

The Impact of Palestinian Nationalism on Israel

by: Rafael Israeli
(May 2013)

Apologia

We tend to regard nationalism as a militant movement that articulates the link between man and a particular land, what we usually call a "patriotic feeling," or in Arabic *wataniyya* (*watan*= homeland or motherland). But there are more meanings to nationalism: a policy of national independence; a policy of rescuing industry and other economic assets from the hands of foreigners (by nationalizing them); a chauvinist feeling of narrow and exclusive identity to set us apart from others; or, a doctrine that lends precedence to national values over international ones, and even provides a particular interpretation of national character and national values. Sometimes, this form of nationalism can come to be personified in the figure of a charismatic leader (for example, Gamal Nasser, Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat, the prominent 20th Century leaders of Egypt, Iraq and the Palestinians, respectively).

Nationalism is also a matter of identity. People seek their roots, and desire to locate the origins of their being in an attempt to determine who they are, particularly in our cosmopolitan world where values and consumer goods have become globalized. At times, people look for a traumatic event or moment in their collective past - a revelation, a myth, an act of heroism, a founding father or some other historical cataclysm - that helps explain how in the remote past that happening had turned an inanimate material culture, or a haphazard collection of individuals, into a culture, a religion, a people, a history, an ethnic or national group. In the search of those links to the past - real or imagined - people often create their own mythology that lends depth to their history.

History of Palestinian Nationalism

The genesis of Palestinian nationalism can be placed in the 1920's when the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, which until then encompassed the entire Arab world and constituted the major focus of its Islamic identity, gave rise to Arab nationalism. In general, this identity was based on cultural, religious, historical, ethnic, territorial and linguistic affiliation under the all-inclusive appellation of *Qawmiyya* (*qawm*= tribe), which assumed a descent from ancient common ancestors originating in Arabia. However, while that definition paralleled the emergence of modern Turkish nationalism, which inherited the mantle of the extinct Empire,

territorial, ethnic, dialectal and historical circumstances further established local and regional differences between, for example, Morocco and Syria, Iraq and Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Libya. These distinctions led to the development of localized or territorial nationalism (*wataniyya*), which has actually come to divide the Arab nation into 22 separate entities, all members of the Arab League.

During the 1920's, many Arabs, including those who lived in Palestine, identified with the idea of Greater Syria, which was considered the most appropriate Arab entity to inherit Ottoman rule in the Middle East. Only when Britain and France divided the Middle East after World War I, and new entities were carved out of the defunct Empire, did a sort of European-style nationalism begin to take root in the Arab world, combining both territorial and ethnic identity into separate nation-states. Syria and Lebanon came under French influence, while Iraq and Greater Palestine (including what is now Jordan) were controlled by the British.

The League of Nations awarded Britain a mandate, essentially an international license to govern Palestine, with the expectation that it would allow the establishment of a "national Jewish home," without hurting the local Arabs' interests. The British, however, did not fulfill the promise of the Balfour Declaration to create a Jewish homeland. Instead, to reward the Hashemite family for its assistance during the war, Winston Churchill severed Eastern Palestine from its western part to establish the Emirate of Transjordan (later the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) and install one of the family's leaders, Abdullah, as its ruler.

Many Arabs in western Palestine objected to the British machinations and spawned their own national movement under the leadership of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini. The Husseini's were a prominent Jerusalem family that competed with other leading Arab families, such as the Nusseibeh's and the Nashashibi's. Often against the counsel of his rivals, the Mufti and his followers used violence to fight against the British mandatory forces. Most of Husseini's efforts, however, were not directed at driving out the British overlords; rather, he was determined to prevent the Jewish Zionists from building their national home. Thus, he vigorously opposed Jewish immigration to Palestine, even after the Nazis came to power and European Jews desperately sought lands of refuge, chief among which was Palestine.

Muslim anti-Semitism and the Rise of Palestinian Nationalism

Husseini's fanaticism was augmented by his close association with the Muslim Brothers organization in Egypt, established in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. Al-Banna did not invent a new Islam; rather he put his own spin on some traditional practices and terminology. For example, the word "*jihad*," long interpreted as striving - as in the aspiration to be a better Muslim, meant aspiration, self-strengthening, or making an

effort, which can be an intellectual and personal pursuit and not necessarily a violent activity. Al-Banna, however, insisted that “*jihad* is an instrument in order to battle against the enemy.” But who is the enemy? According to al-Banna it was the British occupying Egypt and the Jews who were coming to colonize Palestine. Muslims, al-Banna argued, were duty-bound to help the Palestinians fight the Jews and prevent them from usurping Muslim territory. He also claimed that if a Muslim were to die in such a holy cause, this is considered the death of a martyr (*shaheed*) who would be rewarded by going straight to Paradise. Believing al-Banna, the people who volunteered for the Muslim Brothers were not afraid to die; in fact they were eager to martyr themselves for the cause of Islam and take the short cut from this tormenting life into eternal Paradise in the entourage of Allah.

In addition to the Muslim Brotherhood, the Mufti found common cause with the Nazis. The Germans jumped on the opportunity to tell the Muslims that they shared a common desire to eliminate Jews and, therefore, it was only natural for them to collaborate.

Not all Arabs or Muslims were interested in joining Hitler’s war on the Jews (in fact, some Muslims rescued Jews). The Mufti, however, was anxious to work with Hitler and travelled to Berlin where he met the Fuehrer and established together a pro-Axis broadcasting service which operated from Berlin until the very end of the war and was supported by more than 60 Arabs and Muslim broadcasters and translators.

