had tacit support from the Israeli authorities, who first perceived it as a counterbalance against the nationalistic PLO.

Hamas was founded in January 1988 by the charismatic Shaykh Ahmad Yasin as a political movement in Gaza.⁴⁰ Its military wing was established at the same time, named after the hero of the Palestinian Great Revolt of 1936–39, Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam.⁴¹ Hamas claims about 30 percent support among the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank. The Hamas Covenant, published in August 1988, declares that “the liberation of Palestine in its entirety, from the [Mediterranean] Sea to the [Jordan] River, is the most supreme strategic goal.” A smaller rival organization, the Islamic Jihad, founded in Gaza in early 1980, is more interested in pan-Islamism and is influenced by Iranian Khomenism and the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The more militant Islamic Jihad is responsible, in considerable measure, for encouraging Hamas’s founders to endorse violent activity.

The 1993 Oslo Agreement and the Palestinian National Authority

The ability of Israeli political culture to adopt an accord with the Palestinians, led by the PLO, with relatively little domestic resistance, was surprising considering that Israeli law prohibited contact with the organization just a short time before. It is even more dramatic if we consider that the consequences of the agreement and its implementation meant not only accepting the PLO and some of its demands, but also entailed a far-reaching change in the political status quo in the occupied territories. The change in the first stage of the interim agreement was in accepting Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza and Jericho areas, then extending that autonomy to most areas

of the West Bank and Gaza, encompassing a major redeployment of Israeli troops, as a kind of disengagement between the two collectivities.

Starting in 1985, the first year following Israel's Lebanon war, approximately 20 percent of Israeli Jews, a small but slowly growing minority, supported establishing a Palestinian state. The rate of support grew by more than 10 percent, and in the first euphoric stage of the agreement, reached 40 percent. Support has since stabilized at around 33 percent.⁴² The acceptance of the autonomy plan is, of course, also considered a revolutionary change in Palestinian political thinking.

From the Israeli point of view, the very conception of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) and its de facto implementation was possible because, contrary to prevailing common sense, it was well rooted in the Israeli power-oriented culture. From the beginning of the return of the Labor Party to power in 1992, there was a demonstrated stiffening in the policy toward the Palestinians, which included the mass deportation of Islamic activists and extensions of curfews and closures on the Palestinian population. The macho image of the late Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin was well established by his iron-fist policies in the 1980s and his "break their bones" orders in response to the intifada. He was strongly identified with the power culture.⁴³ Ironically, the previous right wing, patriotic Likud administration, despite some of its rhetoric, was more easily identified with the weakness components of Israeli Jewish political culture; most of its political moves were based on arousing anxiety as opposed to the activist and security themes in Labor's message. The final status of the Palestinian entity was conveniently left for another stage of negotiations, depending on the condition that the Palestinian Authority proves itself through its policies and ability to govern. For the Israelis, the major indicator of Palestinian success was defined in terms of providing security to the Israeli Jewish population. For this reason, most of the Israelis were ready to accept the formation of several militia units and security forces by the Palestinian Authority.

A major concern for the Israeli public and leadership was that, despite Israel's formidable military strength, its power underwent continuous attrition and slow deterioration, resulting from the need to police the occupied territories. As the Palestinian popular uprising continued, the price for the Israeli military system of directly controlling the Palestinian population grew, while the gains for the Israeli economy were decreasing. Many Israeli military units drastically cut their basic and advanced training, but worse was the changing mentality of the entire military body, from an elite corps

that could conduct extensive blitzkrieg-style, large-scale wars into a static, internal security militia. The Israeli military quickly learned the limitations of a military power facing active civilian resistance primarily composed of stone-throwing children and youth.

Protecting the small Jewish settlements dispersed among the densely populated Palestinian population has been another heavy burden on the Israeli military. According to an obsolete security doctrine, any Jewish settlement in this space is a part of a regional defense system in case of war, granting territorial depth for defensive forces. Analyzing the present and future battlefields as well as the lessons of the 1973 war in the Syrian (Golan) Heights, shows otherwise. Settlements and settlers hampered the military, limiting large-scale movements of armored troops on the battlefield. However, it seems that the Israeli government estimates that public opinion is not ready to tolerate the dismantling of settlements, including those that could be used as bargaining cards with the Syrians and the Palestinians. Even the Netzarim settlement, isolated in the Gaza Strip and entailing a high military and political cost to maintain, is perceived in such terms.

