

SURVEY OF ARAB AFFAIRS

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THE IMPACT OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Rafi Israeli

The Islamization of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Part and parcel of the rising profile of Islam in the Middle East and in the world has been Islamization of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Islamization means injecting massive doses of Islamic symbols, ideas and values into an already difficult situation, something which has been increasing during the past decade and a half.

The process of Islamization adds a qualitative nature to the conflict. When one looks at conflicts between other nations throughout history, when conflicts are political or are about territory or some other kind of asset that can be touched or measured, then the conflict is for the most part a quantitative one. The parties can sit

around the table, give and take, negotiate, concede, come to a compromise and settle matters. However, to introduce Islam is to introduce a qualitative, ideological angle which makes the conflict much more difficult to settle. Ideology that derives from a creed cannot be negotiated away.

For example, if one side is relying on certain passages of the Koran or some other holy writings in Islam, no one can agree to vote that verse out of the Koran. No parliament in the world can change that verse. Therefore the choice is whether to cite it or not. But when they do, as they are doing today in most of the Islamic world, then it makes their stance in the conflict much more difficult to change. This is the reason why the

Islamization of the conflict makes it more difficult to settle.

The Iranian Revolutionary Model

The success of the Islamic fundamentalist revolution in Iran has had a definite spillover effect on the Arab-Israeli conflict, providing a model which many Palestinians have been striving to emulate. In doing so, many have emphasized Islam. As a result, more and more Islamic elements have been injected into the conflict, making an already difficult problem even harder to solve.

In the case of Iran, the leader of the revolution was not even present when it happened. One cannot imagine the Russian revolution without Lenin on the scene, or the Chinese revolution without Mao present. Yet Khomeni was living in the suburbs of Paris while his followers led the revolution. Only when it succeeded was he invited in as the hero. He recorded his message on cassettes which were listened to very carefully by the masses. Two million people went into the streets of Teheran, defying the armies of the Shah. The same kinds of people were seen in Hama, Syria, fighting against the Baath regime, and are even found in Egypt. They do not need leadership on the scene or even a call from the outside. The seeds of revolution are right there in their religion.

Earlier this year some young Palestinians were caught in Nablus distributing leaflets with pictures of Khomeni. Khomeni is not even an Arab. On the contrary, the Arabs are at odds with the Iranians. And he is a Shi'ite and the Palestinians are Sunni. Nevertheless for them he has become a symbol of someone who after 300 years of imperialist exploitation, conquest, and trampling upon the Moslem state and the Moslem people, finally came forth as a leader, someone who stood up to the Americans, who took hostages with impunity. So Khomeni has become a hero and the caption under his picture on the leaflet read: "If it succeeds there, then why not here [in the terri-

tories]?" That message has a tremendous echo in the hearts and minds of the masses, even within the boundaries of pre-1967 Israel. In Um-el-Fahm, Kfar Kassim and other areas, there is a rising phenomenon of that sort. It has a different nuance than in the administered territories, but it is there and we should not pretend that it does not exist.

What Do the Arabs Really Think?

When researching the image of Israel in the Arab media, this author studied a cross section of the Arabic press from Morocco to Iraq to see what they were saying about Israel after the peace treaty with Egypt. The findings are rather unsettling.

First, they say that viewed in Islamic terms, the Jews are not a nation. If they are not a nation, they do not deserve a state. In order to support that idea they offer citations from the Koran and other holy writings in order to claim that since Judaism is only a faith, the Jews are condemned to remain dispersed among the various nations. An echo of this view can be found in the Palestinian Charter which says in no uncertain terms that Jews are only followers of a creed, whereas the Palestinians are a nation and therefore deserve a state in Palestine.

They say that exactly as there are American Jews and German Jews and French Jews, there are Arab Jews too. For Israelis this is a contradiction in terms, but for them it makes perfect sense. In this context, we can better comprehend the invitation that was heard a few years ago from the heads of some Arab states -- the king of Morocco, the president of Iraq, the president of Egypt -- to the Jews originating from those countries, inviting them to return.