The British White Paper of 1939

Even before the Mufti decided to join hands with Hitler, the Jews in Palestine were facing a more immediate threat from the British mandatory authorities. Just as the persecution of Jews in Europe was escalating, leaving thousands desperate to flee and many wishing to emigrate to Palestine, the British issued a White Paper that would end the hope for the establishment of a Jewish state and prevent a mass influx of Jewish refugees. Aimed at resolving the ongoing conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, the new policy conceived by British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, the co-author of the Munich Agreement, stipulated that a maximum of 75,000 immigration certificates would be authorized by the mandatory power to incoming Jewish refugees.

According to Walid Khalidi, one of the senior scholars of Middle Eastern affairs, when that quota was exhausted, further Jewish immigration would be contingent upon Arab agreement, "which clearly would not be forthcoming"¹ because the Arabs were vigorously opposed to any Jewish immigration.

At this point, Palestinian nationalism was not focused on gaining sovereignty but rather emphasized the expulsion of the British and the prevention of the creation of a Jewish state. The White Paper came on the heels of the Arab Revolt of 1936-9, during which Nuri Pasha of Iraq mediated a truce between Haj Amin and the British, though this lasted only until the Peel Report was published in 1937 recommending the partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs. The Arabs rejected the Peel plan and escalated their revolt, leading the British to ban the Arab Higher Committee and forcing its leader, Haj Amin, to flee to Lebanon, where the ruling French tolerated his continued fight against the British in Palestine. When World War II started, the Mufti was asked to leave Lebanon and he first went to Iraq and then Turkey and, ultimately, Germany, where he lived until the end of the war.

The Mufti's absence from Palestine created a power vacuum, though Haj Amin succeeded in exercising a degree of influence, largely through intimidation, even from exile. The politically active Palestinians had been then divided into two camps: the hardliners, who backed Haj Amin, and the more conciliatory members of the clan, led by Raghib Nashashibi, the patriarch of the rival family to the Husseinis in Jerusalem. During the Arab Rebellion, particularly in the second phase that generated the Peel Commission and its Report, scores of the Nashashibis were assassinated by Husseinis, creating widespread animosity between the two clans. The assassinations, guided by the Mufti from his exile in Lebanon as part of his struggle against the British and the Jews, were calculated to eliminate Palestinians suspected of collaborating with either of these perceived enemies.²

The recalcitrant attitude of the Mufti, as the head of the Palestinian national movement, eventually brought catastrophe upon the Palestinians who - backed by other Arabs and the Muslim Brotherhood - rejected the November 1947 UN Partition Plan for Palestine, confident that the combined power and opposition of the Arab world would prevent the establishment of a Jewish state.

The Arab states, however, had a different agenda than the Palestinian nationalists. Arab leaders shared the interest of driving the Jews into the sea, but they had little desire to actually see Palestine become a Palestinian state; rather, they hoped to divide it amongst themselves. The Jews' victory in the ensuing war of 1948 spoiled the designs of both the Palestinians and the Arab leaders.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled Palestine – a handful were expelled – before and after the war, and these resulting refugees spread across the region. Most Palestinians found themselves under either Egyptian rule in the Gaza Strip or under Jordanian rule in the West Bank. Despite being confined by the Arab leaders in those countries to refugee camps, the Palestinians burning nationalistic fervor found itself subsumed under the respective nationalism of their Arab occupiers. On the other side,

roughly 150,000 Palestinians remained in their homes and were offered citizenship in the new state of Israel.

After the dust of the 1948-9 War settled, the Palestinians made an attempt to revive their nationalism, however none of the Arab leaders were interested in seeing a new militant nationalism emerge in their midst that might threaten their regimes. For the next 19 years, the Palestinian nationalists dreamed of returning to Palestine but never made any demands for the creation of a state in either Gaza or the West Bank. This would not become a goal until those areas came under Israel's control following the Six-Day War of 1967.

Meanwhile, it was not until 1960 that another scion of the Hussein family, a Palestinian refugee who studied engineering in Cairo, Yasser Arafat, became so disgusted by the inter-Arab manipulation of the Palestinians that he established *Fatah*, which is an Arabic acronym for "Movement for the Liberation of Palestine." *Fatah* also had a historical-religious meaning of its own, signifying the occupation of lands during the holy wars that Islam had been waging against the world since its inception. Arafat later united *Fatah* with other Palestinian splinter groups under the umbrella of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). Supposedly to be ruled democratically by a Palestinian National Council (PNC) in which all factions of Palestinian nationalism were represented, the nascent PLO adopted a constitution, dubbed the National Palestinian Charter, in 1964 [later amended in 1968].

Arafat made the PLO increasingly independent from the Arab League which had originally created it and began to organize terror attacks against Israeli targets. The organization, however, remained small and fractured between its more pragmatic groups, such as *Fatah*, and the ideological factions, inspired and supported by the Communists such as the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). Arafat recognized that the PLO was too weak to seriously threaten Israel, which had proved its military prowess in 1948 and again in 1956 when it drove Egyptian troops from the Sinai. The Palestinians, therefore, hoped that the combined might of the Arab world, led by the charismatic pan-Arabist Gamal Abdel Nasser, might yet succeed in driving the Jews into the sea and restoring Palestine to the Palestinians.

The Palestinians were disappointed, however, when Israel overwhelmed the Arab forces arrayed against it in 1967, capturing more territory and creating a second exodus of Palestinian refugees. Israel hoped the Arabs would now see the folly of their efforts to drive the Jews into the sea and expected the Arabs would now be interested in peace. A few months later, however, the Arab leaders crushed this hope at a summit in Khartoum, declaring there would be "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with Israel."