A power-oriented analysis of the situation concludes that indirect control of the Palestinians is a better and cheaper strategy than is direct control,⁴⁴ especially in a completely ungovernable area such as the Gaza Strip. Such indirect rule entails transferring local rule to Palestinian authority, including its police and secret services. These arrangements would take at least five years. In any case, a Palestinian autonomous entity—or in the worst case analysis from the current Israeli point of view, a sovereign state, divided territorially between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and compressed between Jordan and Israel—is for Israel a greater strategic asset than threat.

However, the Oslo Accord itself contradicted the view of Palestinian autonomy just described. The Palestinian Authority desperately needed to gain legitimacy from the Palestinian population, which could only be obtained by holding general and more or less free elections. Elections were finally held in January 1996, in accordance with the Oslo 2 Agreement of September 28, 1995, after major redeployments of Israeli troops from populated areas. The withdrawal of troops in areas of mixed population left behind the seeds of future conflict, as in Hebron; redeployment there without evacuating the small militant Jewish population was a sure formula for confrontation with the Muslim majority. The Israeli government was too weak to wage an open conflict with such ideological settlers before a

comprehensive peace-package deal was presented to the public, and was unwilling to do so in any case. However, the catch-22 was that such a deal was impossible without empowering the Palestinian Authority. As the empowerment process continued, opposition within the Palestinian camp and among its Islamic components escalated the armed struggle against Israeli targets within Israel with the expressed aim of destroying the agreement. A softer interpretation perceives these terror attacks as a signal to the Palestinian Authority, controlled by Fatah, to recognize the Islamic opposition's legitimacy and allow it political freedom as well as the freedom to develop its social and educational activities.

When all is said and done, the Palestinian Authority has been unable to deliver the promised internal security goods to the Israelis, and it has failed to deliver tangible and immediate results for the Palestinian population in improving the quality of life, creating better economic conditions, and providing greater freedom of expression. The Western states, which promised massive financial aid to the Palestinian Authority, have hesitated to fulfill their commitments without clear programs for spending the money for its intended purposes.⁴⁵ Much of the aid that arrived was turned over to supporting the various branches of the Palestinian Authority military. The Israeli leadership, too, was unable to supply the much-desired and long-promised internal security, a promise that returned Labor to power following the 1992 elections. Intensifying the Islamic and other guerrilla attacks left the peace process looking fake in the eyes of Israeli public opinion, which returned to its traditional anti-Arab sentiments. The Israeli government's response to attacks—imposing long closures on the occupied territories—only worsened material conditions for the Palestinians, especially the Gazans, as a considerable portion of the population worked inside Israel. However, the Palestinian Authority's relative success in establishing authority and reducing Islamic violence for the most part kept the gradual implementation of the agreement on track.

Pragmatization of Fatah

The PLO, lead by the mainstream Fatah and Arafat, have already made gradual, essential, though sometimes merely implicit moves toward coexistence and recognition of Israel. The first was the twelfth PNC resolution (July 1974) "establishing a Palestinian national authority in any liberated area [from Israel]," the so-called mini-state option. The second move was

made in December 1988 when Arafat declared in Geneva that the PLO recognized the rights of all parties in the Middle East conflict, including the states of Palestine, Israel, and other neighbors, to exist in peace and security; denounced terrorism; and accepted United Nations Resolution 181. Even though these were abstract declarations without any concrete policy and institutional application, they managed to arouse strident antagonism among many Palestinian groups. The entire process of accepting the Israeli offer and its accompanying details was a revolutionary move for the PLO, as represented by the Fatah leadership and encouraged by part of the local leadership in the occupied territories.

None of the declarations means that Arafat and his colleagues were unaware of Israel's motives, the unfavorable terms of peace from the PLO's point of view, or the danger of becoming the Israelis' soldiers of fortune rather than their equal partners. Palestinian intellectuals in the West, as well as Palestinians who remained outside Palestine, have become the greatest critics of the agreements, continually reminding Arafat and his colleagues of its faults. The irony is that both Rabin and Arafat have been labeled by elements of their own constituencies as traitors. Only a weakened Fatah leader could be coerced into accepting the near-capitulation terms of the agreement, in order to survive after the major political mistake of supporting the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait without the Soviet superpower's political and military backing and threatened by a growing inside leadership of graduates of the popular uprising and Israeli interrogation methods, jails, and detentions camps.