Every Friday morning at 11 o'clock, one can hear live radio broadcasts from the mosques of the surrounding Arab capitals, including the sermons delivered by the imam. Usually those sermons are delivered in the presence of the heads of state. The announcer will report, "King

Hussein just walked in and he is among the participants." So the sermon being broadcast is not by some obscure imam speaking in private. It is usually sanctioned by the state or by the head of state.

What the imams are actually saying is almost indescribable. They heap vicious libel and scorn not on Zionists or Israelis, but on Jews, resorting to those quotations from the Koran about the struggle between the Prophet and the Jews. They do not consider this an historical event that happened 1300 years ago and therefore is of no relevance today. They are continuing to manipulate this story as a very powerful vehicle to carry a political message. Anyone who understands Arabic can tune in and listen for himself or herself. It is a very useful exercise, even if it is a depressing one.

Another grievance that the Moslems advance is that Jews not only do not deserve a state, but that they have also illicitly drawn to them in Israel the Jews who used to live happily and on equal terms under the wings of Islam. But if this were so, then why did the Jews leave the Arab countries once the State of Israel was established? Why did they not choose to remain in the Islamic paradise? And if they left, then why did they go to the State of Israel, the arch-enemy of Islam? Therefore, only the dissolution of the State of Israel will remove that embarrassment for them.

Moslems are also offended by the fact that the Jews dared to fight against the elected nation of Allah. What is worse, they even dared to win and repeatedly so, despite the fact that the Arabs vastly outnumbered them. This, they say, is a deviation of history from its original channel. It was Islam that was created in a state of conquest, of expansion, of victory, and therefore, they say, it does not stand to reason that this miserable people who are a minority should fight against them and win. To return things to their original channel, it is necessary to somehow dissolve this troublemaker which is Israel.

The Moslems also charge that the Israelis have conquered part of the patrimony of Islam, because the land is holy to them too, but in a different way. Since it was conquered in the seventh century by the Moslems, it has indeed been almost uninterruptedly under the domination of Islam, though not always under Arabs. It was conquered by Arabs but then came the Seljuks, Mameluks, and Ottomans who were all Moslems. That means that the land has been ordained by Allah to be part of the patrimony of Islam and that makes it holy. To give up the land, especially if it is torn away by this vile people, the Jews, is something staggering to the mind from the Islamic point of view. Therefore it is necessary to do everything possible to recover it.

They say that in the past 1300 years there was only one exception to continued Islamic dominion -- the Crusader state. In 1099 the Kingdom of Jerusalem was established by a foreign ideology, Christianity, coming from Europe, which took over by force. It established agricultural settlements and military ramparts, but eventually the Arabs united under Saladin, the great Moslem (who was not an Arab, he was a Kurd who united Syria and Egypt), and then the Moslems literally squeezed the Crusaders from Palestine. It took close to 200 years, but they believe that history is on their side.

The Jews, the Zionists, are exactly the same thing -- an ideology which came to this part of the world from Europe, took it by force, established agriculture and military ramparts. So when the Arabs unite, of course they will do exactly as Saladin did. They find the similarity exact. One of the greatest champions of this analogy, before he came to Jerusalem, was President Sadat. He repeated it endlessly in his speeches, writings and interviews.

In the Koran there are many passages favorable toward the Jews. It is true that the Prophet said they are the People of the Book and that they received the promised land from God. But these are only half-truths because after the Prophet broke

with the Jews he had other revelations that are very contemptuous of the Jews and those by far predominate in the Koran. Significantly, never in the last 100 years has one of those favorable passages been used by any Moslem leader, be it religious or political, unless to justify their political views in the West. Islam has also developed a theological way to settle such apparent contradictions in the Koran. Moslem theologians have developed a law of abrogation which says that all the later revelations repeal the earlier ones whenever there is a contradiction. Since it is the earlier ones that are favorable toward the Jews, they are theologically abrogated by the later ones.