Arafat and his PLO then created a new focus for Palestinian nationalism: "liberation" from the "occupying Israelis." To draw attention to their cause, the PLO mounted a terror campaign against targets inside and outside Israel, including spectacular hijackings of airplanes that publicized their plight and demonstrated to the world that there would be a price to pay if Palestinian grievances were ignored. Slowly, Palestinian demands for "justice" gained more support. As Arafat spoke less about the liberation of Palestine - that is, the destruction of Israel - and more about the liberation of "occupied territory," the international community began to accept the PLO as the legitimate spokesman for the Palestinian people and a respectable movement of national liberation. This spread of recognition for the PLO in the world became the major achievement of Palestinian nationalism.

The United States' recognition of the PLO in 1988 created a hopeful turning point in the peace process when the PLO promised to accept UN Resolution 242, recognize Israel and renounce terrorism. This promise was made even as a violent uprising (*intifada*) that began in 1987 was escalating. The *intifada* eventually died down largely as a result of the world's focus on Iraq and the 1991 Gulf War, which put the Palestinian issue on the backburner and created tensions between the United States and the Palestinians because of Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein.

Arafat's willingness to meet the American conditions for recognition ultimately satisfied the Israelis and, following secret contacts in Oslo in 1993, Israel and the PLO openly negotiated terms for ending their conflict. The terms of the Oslo Accords gave the PLO leadership authority over most of Gaza and about 40 percent of the West Bank under a newly created Palestinian Authority (PA). The expectation was that over the next several years, all of the outstanding issues – principally borders, settlements, refugees and the status of Jerusalem -- would be resolved and a Palestinian state would be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip alongside Israel. The Oslo process, however, collapsed under the weight of renewed Palestinian terrorism combined with complaints that Israeli settlement construction in the territories (permitted under the accords) would preclude the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state.

By the end of the 1990's, Oslo was a failure and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak decided to try and skip the gradual process established through the Accords and reach a final settlement in one sitting during a summit in Washington, D.C. Despite offering Arafat the opportunity to create a state in 97 percent of the West Bank and 100 percent of Gaza while also offering compromises on the other final status issues, Arafat rejected the deal. A second *intifada* subsequently erupted and continued for five years, claiming more than 1,000 Israeli lives and several thousand Palestinians, either "martyred" committing acts of terror or in the course of Israeli counter terror operations.

While the PLO directed most of the terror from the West Bank, a growing source of resistance was emerging in the Gaza Strip led by the Islamist group Hamas. During the intifada both groups focused their energy on attacking Israel, but afterward, they became increasingly competitive with one another.

Islamic Antecedents in Palestinian Nationalism

Palestinians, like other Arabs and Muslims have been caught up in the periodically surging trend of fundamentalist Islam, though this is nothing new if one takes into consideration the antecedents of Palestinian nationalism where Islam had played a prominent role. In the 1920s, the Palestinian national movement was headed by a religious figure, the Great Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini, who played up in religious terms his opposition to both the British and the Zionists. In the 1930s, Izz a-Din al-Qassam, a Syrian cleric who settled in Haifa, undertook extensive religious and political activities in northern Palestine that soon lent prominence to his leadership. He then founded a militant group, *al-kaff al-aswad* (the Black Hand) as an instrument of armed struggle against the British and the Jews in contended Palestine. He called openly for Jihad against both, until the British killed him in battle in Ya'bed (northern Samaria) in 1935.

During the Palestinian Revolt of 1936-9, the Muslim Brotherhood based in Egypt established a number of lodges in Palestine that later grew into a full-fledged network. The Muslim Brethren in Egypt and Palestine developed a two-pronged line of activism against the British occupation and the perceived Zionist menace. The 1948-9 war of the Arabs against fledgling Israel split the Palestinian Arab population into five different slices. A majority fled east, either moving across the Jordan River to Transjordan or settling in the Jordan-dominated West Bank. A large group also concentrated in the Egypt-dominated Gaza Strip. A minority, about 150,000 Palestinians, remained within the state of Israel and became known as the Arabs of Israel. Some moved to neighboring Arab countries where they were confined to refugee camps, while others still traveled to Western countries and labor-hungry Arab countries, like the Gulf Emirates, to seek education, jobs and good fortune.

Israel's takeover of the West Bank and Gaza during the 1967 War brought the entire Palestinian population west of the Jordan River under Israeli authority. Israel allowed the Palestinians leeway in their activities as long as they operated within the confines of Israeli law and refrained from terrorism. However, even though the standard of living, the rate and quality of employment, life expectancy and technological advance were greatly boosted by the Israeli presence, the nationalistic anti-Israeli sentiment kept rising among the Palestinians. It reached a climax in the 1980s when Israel permitted free local elections and pro-PLO mayors were elected in towns throughout the West Bank.

Meanwhile, the rapid modernization of Palestinian society caused by the intrusion of Israel into the traditional social structures generated the outrage of Muslim fundamentalists who came to view Israel as undermining their traditional societal fiber through the introduction of "westoxicated" values. This resentment sowed the seeds of an open conflict between the fundamentalists and the Israelis, in addition to the internal struggle against the PLO. While the Palestinian factions each fought to lead the "resistance to occupation," Israel had to confront the Islamic and "secular" tendencies in Palestinian nationalism.

The need for Israel to differentiate the threat posed by the two factions became acute with the emergence of Hamas³ during the first *intifada* (1987-92). The word "*Hamas*" means "zealous" in Arabic and is also an acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement." A militant group encompassing most of the existing Muslim associations, Hamas was dedicated to raise the banner of *Jihad* against what they perceived as the Israeli occupier.

