The Palestinian Issue

Historical Background & Contemporary Developments

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Chapter Three

The Palestinian Issue 1949–1967

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Introduction

A feeling of bitterness and disenfranchisement prevailed among the Palestinians, the Arabs and the Muslims after the war of 1948. The people of Palestine found themselves displaced and uprooted from their land for the first time in history, and subjected to the rule of several regimes that gave them varying degrees of freedom and civil rights, and the right to organize themselves into political and resistance groups seeking to liberate their land. However, the Palestinians, with their renowned vitality, dealt with admirable positivity with the situation and tried to adapt themselves to their difficult circumstances. For instance, only a few years passed before they became the most educated people of all the Arab countries, since education was one of the important ways to compensate for their tough conditions, and to prepare for tackling the future and the challenges it brought with it.

First: The Arab States and Palestine

The period in question saw the decolonization of most countries in the Arab and Islamic worlds. However, the "independent" regimes that replaced the colonial ones adopted the Western style of ruling, and secular systems that had liberal, socialist, or conservative underpinnings, or fell under direct military rule. Each regime sought to assert its own influence and individual national identity, instead of striving towards unity in a broader framework, thus leading to further divisions. Nevertheless, the pan-Arab rhetoric and slogans remained prevalent in the Arab arena. The Palestinians pinned their hopes during that period on the "pan-Arab nature of the battle" and on certain Arab regimes, particularly Egypt under the leadership of Gamal 'Abdul Nasser.

That period's slogan was "unity is the road to liberation." But the more this slogan was discussed, the more people felt despair about ever achieving it, especially after the failure of the Egyptian-Syrian union in 1958–1961, and following the "loss of the credibility" of its leaders in the aftermath of the catastrophic war of 1967. To be sure, these leaders lacked the real conviction,

the sound methodology and the necessary persistence needed to achieve the goal of the liberation of Palestine. They therefore achieved neither unity nor liberation, in addition to losing the rest of Palestine, the Sinai, and the Golan Heights in the war.

This period also witnessed a surge in nationalist and leftist ideologies against the decline of the Islamist movements on the political, popular, and resistance fronts, especially after the fierce organized campaign led by Nasser and his supporters against the Islamists.

In any case, the official state of war with Israel continued throughout this period, but the Arab regimes made practical moves towards maintaining rather than challenging the status quo. In other words, they favored "settlement" over "liberation" for both subjective and objective reasons, with the result being that they began to feel genuine incapacity. They thus occupied themselves with tickling the fancies of the public, which waited eagerly for the battle to come, while Israel grew stronger and its roots deepened.

Therefore, Palestinian resistance was adopted mostly for "tactical" political reasons rather than in the context of comprehensive strategic plans. The policies of the countries that were in confrontation with Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinian resistance followed two lines:

- **First:** Focus was on each regime's safety and survival, avoiding its exposure to the dangers of Israeli retaliation, and, in general, avoiding any confrontation that may reveal the regime's weakness. These regimes sought to control Palestinian guerilla operations and prevent them from using their borders with Occupied Palestine for armed resistance operations.

- **Second:** Allowing the presence of armed resistance on the ground only for tactical and provisional reasons, in order to achieve popular political gains or avoid internal turmoil, and appease the angry public. Hence, confrontation countries kept their territories off limits to Palestinian guerilla operations, with very few exceptions imposed by specific circumstances. The most important such exception was south Lebanon, which saw the formation of a strong resistance base after the 1967 war that continued until 1982, not in response to the wishes of the ruling regime there, but as a result of its weakness and the strength of the Palestinian revolution and its broad support base in the country.