The Importance of Jerusalem

A final grievance of major importance is the question of Jerusalem. The leaders of Israel as well as those in the Western world are vastly underestimating the importance of Jerusalem from the Islamic point of view. Everyone tends to discount this problem, believing it can be deferred and then settled somehow at the end of negotiations. The problem is that there is no Arab or Moslem leader who would be prepared to give up Jerusalem. For the Moslems, Jerusalem is of major significance on the symbolic level because according to their own tradition it is connected with the personal biography of the Prophet Mohammad. According to Islamic history, the Prophet Mohammad made a mysterious nighttime journey from Mecca, his native city, to Jerusalem on horseback. He tied his horse near the Wailing Wall and from there ascended to heaven. He saw the angels and then returned and rode his horse back to Mecca. That makes the Temple Mount a holy place for the Moslems.

We can ask why the Moslems need Jerusalem. Islam was born in Arabia. They have their own holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Islam is a religion by the Arabs, in Arabic, for the Arabs. Jerusalem had always been beyond the purview of the Prophet Mohammad. We know historically

that he could not have been there. Nevertheless we have to take it seriously because in order to gain credibility, especially at its beginning, Islam had to somehow send its founder to heaven or to impute to him some kind of divine contact. Judaic tradition has the events at Mount Sinai where Moses received the Tablets of the Law from the Lord. In Christianity, Jesus Christ became the "son of God." In Islam they also wanted to somehow send the Prophet Mohammad to God to establish a divine connection. But in order to go to heaven he had to stop over in Jerusalem first, Jerusalem which was reputed to be a holy city, a city of the prophets. Therefore Jerusalem came to be incorporated into Islamic tradition. But while we may think about it as a legend, for the Moslems it is a fact of history. On the operational level, what counts is not what can be proven but rather what people believe. If people are prepared to fight and die for such things, then that is what counts.

The Jews can claim from here to eternity that they love Jerusalem more than the Moslems, but that is of no consequence to the Moslems. They will respond that they number half a billion, while the Jews are only 12 or 13 million. It is true that they have two other holy cities, but Jerusalem is holy for them too. They also claim that Islam should substitute for both Judaism and Christianity because it is the most updated divine message. Therefore there is no point in attempting to argue the matter in terms of history or archeology or proofs or evidence. The important thing is to realize how intense is their feeling.

Even the terrible war that went on between Iran and Iraq for more than seven years, longer than World War II, was rationalized in terms of the liberation of Jerusalem. None other than Khomeni, when sending his young people to the war front, stated that the road to Jerusalem goes via Baghdad. That is not only a geographical statement that Baghdad is indeed halfway between Teheran and

Jerusalem. It also means that once the Iranians remove Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, they are halfway to achieving the ultimate goal -- Jerusalem.

In March 1979, one month after Khomeini took over in Iran and more than three full years before the Israeli incursion into Lebanon, Iran announced that it was sending a contingent of volunteers to help the Lebanese fight the Zionists. Israel does not even have a common border with Iran and the Iranians are not only not Arabs, they are at odds with the Arabs; nevertheless they sent a contingent to fight the Zionists in order "to cleanse the Holy Land from the scum of the Jews."

Peace or Armistice with Egypt?

What are the long-term prospects for peace with Egypt? There are Israelis who come back from Cairo and say, "The Egyptians want peace, that is what my taxi driver told me." The taxi driver may be a very important source, but if one reads what the Egyptians write, the books they publish in Egypt including some that justify the blood libel as a scientific finding, and what they write in their newspapers day in and day out, one begins to wonder if Israel made peace only with Sadat and not with the entire Egyptian people.

They are continuing to talk with two voices. On the one hand there is the establishment which is interested in maintaining the peace. On the other hand there are the professionals, the intellectuals, writers and others who determine public opinion. For example, the Association of Arab Lawyers, with headquarters in Egypt, is perhaps the only organization in the Arab world which celebrates the day of the signing of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. How do they celebrate it? They burn the Israeli flag in one of the main streets in Cairo.