In the contest to win the allegiance of the Palestinian people, Muslim radicals have not monopolized Islamic thinking and sloganeering. Mainstream Palestinian nationalism, like most local forms of Arab nationalism, has made use of Islamic symbols and vocabulary to characterize enemies, to imply modes of action against them, and to define the nature of the Palestinian community and its struggle, thus linking key religious and secular concepts.⁴ Terms like "*Jihad*," "*shahid*," and "*fidayeen*," and the emphasis on the centrality of Jerusalem all attest to the Islamic discourse that is ingrained in Palestinian nationalism. Add to that the symbolism of the usage of Islamic terms in Arafat's *nom de guerre* (Abu Ammar), the very meaning of *Fatah*, as explained above, and the names of his armed brigades: *al-Aqsa*, *Hittin*, *Ein Jalut*, *Qadisiyya* (all names of great Islamic battles), and you have a wide sampling of the depth and the extent of the Islamic hold over Palestinian nationalism.

In the 1980s, the Islamic bloc emerged as a powerful constituency in the West Bank and Gaza, boosted by three Islamic colleges in Jerusalem, Hebron and Gaza, and by professional associations of doctors, engineers, lawyers, students and others who soon showed their loyalty to the Hamas umbrella. But it was not until the *intifada* in late 1987 that the Muslim radicals united their ranks under the Hamas banner and began to pose a serious challenge to the established leadership of the PLO. Since that time, Hamas has competed with Fatah for the souls and the political allegiance of the Palestinian masses. The signal was sent, loud and clear, that against the national aspirations of the Palestinians and their ethnic-national-cultural claims, personified by the PLO and led by Arafat, Hamas posited a viable Muslim alternative. It also engraved its Muslim mark on Palestinian identity, and was led by another popular and charismatic Gazan figure -- Ahmed Yassin, the presumed author of the Hamas Charter. Hamas sought to replace "secular" Palestinian nationalism and counter the

PLO Covenant, by promulgating its own Islamic-based charter. To comprehend the width and depth of the ideological rift between the two brands of Palestinian nationalism, let us briefly summarize their platforms which constitute their respective identity cards.

The Secular Brand of Palestinian Nationalism

The PLO Charter defines the Palestinians as a people and a nation with its inherent culture, ethos, ethnic affiliation and historical specificity. The Palestinians are called upon to crystallize their dreams and aspirations by means of a continuous armed struggle against a specific enemy – Zionism. Thus, the whole concept of a nascent Palestinian nationalism was made to hinge upon a dialectical interaction with its sworn enemy. This battle to the finish, as reflected in the Charter, does not allow for compromise or negotiation. The goal is to destroy Israel and replace it with a Palestinian state.

We may summarize the nationalist message of the PLO thus:

1) Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinians, but at the same time Palestine is part of the greater Arab homeland, and the Palestinians are part of the larger Arab nation. This means that while the Palestinians express their attachment to the land of Palestine (*wataniyya*), and state their particularistic identity, they are also aware of their belonging to a larger ethnic whole (*Qawmiyya*), in terms of ethno-cultural descent, historical heritage and linguistic affiliation. The Covenant also states that the Palestinian identity is an innate, persistent characteristic that does not disappear, and it is transferred from father to son. The fact that the Palestinians have been dispersed as a result of the disasters that befell them does not detract from their nationhood or their national character. Moreover, Palestinian-hood is defined not only by the land ("those who lived in the land until 1947"), but also by ethnic descent (anyone born to a Palestinian father within Palestine or outside of it). Outside this ethnic definition, only Jews who were in Palestine "prior to the Zionist invasion"⁵ are considered Palestinians, presumably a tolerated minority. So, apart from this exception, Palestinian nationalism equates nationhood-peoplehood with Arab ethnic descent.

2) The outer circles of Palestinian nationalism are its Arab and Muslim identities. Palestinian nationalism declares itself to be part and parcel of Arab nationalism and insists the Arabs all face the same enemies -- Imperialism and Zionism – and, therefore, they should all be mobilized to push out the foreign threat. The Palestinians, however, being at the forefront of that battle, undertake to be the vanguard of all Arabs in that undertaking. Islamic identity is invoked in the context of Palestine as the Holy Land, hence the urgency to restore it to Islamic hands to safeguard freedom of worship there. Palestinian nationalism also maintains that the survival of Palestine and

the Palestinians hinges upon the destruction of the Zionist entity. Thus, unlike other nationalisms, the Palestinians seek not only to throw off the yoke of an occupier, but to eliminate it.

Islamic Nationalism

Prima facie, nationalism and Islam amount to a contradiction in terms: one is secular, the other religious; one is founded on particularism, the other claims universalism; one asserts this-worldly aspirations, the other promises the hereafter. Thus, while the PLO document had been deliberated, debated, argued, amended and repeatedly voted upon before it was adopted by the PNC, the Hamas Charter was written by some of its leaders, and only then promulgated to the public. Consequently, while the PLO Charter has been considered a man-made political document, albeit of constitutional import, which also provides for the instrument of its own amendment (Art. 33), the Hamas document creates the impression of reflecting universal, immutable and eternal truths that are not liable to change. The PLO Charter uses political language, though sometimes bombastic and flowery, but the Hamas Charter is wholly anchored in Islamic parlance. Not only are Islamic symbols and vocabulary often invoked, but most articles are backed by quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith. The juxtaposition of the Charter's clauses with these holy texts inextricably lends to the former the sanctity of the latter.

Most interesting and relevant, the PLO avoids direct attacks on Jews as such and purports to struggle against Zionism only. Hamas unabashedly launches anti-Semitic broadsides against the Jews, often citing such notorious texts as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. For Hamas, *Jihad* is justified against Zionists who have "usurped Palestine," as well as Jews around the world who threaten to undermine and dominate all societies. Hamas regards the liberation of Palestine as a holy and religious mission, incumbent upon all Muslims. Thus, while the PLO Covenant appeals to the Arab world for support, the Hamas appeal is directed to the Islamic world at large.