Second: Palestinian National Action

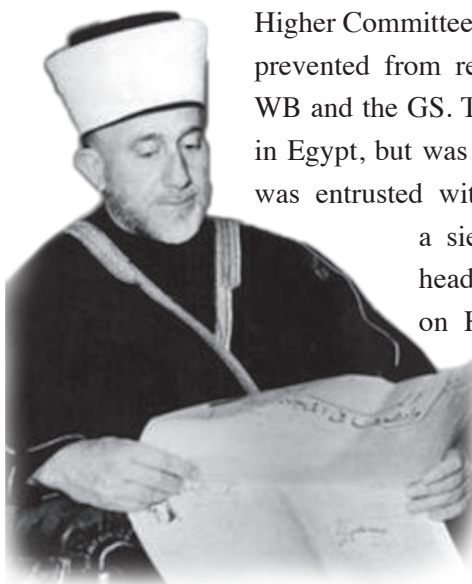During the same era, popular Palestinian attitudes were characterized by the following:

- Attempting to absorb the shock and adapt to the new reality, as well as focusing on education and the means for achieving self-dependency.

- Joining nationalist organizations and parties including the Nasserites and the Ba‘ath Party, communist and leftist groups and Islamist ones (in the first half of the era in question examples include the MB Movement and Hizbut-Tahrir).

- The emergence of a Palestinian national identity, which had been overshadowed by nationalist and leftist ideologies, e.g., the birth of the Fatah Movement, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

- The immigration of many Palestinians to the east bank of the Jordan River and the Gulf countries, particularly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Kuwait.

- Gradual decline of popularity of Haj Amin al-Hussaini.

The Jordanian government completed its constitutional control of the WB, which represented most of what was left of Palestine (5,878 km^2, i.e., 21.77% of Palestine's area), after it encouraged several conferences that were attended by pro-Jordanian Palestinian dignitaries calling for unity with Jordan. A conference was held in Amman on 1/10/1948 (in parallel with the Gaza conference) chaired by Sheikh Suleiman al-Taji al-Faruqi, and participants gave King 'Abdullah bin al-Sharif Hussein bin 'Ali full mandate to speak on behalf of Palestine's Arabs.[1] Another conference was held in Jericho on 1/12/1948 chaired by Muhammad 'Ali al-Ja'bari, the head of the municipality of Hebron. The conference declared the unity of the Jordanian and Palestinian lands, and declared King 'Abdullah sovereign over Palestine. The Jordanian government issued a statement saying that it "respected the will of the Palestinian people and agreed with it." The Jordanian National Assembly convened on 13/12/1948 to approve the Jericho conference and the stance of the Jordanian government and took a decision to unify the two banks (East Jordan and WB). In the end of that year, a third conference was held in Ramallah and a fourth in Nablus; both supported the decisions of the Jericho conference.

However Jordan's position was met with strong opposition in both official and popular Arab and Palestinian circles, yet Jordan's military and administrative

control over most of what remained of Palestine (the WB) enabled it to prevent the All-Palestine government from exercising its powers. The Jordanian government took a number of unification measures in 1949, and in December 1949 a royal decree was issued, granting Jordanian nationality to all Palestinian residents in East Jordan and WB. Another royal decree was issued for holding elections on 20/4/1950 in both banks. On 24/4/1950, the first representative parliament for the two banks was formed, and went on to approve the unity between the WB and East Jordan.[2]

Meanwhile, the Egyptian government took over the GS (363 km[2], i.e., 1.34% of Palestine's area) and began to administer it. Haj Amin, the Arab Higher Committee and the All-Palestine government were prevented from residing or engaging in politics in the WB and the GS. The All-Palestine government remained in Egypt, but was unable to carry out any of the tasks it was entrusted with. The Egyptian authorities imposed a siege on the Arab Higher Committee's headquarters in Cairo and strict surveillance on Haj Amin, restricting his freedom of action and movement. Thus, the Arab Higher Committee and the All-Palestine government were besieged, ignored, and tightly controlled, until any practical effect they had on Palestinian life ended. After Haj Amin found himself practically a

• **Haj Amin al-Hussaini**

hostage in Egypt, tasting the bitterness of isolation and restrictions; he had to leave for Lebanon in 1958. "His" committee and government gradually became smaller and more isolated, until they were restricted to one or two flats in Cairo! The role of the head of the All-Palestine government turned in 1952 into one of a mere delegate of Palestine in the Arab League. It is thus that Haj Amin's role gradually grew weaker. But whether or not he was greatly popular until the mid–1950s and whether or not some part blamed him for the loss of Palestine, Haj Amin was renowned for his strength and loyalty, and was the first symbol of the Palestinian national movement for more than 30 years.

