

SELECTING CONFLICTS

Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine, by Jonathan Schanzer. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. x + 197 pages. References to p. 235. Index to p. 239. \$27.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Khaled Hroub

Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine belongs to that genre of sensational and populist journalism that eschews objective analysis and has no use for academic rigor. Packaging prejudice and hatred against Palestinians under the guise of academic work, Jonathan Schanzer, a director of policy at the Jewish Policy Center and counterterrorism analyst at the U.S. Department of Treasury, aims to build an anti-Palestinian polemic whose vulgarity would stun many readers, including many mainstream Israelis. Anti-Palestinianism infests the book from cover to cover as the author recycles every tired Zionist misconception about the Palestinians in a new disguise: the Hamas-Fatah rivalry. Thus, we read that the PLO and its factions "became the preeminent model for terrorism in the modern era" and that "violence in the name of Palestinian nationalism has led to death and destruction in nearly every territory that the Palestinians have inhabited" (p. 8). All military activities against Israel and its armed forces are naturally labeled "terrorist attacks," but Israeli atrocities, say, against the unarmed village of Samu' in November 1966, in which "more than 70 people" (p. 18) were killed, is not.

The author's "new" contribution to our understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the following bizarre theory: We have all been wrong to focus on the "sensational" Israeli-Palestinian component

of the conflict when the core of the conflict has in fact lain entirely with the Palestinians themselves. The decades-long "Palestinian Civil War"—an upper-case term fondly and repeatedly used by the author—which culminated, of course, in Hamas's seizure of power in the Gaza Strip in July 2007, is far more important and destructive than all other "disputes" with Israel. Schanzer advises that the "conflict between the two most influential Palestinian factions must be, and always should have been, a critical component to understanding the Arab-Israeli conflict" (p. 3). It remains unclear how this critical component could further our understanding of the 1948 war; the 1956 Suez crisis; the 1967, 1973, and 1982 wars; or Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and the Camp David peace treaty, to name but a few among thousands of events and turning points that occurred before any rivalry between Hamas and Fatah emerged in a conflict that started before the creation of either movement.

To prove his point, the author twists facts, eschews truths, reconstructs events, and overemphasizes anecdotes. Furthermore, all of this is woven into a decontextualizing and ideological approach. Because any oppressive occupational context or brutal Israeli policy against the Palestinians is ignored, the reader is left with the impression of a "strange" Palestinian people acting and reacting with inexplicable violence and terrorism. The only explanation that can be inferred from the book has to be based on the author's insinuated racist statements about the "Palestinian culture of violence" and the "dangerous ideology" of Palestinian nationalism, which, he implies, combines "xenophobia, chauvinism, and/or irredentism" (p. 7). The author would even have his readers conclude that Palestinian nationalism has been so ambitious and expansionist that had "Hitler won the war, [Hajj Amin al-]Husseini reportedly hoped to rule over a vast territory in the Middle East" (p. 7)!

Some claims presented as "new facts" in the book are really intriguing. Yet "sources" and footnotes regarding such "facts" are newspaper articles pieced together without further investigation. A telling example is the author's assertion that "In March 2008, the [Palestinian Authority] announced the creation of a new socioeconomic network—financed by the United

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States, Israel, the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia—to counter the Hamas *dawa* system by providing aid to some 60,000 persons in the West Bank” (p. 127). Puzzled by this new information, this reviewer rushed to check the source to find nothing more than a newspaper report in *Ha’Aretz* with the speculative title, “PA to Launch Welfare Network in Hopes of Countering Hamas.” The speculative nature of the report, however, was conveniently dropped during the author’s “rigorous research” and replaced by an affirmative statement.

Factual errors large and small embellish the book throughout. A few examples suffice: Yasir ‘Abid Rabbuh, a leader of the FIDA movement and adviser to the Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, is referred to as a Fatah spokesman; Hamas’s first official statement is described as being made in February 1988 when it is well known that it was issued in December 1987; the military coup that brought the revolutionary Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in Egypt took place in 1954 according to the book, rather than in 1952; and the author states that Fatah’s first military operation was carried out on 3 January 1965 (not on 1 January as everyone else knows, including those who took part in it).

Daniel Pipes’s foreword gives the reader some idea of where this anti-Palestinian paradigm might have come from. Pipes, one of the author’s mentors, praises the book because it properly redirects the focus of Israel/Palestine studies and wonders why such a “small and obscure” (p. xv) population (the Palestinian people) has attracted so much international attention. Since the aim of this anti-Palestinian paradigm is to deconstruct any notion of Palestinian nationalism, identity, and coherence, both mentor and disciple attack Rashid Khalidi and his assertion of a “unified Palestinian identity.” It is not important to Pipes or Schanzer that the “small” Palestinian population is almost double the size of Israel’s (including the Palestinian diaspora and Palestinian citizens of Israel); or that this “obscure” population has historically been rooted in Palestine for more than the past millennium and is ethnically coherent and linguistically unified—facts that actually seem crucial to this reviewer in light of the artificial nature of the hodgepodge “Israeli nation” and the way in which it was brutally imposed.