For Hamas, since the entire land of Palestine is *waqf* (Muslim holy endowment), accorded by Allah to all generations of Muslims, no one is allowed to negotiate it away. Hence, all negotiations are deemed a "loss of time," and any intercession by foreign powers in the Arab-Israeli dispute represents "imperialism's collusion with Zionism." While the PLO has envisaged institutions and civil processes to implement its platform, Hamas, leaning entirely on *Sharia* Law, seeks to establish an Islamic state in the entire expanse of Palestine, with its state institutions governed by the Holy Law of Islam.

The Confrontation between the two Nationalisms

Secular Palestinian nationalists feared an Islamic takeover; nevertheless, for years they publically dismissed the Islamists as insignificant. Still, they increasingly realized that modern and secular nationalism, based on the rejection of Israel was not enough to counter the appeal of Hamas. Against the flowery promises of the PLO to establish a Palestinian state through negotiations and cooperation with Israel - which the PLO leadership failed to deliver over the years - Hamas posited the alternative of *Jihad* and resistance. Frustration with the PLO's failure to deliver independence combined with anger over luxurious lifestyles of PLO leaders and widespread corruption in the PA increased the popularity of Hamas, whose leadership represented a contrast of humility and modesty. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and his cohorts presented an image of leaders who cared about the people's problems and tried to solve them. The conflicting images of the PLO and Hamas resulted in the victory of Hamas in the first democratic elections of the PA in 2006.

Redefining the Palestinian Narrative

A national ethos, which took shape only within recent memory, was created by nationalists who confronted the Hamas onslaught over the past few years and wished to lend some depth to Palestinian identity and history. Indeed, the Palestinians today rewrite their history so as to incorporate in their ancestral background the Canaanites and the Jebusites.⁶ They use the succession of calamities that befell them in 1948, 1967, 1970 and 1982⁷ to draw their ranks closer while cultivating, like the Jews of Israel, an almost mystical connection to the land. They also promote their particularistic history and culture and brandish national symbols (e.g., flag, headgear, anthem, slogans, elected institutions, stamps, literature and poetry, passports, police) to create the impression of being on the cusp of full-fledged independence, which will bring with it sovereignty, currency, armed forces, and all the other attributes of national existence.

Since Palestinians claim Jerusalem as their capital, they have engaged in a particular effort to deny the Jewish connection to the city by rewriting history and asserting that Jewish claims to the land are contrived.

Finally, they elevated the figure of Yasser Arafat, their national symbol for over a generation, almost to the level of a cult personality, much to the exclusion of other major personalities in the Palestinian pantheon of heroes.⁸

Most significantly, these elements appear in Palestinian writings and thinking, not only as the self-defining traits of Palestinian nationalism, but also as the requisites setting them apart from, and often pitting them against, the enemy – Israel, Zionism, the Jews -- because they are the ones who are perceived as posing a challenge to the Palestinians, and it is to them that the Palestinians feel compelled to respond. For

example, the Canaanite claim is clearly geared to legitimize the Palestinian title to the land that has been snatched from them, as they see it, by the Zionist Jews who built Israel, and who themselves base their claim on their line of descent from the biblical Israelites who had conquered the land from the Canaanites. Thus, if the Canaanites are neatly established as the forebears of Palestinian Arabs, then the Jewish experience in the ancient Holy Land, based on aggression and conquest in the first place, becomes a fleeting episode in history, and the Palestinians come full circle by justly (a "just peace" is one of their slogans) restoring possession of the land to its original legal owners. But then, the Canaanites were neither Arab, nor certainly Muslims. However, like President Sadat - who could strike the balance between his Pharaoh-ism and his Arabism and Islam⁹ - or Saddam Hussein - who claimed the ancient heritage of Mesopotamia's Hammurabi as his own but also incorporated his Iraqi, Arab and Muslim identities - so have Palestinian nationalists learned to juggle their identities with dexterity. It is also significant that the Canaanite antecedent is particularly popular among Palestinian Christians who, aware of the massive doses of Islam currently injected into Palestinian nationalism, would hark back to a non-Islamic past in which they can find solace against the pressures of revivalist Islam around them. Much like the Prophet of Islam in his time, who lent depth to the history of Islam by claiming an Abrahamic root to it, the Palestinians today assert, as part of their nationalism, that their ancestry was in fact Canaanite, and that Jesus Christ was also Palestinian.

Both Hamas and the PLO tacitly agree, however, to their joint, though not necessarily coordinated, campaign to disinherit the Jews from their patrimony. The religious Muslims insist that the entire land of Palestine is *waqf*, as part of the earliest *Fatah* conquests by Muslims, which lend to it permanence, sanctioned by Allah as a Muslim inheritance for all generations to come. Therefore, they accuse the Jews as liars and usurpers who have manufactured a false history to take over Muslim holy lands. The PLO makes similar accusations against Israel and refuse to share the holy sites with Israel on the grounds that the ancient inhabitants of the land were Palestinians. Moreover, to justify the annihilation of Israel, their peace negotiations with Israel notwithstanding, in the last decade the PLO launched a campaign of iconizing and martyring infamous terrorists who mass-murdered thousands of Israeli civilians in restaurants, hotels, buses and other public places. Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas), or his representatives, have repeatedly attended events glorifying these heroes and have named buildings, sporting events and public installations after "martyrs" while encouraging Palestinian youth to follow their examples. This message is amplified in children's textbooks, in the PA-sponsored media, in public addresses of the leaders and in sermons in mosques, all of which creates, on the Israeli side, a sense that the Palestinians have no interest in coexistence and that the next generation will be even less likely to see peace.

One condition of Israel's continued participation in negotiations with the PLO following Oslo was that the covenant be revised and the offensive clauses calling for Israel's destruction be removed. President Bill Clinton went to Gaza in December 1998 to observe a vote amending the charter. Critics later charged that the PLO did not go through the required process for making amendments and that the clauses remained in effect; however, Clinton and the Israeli government accepted the process and ceased to make the charter an issue.