Under Islamic law, the world is divided into the patrimony of Islam and the rest of the world against which all Moslems must theoretically wage war until it is conquered. But Islam is also a very pragmatic faith. Almost invariably in the last

3-400 years, whenever a mufti was asked, "Should we go to war?," the answer was always, "Go to war only if you are not likely to lose and thereby to humiliate Islam even more." Islam has embraced this approach since its beginning, namely that if they are more or less assured that they are going to win, then they should go to war to add glory to Islam. For example, in less than 100 years the Islamic empire came to encompass a territory even larger than the Roman empire at the height of its expansion. However when they tried to conquer the Byzantines, they failed because the Byzantine empire was too strong. Therefore, according to certain patterns set by the Prophet, they agreed to a ten-year armistice with the Byzantines which would be renewed every ten years as long as they could not be overcome. In theory, everything can be justified in these terms. When Islam is not strong enough to fight, then it is in armistice.

When the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was signed, Sadat needed the sanction of some kind of religious authority in order to sell it to his public. Therefore the Sheikh of al-Azhar, the highest authority of established Islam, made a ruling that was published in the newspapers. He said it is good to make peace with Israel because "our Prophet Mohammad also made peace at Hudhaybiyya." No one in Israel paid any attention to the meaning of Hudhaybiyya.

What is the peace at Hudhaybiyya? In the first years of Islam, the Prophet Mohammad fought a war against the people of Mecca after he had moved to Medina. They were fighting at Hudhaybiyya, a small oasis halfway between the two, and he was about to lose the battle. So Mohammad signed a ten-year armistice with the people of Mecca. Two years later, when he was strong enough, he marched on Mecca and conquered it. What the Egyptian people understood from the reference of the Sheikh to Hudhaybiyya was that "We signed with the Jews because we could not win the war, but if in

some future time, in 2 years or 10 or 50, we sense that we have enough power, there is no problem." If and when the Egyptians feel they are strong enough, they will make their move, in conjunction with other Arabs or alone. There is no other way to understand the sanction of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty as similar to that of Hudhaybiyya.

These same ideas are currently circulating in the administered territories. One leaflet put out by the Islamic organization in Ramallah starts with quotations from the Koran and talks about "Fight them until death." We have become used to things like this. But it ends with the words: "The time of Khaybar has come." Every Moslem knows that Khaybar is a small oasis in the Arabian desert where all the Jews living there were massacred. So the time of Khaybar has come. We are living on a powder keg and what is happening in the territories today is only one indication of that. The first conclusion to draw from all this is to be strong, to be unbeatable, to be indestructible, and to be seen as such. The Moslem faith, being a pragmatic one, must come to the conclusion that by another war they will bring about another humiliation upon themselves.

In the territories recently there was a demonstration in Jenin. The people were shouting slogans and the Israeli TV correspondent either did not understand or did not tell the Israeli public what he heard. The people were not shouting for the liberation of Nablus or Ramallah, cities in the territories. They were shouting "With our soul and blood we shall rescue you, O Galilee." These are things that should be told to the public.

How to Maintain Peace with the Arabs

In order for Israel to maintain peace with the Arabs, our major consideration should be to work for security safeguards that will continue to carry the perception to the Arabs that we are strong and indestructible. That is the key.

The perception of strength hinges perhaps even more on the human factor than it does on the number of guns and planes. In preparing a biography of President Sadat, this writer learned that in the years preceding his peace initiative, Sadat had said that the Israeli troika in power in the mid-'70s -- at the time it was Rabin, Peres, and Allon -- showed evidence of a tremendous weakness in Israeli society. He said, "What kind of leadership is that, a troika? Can't they find a leader, one leader?" There was a perception of divisiveness, of everybody pulling in a different direction. He said, "With that kind of people I can never conclude peace." When Begin came to power, one of the first things that Sadat did was to fly to Bucharest to ask Ceausescu to size Begin up for him. Ceausescu's report was positive, Sadat felt that for the first time he had a partner, and the rest of the story is history. So the nature of the leadership in Israel is a very strong element in their view. Today in the Arab world they are writing about that same element of divisiveness, that Israel is falling apart, that there is no leadership, the perception of a weak Israel.