Nonetheless, the ambiguous deal that the Israelis proposed holds within it the potential to create a small, independent Palestinian state. As a sovereign state, it will have greater possibilities to maneuver and exploit political or military opportunities in the face of its two major potential enemies, Jordan and Israel. No doubt, the prospective state's small size split into two separate territorial units, internal demographic pressures, economic underdevelopment, lack of natural resources, and pressures from a highly mobilized diaspora will lend this state built-in political and social instability.⁴⁶

The PLO-Israel deal included an understanding that the organization would amend the Palestinian National Charter; the preamble of the Washington Declaration stated that

it is time [for Israelis and Palestinians] to put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict, recognize their mutual legitimate and political

rights, and strive to live in peaceful coexistence, mutual dignity, and security to achieve a just, lasting, and comprehensive settlement and historic reconciliation through the agreed political process.⁴⁷

Interestingly enough, the agreement was made between the government of the state of Israel and “the Palestinian team representing the Palestinian people,” and not with the PLO or one of its organs. In an extensive analysis, Bilal al-Hasan,⁴⁸ a brother of Khalied al-Hasan, one of the original founding fathers of Fatah, challenged the legal relations between the newly founded Palestinian Authority and its council, which was to be elected by the Palestinian population, and the PLO organs, questioning the subordination of the latter to the council and the Palestinian Authority. Like many of the Palestinian leadership and intellectuals remaining in *ghurba* (exile), al-Hasan questioned the legality of the amendments to the charter. To make matters more complicated, the Israelis conditioned the holding of elections for a new, locally elected, self-governing Palestinian council upon amendments to the charter, placing the Palestinian Authority in a no-win situation.

The New Rejectionist Front and the Holy Land

In July 1974, when the twelfth PNC adopted the idea of the mini-state option, which was in fact a late acceptance of the 1948 partition plan, it gave up the traditional claim for Greater Palestine, and many Palestinians perceived it as a betrayal of the cause. Important organizations such as the PFLP resigned from the Executive Committee and established the Rejectionist Front, supported mainly by Iraq and Libya. Every deviation from the traditional total Palestinian negation of the legitimacy of a Jewish polity in Palestine sparked harsh disputes and created cleavages and violent conflicts.

Thus, it is no wonder that a good deal of violence and hostility accompanied Arafat’s acceptance of the Declaration of Principles and the other agreements with Israel — Cairo, Washington, and so on. Both non-Fatah-affiliated organizations and members of Arafat’s immediate entourage, including central figures such as Faruq Qaddumi and Hani al-Hasan, openly criticized the agreement. Other previously strong supporters of Arafat and Fatah, including such intellectuals as Edward Said, Hisham Sharabi, and Elia Zureik, attacked the agreement or quietly withdrew from their positions on negotiation teams established in October 1991 following the Madrid peace talks, arguing that the agreement gave the Israelis too much.

Other prominent Palestinians continued to refuse to accept any recognition of the Jewish state within historic Palestine. Most of the Palestinians who remained in *ghurba* would not benefit from the agreement, and thus had no interest in accepting it. For those in the would-be Palestinian territories, it seemed to be minor compensation for all of the humiliations and frustrations they had endured in the years of occupation.⁴⁹ For the younger generations it would be hard to adapt to a routine life after the glory days of uprising and permanent revolution.

Under such circumstances, Arafat and the other Fatah supporters of the agreement relied mainly on the support of the West Bank middle class and the personal loyalty of Fatah military units and security forces brought in from the outside.⁵⁰ The most loyal and enthusiastic Arab supporters of the agreements were the vast majority of Israel's Arab citizens, who had long desired a reconciliation between their people (the Palestinians) and their state (Israel). In fact, for both Palestinians and Israeli Jews, the agreement hurt longstanding cognitive maps—of who the perceived enemy is, of the intentions of the other, and of the imperatives of collective memories and amnesia—without any proper preparation.⁵¹ Moreover, for both parties, many vested interests are sunk into continuing the conflict and into the mutual concessions that actually or potentially touched upon the interests of diverse social strata. Intentionally or unintentionally, the tactic of both leaderships was to build quickly a new irreversible social and political reality based on their existing political cultures.