While the call for Israel's destruction may have been removed, the Palestinians were never asked to take the next step toward reconciliation - namely, to recognize Israel as a Jewish state or accept Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. Israel's recognition of Palestinian national rights and of the PLO as their national representative, therefore, remains one-sided.

Though the Palestinians viewed the Oslo process as deficient in satisfying Palestinian ambitions, the PLO shelved the "armed struggle" as a tool of policy and generated a fruitful collaboration between Palestinians and Israelis on security matters. Furthermore, under the guidance of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, a pragmatic, Western-educated economist, the West Bank political leadership began to focus more on domestic development and state building and less on confrontation with Israel. This helped change the image of the Palestinian leadership in the West, from terrorists to statesmen and partners for peace. This also helped the Palestinians raise billions of dollars in international aid, though many countries, particularly the Arab Gulf states have often failed to fulfill their financial pledges and the Palestinian Authority has faced repeated financial crises which have only been exacerbated by allegations of corruption in the PA (for example, a 2003 report by the International Monetary Fund, for example, revealed that Yasser Arafat diverted approximately \$900 million from the PA Finance Ministry into secret accounts that he alone controlled¹⁰).

The PLO leadership, in their desperate attempt to retain the dwindling loyalty of the masses, set on a course of delegitimizing its partner to the Oslo Accords, and in this national effort it hardly risks any criticism by its Hamas rivals at home. As Marcus and Crook have shown¹¹, one of the primary objectives of the PA (and certainly of Hamas) is to delegitimize Israel to facilitate its subversion, then destruction and takeover. This campaign encompasses denial of the right of existence of a Jewish state, hate messages and false accusations that Israel massacres innocent Palestinians, especially children, and blood libels.

Examples abound. For one, the history of the Middle East has been totally revised and re-written with a view to erasing all records of Jewish presence in the Land of Palestine/Israel, archaeological sites and world-recognized authoritative histories notwithstanding. The Authority probably believes that by delegitimizing Israel under

academic trappings, it can achieve a respectable and irrefutable denial of the historical link between the Jews and Israel. So, they first create the infrastructure of the evil Jews who pitilessly "massacre Palestinians" and "drink their blood" for breakfast, and then follow that up with the creation of fictional narratives to prove that Judaism is racism. These traits are presented as the unchangeable character of the Jews for the "educational" programs of the Palestinian Authority, both in textbooks and in the media.

When it became too much for even manufacturers of history to strip the Jews completely from their history, due to the compelling evidence to the contrary, Palestinian academics simply adopted the strategy of borrowing the ancient identity of Hebrews as their own, claiming that ancient tribes were both Arab and Muslims (more than two millennia before there was Islam), thus refuting today's Jewish claim to the land. One of those "historians" who was handpicked by Arafat as his adviser and chief librarian, Jirar al-Qidwa, has been the champion of this "replacement theology," which he propagates via PA TV broadcasts. He unabashedly converted biblical Jews into Arabs, two millennia before Arabs from Arabia invaded Palestine and subjugated it. He wrote:

Regarding the Israelites, they were Arab tribes and among the purest... And believe me, by Allah's name, that my blood has more of the Israelites' blood and of the blood of ancient Hebrews than has the blood of Netanyahu and Sharon.¹²

The Post Oslo Political Praxis

Today's divided house among the Palestinians impels us to tackle the two seemingly contradictory concepts of the secular nationalism of *Fatah* and the Islamic nationalism of Hamas. The general trend that has emerged from the "Arab Spring" toward accepting Islamists as political leaders only complicates the issue further and prevents any definite, iron-clad conclusions from emerging. For today, a competition is raging, covert and overt, between the two worldviews, aimed at converting public opinion to their respective causes and forcing a decision between applying the sacral-dogmatic-scriptural in contemporary life or making the temporal-pragmatic-legal prevail. The nationalist aspect would normally base its appeal on the secular and particularistic notion, while "religion" would claim a more universalistic approach derived from some divine authority. Hence the dichotomy between the secular-nationalistic political culture, which would tend to adopt rational if often mythical or manufactured measures, some based on compromise and negotiation to achieve its goals, versus the religious-dogmatic imperatives of self-righteousness and single-mindedness, which often lead to fanatical and unbending conduct.

Implications for Peace

Israel's position regarding a settlement with the Palestinians is determined by a democratically elected government, which would negotiate, sign and enforce any agreement. It is impossible, however, to identify the "Palestinian position" because no single entity represents the Palestinian people. It is a divided house, with two competing ideologies, two kinds of nationalism and two rival authorities and political entities. Therefore, Palestinian delegations negotiating with Israel reflect the views of only one part of the Palestinian people and Israel has no assurance that any agreement would be enforceable on those from other factions.

The PLO runs the Palestinian Authority, which is supposed to govern the Palestinian-controlled areas of the West Bank along with the Gaza Strip. Following a coup in 2007, however, Gaza has been ruled by Hamas. The PLO has signed agreements with Israel and expressed a willingness to reach a settlement that would create a Palestinian state beside Israel. Hamas, however, is guided by Islam and opposes any negotiations with Israel and has called for its destruction. In an effort to unify the Palestinian leadership and create a single governing authority, third parties have attempted to mediate a reconciliation of the two factions, but as of May 2013 they have been unsuccessful because neither side wants to cede power to the other and because of the difficulty in bridging the rivals' divergent philosophies.