At the popular level, the MB Movement prevailed in Palestinian circles during 1949–1954, both in the WB and the GS, thanks to their reputation for fighting in the 1948 war and their patriotic Islamic and social welfare programs. They enjoyed a relative freedom in Egypt until 1954, and favorable conditions in Jordan. Moreover, Hizbut-Tahrir became a party to be reckoned with, particularly in Jordan in the mid–1950s, where it focused on political work and the reestablishment of the Islamic Caliphate.

The communists represented a popular challenge to the Islamic movement, especially among student and professional circles, with their attractive slogans on the suffering of the people, and their accusations against the regimes of treason and collaboration with the enemy. However, they and the other nationalist and leftist movements were not able to compete with the Islamists until 'Abdul Nasser dealt a harsh blow to the MB Movement, and began cracking down on them, using the media to distort their image. The general attitude of the MB Movement and the Islamists thus became about self-preservation and keeping a low profile until better conditions emerged. An example of the Islamist force was the Palestinian Students League in Egypt, where the Islamists or their supporters won its internal elections year after year until 1957. This association was chaired by Yasir 'Arafat, at a time when he was close to the MB Movement as a student.

The Palestinian resistance took, during that phase, simple forms that had a limited impact. During the first half of the 1950s, the resistance conducted cross-border operations to retrieve possessions of displaced families or to retaliate against the Zionists. In GS, the MB Movement formed a covert military organization, which conducted a number of operations in collaboration with the Bedouins in the Negev, and benefited from 'Abdul Mun'im 'Abdul Ra'uf, the MB Movement officer in the Egyptian army, who was posted to the GS, following the success of the Egyptian revolution in 1952. 'Abdul Ra'uf facilitated the group's military training. An attack on a bus, on 17/3/1954, was one of the most famous operations that bore the hallmarks of the Bedouins, in collaboration with the MB Movement, and led to the death of 11 Israelis near Beersheba, near the settlement of Ma'ale Akrabim.[3]

Zionist reactions to resistance operations were violent and heavy-handed, both in the WB and the GS, such as with the Qibya Massacre on 14–15/10/1953, which claimed the lives of 67 people.[4] On 28/2/1955, the Zionist forces perpetrated the Gaza Massacre, which resulted in 39 deaths with 33 injured, and provoked Gaza's inhabitants to rise up and demand military action. The Egyptian leadership approved Palestinian military operations, and entrusted the mission to Egyptian officer Mustafa Hafiz, who carried out the task effectively. Thousands volunteered to fight, but only those with

• **Mustafa Hafiz**

fighting experience and intricate knowledge of the territory were chosen, and in the end, more than a thousand guerilla fighters enlisted. They conducted swift daily operations, including large-scale operations at times, from September 1955 to October 1956. However, Mustafa Hafiz was killed on 11/7/1956 due to a parcel bomb that was sent to him by the Israeli Mossad through a double agent.[5]

According to a statement by the then Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in the Knesset in March 1956, the number of Israeli victims due to border incidents was 137 in 1951; 147 in 1952; 162 in 1953; 180 in 1954; and 258 in 1955.[6] On the other hand, and according to Hussein Abu al-Naml, 1,176 Israelis were killed between the armistice in March 1949 and the invasion of the GS and the Sinai in October 1956.[7]

The Tripartite Aggression (Israeli-British-French) on Egypt began on 29/10/1956. The Zionists sought to put an end to Palestinian resistance operations in the GS, open maritime lines for their ships in the Red Sea, either by opening the Suez Canal or by lifting the siege off the Eilat port, and fulfill