Only if the Arabs conceive of Israel as united and strong is there any chance that they will come to terms with us on an armistice that may last 500 years. In an age of ascendant Islamic fundamentalism, such an armistice is the most we can presently hope to achieve.

As long as the profile of Islam remains high, it will remain difficult to reach any political accommodation. Only when this wave of Islam recedes (and this will take a long time) and the conflict becomes quantitative rather than qualitative, can a true peace settlement with the Arab world become more likely.

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EGYPT VIEWS THE ARAB UPRISING

"Roundtable: The Palestinian Uprising: Its Historical Route, The Powers Behind It, Its Path and Future," Al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi (The Arab Future), (Cairo) May 1988: 6-42.

In 1982 Egypt recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv in protest against Israel's invasion of Lebanon in its war against the Palestinians. In 1987, when mass rioting erupted in the territories and for the first time local Palestinians suffered serious casualties, the Egyptian government made do with routine protests and its ambassador remained in Tel Aviv.

Some explanation as to why Egypt has kept a low political profile on the intifada may be found in the roundtable discussion by twelve experts on Palestinian affairs convened by two leading Egyptian research institutes -- the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies and the Al-Wahda Center, a pan-Arab think-tank.

The first paper, an historic account of the Palestinian conflict by Wahid Abd al-Majid, is a justification of Egypt's low profile. For al-Majid, the success of the intifada has relieved Egypt of its responsibility to the Palestinians. According to him, the Palestinians' worst woes befell them when the Arab states were most involved in the Palestinian question. The Palestinians fared little better when an indigenous Palestinian diaspora center took the helm, for that center too had to interact, by virtue of its geographic location, with the Arab states to the detriment of the Palestinian movement. Al-Majid was referring to the period in Palestinian history which ended with the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut.

When did the Palestinians succeed? In December 1987 when the local Palestinians finally took their fate into their own hands. Although al-Majid still sees a role for the diaspora Palestinians and even extols the growing cohesiveness between the Palestinians "outside" and "inside," he does not see any constructive role for the Arab states in the foreseeable future. The fact that the intifada broke out when Arab aid to the Palestinians was at its lowest level in years is one more proof of the sagacity of remaining uninvolved.

Why Egypt cannot get involved in the intifada even if it had wanted to is addressed indirectly by Aala Mustafa. Mustafa argues that the Muslim brotherhood was the main breeding ground for the germination of the latest wave of fundamentalism in the territories and remains the dominant Muslim fundamentalist partner to the PLO in the intifada. It is common knowledge that the Muslim Brotherhood, as opposed to the Islamic Jihad which is of Syrian origin, originated in Egypt and remains a political force of troublesome proportions to the Egyptian government to this day. It would be folly for Egypt to support an uprising which enhances the prestige of such an organization.

Mustafa stresses the problematic relationship between the PLO mainstream and this movement. The Muslim Brotherhood preaches social and religious change before political gains can or should be made. The relationship between the PLO and Islamic Jihad are on a sounder basis. The PLO mainstream feels that they can be useful allies in a protracted struggle and that their political Islamic symbols can be used to mobilize segments of the population who are not ideologically inclined and whose only basis of identification is Islamic.

There is one more reason why, based on this discussion, Egypt should remain aloof from the uprising. Egypt's major role as the only Arab state which has diplomatic relations with Israel would naturally be manifested in a peace process. Yet not one participant spoke of peace. In the discussion regarding the future of the uprising, many suggestions were made about how to protract and increase the intensity of the uprising. No one thought of suggesting how its successes could be translated into meaningful political gains in a peace process. This could hardly be expected since most of the proposals were concerned with extending the conflict to the "stolen" lands of 1948.

-- Hillel Frisch

THE PLO CONDEMNS HUSSEIN

Though the official PLO reaction to King Hussein's announcement severing ties with the West Bank was supportive, their first gut-reaction, the reaction which probably counts, was quite different. Their response, in the form of an editorial in Al-Fajr, the PLO-oriented daily in Jerusalem, accused Hussein of undermining the PLO's right to represent all the Palestinian people.