Israel views any reconciliation of the two parties as an indication that the Palestinians are no longer interested in negotiating a peace agreement because Hamas has made clear it has no interest in coexistence with Israel. The international community has joined Israel in insisting that Hamas cannot be part of negotiations unless it accepts the Oslo agreements, recognizes Israel's right to exist and ceases terror. The leaders of Hamas continue to insist that they will not meet these conditions and, therefore, Israel has made clear it will not work with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas.

The Oslo Accords, signed between Israel and the leadership of the PLO in 1993, shifted the debate between the PLO and Fatah from abstract ideology to practical politics. Though both groups called for the end of Israeli "occupation" – the signature of those agreements indicated that the PLO was prepared to eschew violence, and to negotiate with the Israelis to achieve their goal. Hamas, meanwhile, remained committed to a holy war to drive the Jews out of Islamic territory, that is, Palestine. The divide between the compromising position of the PLO and uncompromising views of Hamas with regard to peace talks with Israel has aggravated the already tense rivalry between them.

The PLO has agreed to negotiate on the basis of a two-state solution that would lead to the creation of a Palestinian state beside Israel. Hamas, however, maintained that the entire Land of Palestine must be cleansed from the viciousness and impurity of the "occupiers," and that only a single state under Islamic rule allows for the possibility

that other faiths can coexist. Hamas insists that Muslims are obligated, following the model of the Prophet, to fight and kill Jews wherever they can be found, or at least ban them from Islamic land if they refuse to submit to its beneficial hegemony. Given this belief, how could Hamas accept reconciliation with the Zionist entity?

Neither the PA nor Hamas have proved to the other party, or the Palestinian public, that their formula for salvation is more successful. The PLO is accused of submitting to the Americans and the Israelis despite its failure to get any closer to Palestinian statehood. Nevertheless, by eschewing terror and focusing on state-building, the West Bank has enjoyed relative tranquility and economic growth. Hamas, on the other hand, has maintained a belligerent posture and been no more successful in achieving its aims. By eschewing international conditions for recognition as a party to negotiations, it has remained largely isolated and the people of Gaza have suffered. While the PA realizes its weaknesses, compared to the image of resistance projected by Hamas, it cannot afford to embrace Hamas too warmly for fear of losing Western support to which it owes its survival. But Hamas, which is funded by Iran and other Muslim quarters, believes it has little to lose from its brazen belligerence, and much to gain from its victimization in the Western world. The ascendance of Islamist governments, especially in Egypt, has given Hamas a boost and created the possibility for getting new economic and military support through Egypt. Hamas continues to receive support from Iran and Turkey, since the 2008-9 war with Israel.

Islamists sometimes speak the same language as nationalists, using the same words with different meanings. Take, for example, this passage from the Hamas Charter:

Hamas is a humane movement, bent on human rights, and is committed to the tolerance inherent in Islam, as regards attitudes to other religions. It is only hostile to those hostile to it or stand in its way in order to disturb its moves or to frustrate its efforts... Under the shadow of Islam, it is possible for the three religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism, to coexist in safety and security. Safety and security can only prevail under the shadow of Islam... The members of other religions must desist from struggling against Islam over sovereignty in this region. For if they were to gain the upper hand, then fighting, torture, and uprooting would follow (Art.31 of the Charter).

The words of humanity and tolerance are there, but what do they mean? Are freedom and tolerance valid when attached to the provision of "under the shadow of Islam?" Similarly, Palestinian PLO leaders have been committed to promoting democracy, freedom, civil rights and the like, but as soon as their Chief is attacked, the security forces move in and arrest the critics. Fearing that he would lose power in any election, Abbas has simply refused to schedule elections since Hamas won them in 2006 and

therefore he has no legal mandate to govern the PA. Nevertheless, he continues to be recognized by the international community as a legitimate leader.

The Palestinians have been preparing a constitution in expectation of achieving independence. This does not necessarily mean, however, that a future Palestinian state will be a democracy. Any political entity can have a "constitution," like the one embraced by Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein, couched in lofty terms and encapsulating the most humane and generous terms, but the question is whether it is applied in practice. For example, do independent courts exist to protect and defend it? Will it provide for the civil rights and freedoms Americans take for granted? Similarly, elections do not ensure democracy. In Iran, for example, people elected the Islamic regime over the authoritarian one provided by the Shah and his underlings. But who can be sure that the majority of the people there do not now regret their choice and would rather reverse course if they could? In practically all Islamic countries, the choice will always be between authoritarianism and Islam. This has happened in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia during the Arab Spring and will likely also play out in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and perhaps Palestine where Islamist political parties have dominated the public square. The last Palestinian election in 2006 saw Hamas win the vote. That election was a direct result of President George W. Bush's push for democratic reforms in the PA, but what emerged was an autocratic regime that has continued to deny its people fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly, and practically scuttled the Oslo peace process.

The peace process is crucial because it consists of on and off negotiations in which the parties have to overcome the gap between what they regard as negotiable in a give-and-take horse-trading, and what they might deem as non-negotiable under any circumstances. Negotiable issues usually regard assets and other measurable quantities, the renunciation of which would mean material, real estate or financial loss. When a party to the negotiations senses that the sustained loss can be compensated by other assets or, that by giving up some, one gets some other, one may be inclined to negotiate and come to some compromise, because the disagreement is quantifiable, measurable and therefore compromise-able. When, on the other hand, the parties advance religious- or value-related arguments, the debate goes one notch up. The value attached by one party to one element or another, like a holy place, a vital interest of *sine qua non* character, or a matter of national prestige and standing, is immeasurable and subjectively evaluated. It might be hugely significant for one party but totally insignificant to the other, or of equal value to both parties, or simply because it is so important for one, as to make the other covet it too. The contested value may be moral, cultural, or religious, and as such it becomes utterly un-negotiable, and this is the moment we enter the domain of qualitative debate. For

example, while it is possible to negotiate a territorial swap between Israelis and Palestinians, none of the parties is prepared to relinquish the Temple Mount in Jerusalem totally to the other at the price of excluding itself from it.