The beginning of the resolution of the conflict between the two national movements, Zionism and Palestinism, exposed the primordial and religious dimensions of the confrontation. For both collectivities, Palestine–Eretz Israel was not only a father or motherland, but the Holy Land.⁵² As the conflict's national meanings were reduced, its religious and primordial meanings increased. The trend began much earlier on the Jewish side, when, following the 1967 war and the “reunion” with the “holiness of the national cradlelands,” a quasi-millenarian movement arose among the Jewish population focused in the later creation of Gush Emunim and a grassroots settler movement in the West Bank⁵³ that reshaped Israeli society's social and political boundaries. It remains unclear if a real political threat to the Jewish settlements in the Holy Land will lead to violent resistance, and whether a government will be ready or able to face such a resistance.

From the Palestinian side, the conflict between the rapidly growing, highly politicized, and armed Islamic movements and Judaism as a religion

and culture is even more prominent.⁵⁴ The conflict always had religious roots, and from the beginning religious symbols and terms, such as *jihad*, *shahid*, or *fida'i*, were used to mobilize the peripheries for the struggle, but Islam was only one component of conflict management. For the Islamic movement, the religious side of the conflict is the dominant consideration—theologically, to give up an Islamic land to non-Islamic people is prohibited—but it seems that Hamas's hesitation to join the peace process was rooted more in following the initial Palestinian nationalistic approach, together with an internal struggle that left open the option to participate in the new Palestinian polity. Continuing guerrilla warfare against Israel to blow up the PLO-Israel agreement was a fundamental challenge to the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, the challenge can be seen as an Islamic leadership requesting recognition as a partner in the deal and treatment as a legitimate actor in establishing a new polity.

The Palestinian national leadership faces a major dilemma. It must prove its credibility through its ability to implement the agreements with Israel so that the process continues, and deliver the goods by guarding Israel's security. At the same time, it must avoid a major clash—one that could develop into a civil war—with the Islamic movements and the other opposition elements in Palestinian society. As the terms of the agreements with the Israelis are humiliating to it, the Palestinian Authority has to continually test the boundaries of Israeli permissiveness and public opinion in granting the use of additional state symbols, nationalist activities in East Jerusalem, and power and institutions that point toward creating a future independent state.

Epilogue

The Israel-PLO agreements simultaneously fit and contradict both sides' collective memories, cultures, and conventional wisdoms, as well as the interests of different strata and interest groups in each society. They are a kind of political experiment in the making. Social scientists label such an experiment as a social construction of reality, interpreting the sociopolitical facts differently. The move was taken by two leaderships that tried to provide new solutions to old problems and, in large measure, to force on their own constituencies top-down solutions. Both leaderships had enough power to begin the process, but the power eroded as they tried to convert images to institutional arrangements.

During an international conference dedicated to the Arab-Israeli con-

flict at Tel Aviv University in late 1992, most of the participating experts agreed that the conflict “was ripe for resolution.”⁵⁵ However, none of the experts could provide any theoretical conceptualization or historical depth beyond wishful thinking and gut feelings. No doubt, at that time, dramatic changes had occurred in the Middle East, beginning with the Camp David accords and later accelerated by the collapse of the bipolar world order and the dismantling of the Eastern bloc—the military, ideological, and political patron of the Arab and Palestinian causes. The hidden agenda behind the ripeness theory at least partially assumed that the Israeli side of the conflict had attained a decisive position of power that enabled it to dictate terms to the Arab side, including recognizing Israel’s right to exist. The other component of this theory was the assumption that from such a powerful position, the Israeli side would feel secure enough to give the Arabs such a generous offer that a revolutionary shift would be created in their political and ideological thought, leading to their accepting the Israeli state and settler society in the region.

The ingredients of the ripeness theory formed the background dimensions of the settlement, as conducted by the Israeli power-oriented culture before the Palestinians. However, power is a very elusive notion, and in some cases has a consumer effect: the more that one uses a product, the less it is worth. The Palestinian leadership learned a similar lesson. In trying to convert prestige and image into real power, it discovered that power concomitantly deflates. The results of the 1996 elections demonstrated that the Jewish population of Israel indeed was not ripe for a reasonable settlement; the state of ripeness of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict generally is an open question.