In his speech, King Hussein warned the Palestinians in Jordan, who form the majority of the citizens of his kingdom, that though they might be of Palestinian origin, they hold Jordanian citizenship and must therefore remain loyal citizens of

Jordan. Loyal citizenship, Hussein stressed, was the basis of Jordan's calm and its recent prosperity and development.

Not so, responded Al-Fajr; the PLO has the sole right to represent all Palestinians everywhere regardless of citizenship. This position amounts to a declaration of war against the Hashemite kingdom. This position also serves as a dire warning to Israel, one-fifth of whose citizenry is composed of Israeli Arabs who are also Palestinians. The PLO's message is clear: the solution to Palestinian statehood involves the dismemberment of one neighboring state -- or possibly two, for that matter.

Data Base:

191,700 JEWS IN THE "OCCUPIED TERRITORIES"

Even moderate Arabs who are prepared to negotiate peace with Israel demand in return nothing less than all the territories captured by Israel in the Six-Day War including Jerusalem, the one part of Judea and Samaria actually annexed by Israel (immediately after the war).

Part of the argument for a complete transfer of these territories to Arab rule is that not only is their population overwhelmingly Arab but that Jews have failed to settle across the old "Green Line," demonstrating their lack of real commitment to Judea, Samaria and Gaza except perhaps rhetorically. Thus demographics have become a serious element in the discussion of the future.

Just how many Jews do live over the former "Green Line"? Figures may be obtained from several sources, but the latest available were from 1986. In this rapidly changing situation, the Jerusalem Center recently conducted its own survey to supplement existing information. As reflected in the following table, our study reveals the little recognized fact that the combined efforts of Israel's major political parties since 1967 have resulted in nearly 200,000 Jews living in the "occupied Arab territories" today. The sheer size of this number, which continues to grow each

year, makes any Arab demand for their removal as the price of any projected peace settlement clearly impractical.

-- Mark Ami-El and Warren Zinn

NOTES

1. All figures listed for Jerusalem neighborhoods are as of 31 Dec 1986. Source: Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem, No. 5, 1986 (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Israel Studies, 1988).
2. Significant recent growth has occurred in these neighborhoods and is not included in these statistics.
3. Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, testifying before a Knesset committee in April 1988, cited the figure of 110,000 Jewish residents of Jerusalem living in areas over the "Green Line."
4. Figures are as of 31 March 1986. Source: Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza (Moetzet Yesha) (August 1986).
5. As of 31 Dec 1985. Source: Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1986 (Jerusalem: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1987).
6. Source: JCPA telephone survey of local and regional councils in Judea and Samaria (July 1988).

JEWISH POPULATION OVER THE "GREEN LINE"

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Gaza District, and Golan Heights

	1986	1988
Jerusalem -		
New Neighborhoods:		
East Talpiot	12,200	
French Hill	9,100	
Gilo	25,200	
Neve Yaakov	14,300	
Old City	2,200 ²	
Pisgat Zeev	2,400 ²	
Ramat Eshkol, Givat Hamivtar, Maalot		
Dafna	15,000 ²	
Ramot	23,800 ²	
	<u>104,200¹</u>	<u>110,000³</u>
Judea -		
Towns:		
Efrat	1,600	1,750
Givat Zeev	3,900	4,250
Kiryat Arba	4,500	5,000
Maaleh Adumim	12,400	13,000
Regional Councils:		
Gush Etzion	3,400	3,500
Hebron Hills	1,000	1,300
	<u>26,800⁴</u>	<u>28,800⁶</u>
Samaria -		
Towns:		
Alfei Menashe	1,800	2,000
Ariel	5,900	8,500
Elkana	1,900	2,000
Emmanuel	4,000	4,500
Maaleh Efraim	1,100	1,300
Regional Councils:		
Samaria	9,300	12,000
Benjamin	5,800	8,500
Jordan Valley	2,000	3,200
	<u>31,800⁴</u>	<u>42,000⁶</u>
Gaza Regional Council	1,800 ⁴	1,900
Golan Heights	8,700 ⁵	9,000
	<u>=====</u>	<u>=====</u>
TOTAL -	173,300	191,700