In any process of conflict management, and more so of conflict resolution, the quantitative issues would tend to be resolved and agreed upon first, while the more qualitative ones would tend to be relegated to the end of the process. To reach the elusive "agreements" of Oslo I and II, Israel had to pay in quantitative terms: partial withdrawals from territories and partial independence to the Palestinians, euphemistically termed "redeployment," "self-rule," "autonomy" and "state-building." Israel, having spent many of her trump cards on this quantitative stage of settlement, has very few arrows left in her quiver for the qualitative debates that will follow regarding Jerusalem, Palestinian statehood, borders, settlements, and refugees. Israel already disbursed many of its concessions before the negotiations even started, thus making any further retreats increasingly difficult. The built-in contradiction between the Palestinian resolution to get to their key qualitative issues, such as the return of Palestinian refugees to Israeli territory, or exclusive control of Temple Mount, and the equally rigid determination of the Israelis to foil those attempts, has stonewalled the process ever since. Thus, while the PA leadership can survive only as long as it can deliver to its public Israeli concessions, it will become a lame duck when Israel draws the line and refuses to retreat any further. That is not only the reason for the impasse in the negotiations, but if an effort is made to force the issues on which both sides cannot yield, the explosion and breakdown of the process will prove inevitable, and will vindicate those who had held no hopes for it *a-priori*. The PLO demand to freeze Israeli settlement construction as a prerequisite to renew the negotiations, is really only a pretext to avoid them. For in all previous negotiations since Oslo, the talks and discussions were never ceased due to Israeli settlements, and in 2000, when Prime Minister Barak offered a 97% withdrawal from the West Bank in return for the Palestinian recognition of the finality of the conflict, his plea was rejected out of hand in Camp David, proving that for the Palestinians land, territories and settlements were less important than bringing the conflict to its final point.

In the wake of the failure of the PA to deliver a state, Hamas will become a more attractive alternative. The PLO's will to negotiate and compromise did not end Israel's control over Palestinian lives. Hamas can then make the case that it is time to adopt a policy driven by the infallible and history-tested tenets of Islam, which preclude any negotiation or compromise over the *waqf* land that had been accorded by Allah to all generations of Muslims. The Islamists will call for a return to the violent struggle to liberate Palestine in which it is more worthy to die as martyrs in *Jihad* resisting the "occupiers", than submit to the humiliation of accepting the usurpation of Muslim lands by the despicable enemies of Allah and Islam.

The next phase of Palestinian nationalism, therefore, remains uncertain. If negotiations with Israel succeed, and result in the creation of a Palestinian state, the more secular nationalists may continue to dominate Palestinian society. If negotiations fail, or fail to resume, the Islamists may reshape Palestinian society in their image, as they have already begun to do in Gaza. Given their view that their mandate is divinely inspired, the Islamists will continue to seek to influence the future of the Palestinians regardless of the outcome of the peace process.

Sources:

¹ Walid Khalidi, *Journal of Palestinian Studies* Vol. XXXV, No1, Autumn 2005, pp. 60-79.

² Ibid. p.70-1

³ Hamas is the acronym of *Harakat Muqawama Islamiyya* (The Islamic Resistance Movement), which became the umbrella organization created overnight at the outbreak of the Intifada in 1987, to bring together of the local Muslim associations of years past.

⁴ See Sylvia Haim, *Arab Nationalism*, UC Press, Berkeley, 1962; N. Johnson, *Islam and Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism*, Kegan Paul, London, 1982; and Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam", *Commentary*, (Winter, 1976).

⁵ Arab literature marks the beginning of Zionist invasion as the year of the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

⁶ In addition to this prevailing theme in recent Palestinian publications, even such respected scholars as Sari Nuseibeh hark back to this myth as if it were a fact of history. See his jointly authored book with Mark Heller, *No Trumpets, No Drums*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1993, p. 32.

⁷ The 1948 War, which generated Israel's independence and the problem of Palestinian refugees, is often termed *al-Nakba* (the Disaster), and so is the defeat of all Arabs by Israel in 1967, which ended in Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In 1970 the PLO was forced out of Jordan following Black September, and in 1982 the PLO was forced by Israel out of Lebanon.

⁸ Previously prominent names in the Palestinian national struggle, such as Abu Iyyad and Abu Jihad, or latter day aides Abu Mazen and Abu 'Ala', or opponents such as Hamas leaders or Faruq Qaddumi, were seldom mentioned in the Palestinian hierarchy of heroes. Only more recent heroes who died dramatically, like Abu Ayyash (the Engineer), or did not otherwise pose an immediate threat to Arafat, such as ailing Ahmed Yassin (until his death), were mentioned. After Arafat, the Palestinian leadership split between the PLO and the Hamas, and the unifying figure of Arafat has receded into historical background.

⁹ See R. Israeli, "Sadat Between Arabism and Africanism", *Middle East Review*, 2, Spring 1979, pp. 39-48. See also from the same author, *Man of Defiance: a Political Biography of Anwar Sadat*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1985.

¹⁰ "Press Briefing on West Bank & Gaza, IMF Middle East Dept," IMF, (September 20, 2003).

¹¹ Itamar Marcus and Barbara Crook, "Anti-Semitism among Palestinian Authority Academics", in *Post-Holocaust and anti-Semitism*, No 69, 1 June, 2008, published by the Jerusalem Center of Public Affairs, 2008.

¹² PA TV, June 5, 1997 (incidentally, or perhaps not, also the 30th anniversary of the 1967 Six-Day War, which unwittingly triggered the revival of Palestinian nationalism. Cited by Marcus and Cook, op.cit. p 2.