• **Tripartite Aggression 1956**

their expansionist aspirations. This was in accord with British colonialist intentions to continue to control the Suez Canal, and with the French desire to deal a blow to Egypt, which supported the Algerian revolution. All this led to the Israeli occupation of the GS and the Sinai, and

Britain and France took part in striking Egypt's airports and occupying its ports. The Israeli occupation was swift and decisive, and exposed the weakness of the Egyptian army and the shortcomings of its political leadership. Nonetheless, the Egyptian media shed light on the resistance of the Egyptian leadership against making concessions, and took advantage of the withdrawal of the Israeli, British, and French forces (under pressure from the US) on 6/3/1957 to restore 'Abdul Nasser's stature. But resistance operations through the GS ceased after the Tripartite Aggression, and Egypt shut off its borders to Palestinian resistance fighters.
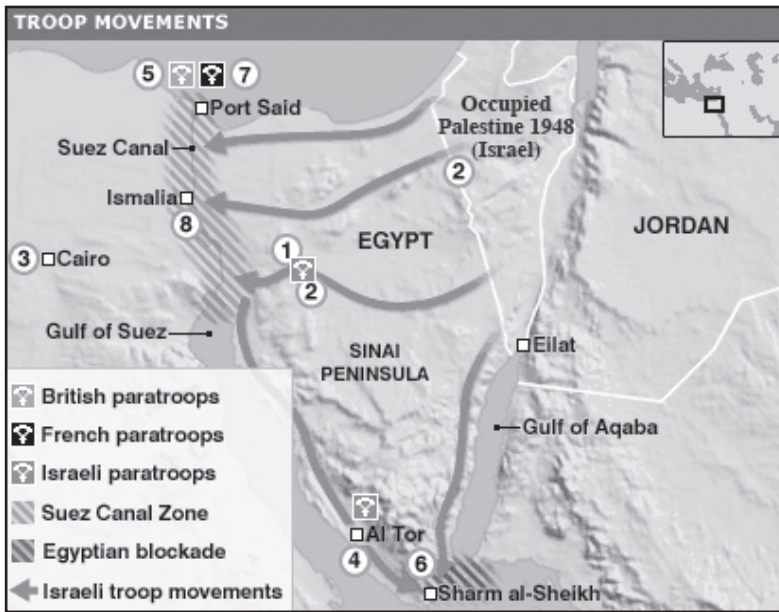
• Tripartite Aggression 1956

Third: The Birth of the Fatah Movement

During that period, persecution against the Islamist movement, especially in Egypt and the GS, caused young and eager Palestinian members of the MB Movement to begin to wonder what to do to liberate Palestine. Despite the fact that the general trend among them called for patience and for focusing on educational and religious endeavors, another trend began to go in the direction of establishing an organized armed movement. The inclination was for this not to have any overt Islamic forms, and to instead adopt a nationalist framework that would enable such a movement to mobilize larger sectors of young people, and protect it from

persecution by hostile anti-Islamist regimes. The Algerian revolution at the time was one of this movement's primary inspirations. Thus were planted the first seeds of the Fatah Movement (the Liberation of Palestine Movement, and later the Palestinian National Liberation Movement) in 1957 in Kuwait, headed by Yasir 'Arafat, and which originated from the MB Movement and, more specifically, the inhabitants of the GS.

Khalil al-Wazir (aka Abu Jihad), who became the number two man in Fatah for over 30 years (till his assassination in April 1988), submitted a proposal for the creation of such a movement to the MB's leadership in the GS, but received no response. Nonetheless, this did not prevent several respectable members of the MB from joining Fatah upon its foundation and becoming some of its leading members (e.g., Sa'id al-Muzayyan, Ghalib al-Wazir, Salim al-Za'nun, Salah Khalaf, As'ad al-Saftawi, Muhammad Yusuf al-Najjar,

• **Yasir 'Arafat**

Kamal 'Adwan, Rafiq al-Natshah, 'Abdul Fatah Hammoud, and Yusuf 'Umairah). However, after Fatah focused on recruiting members of the MB Movement until 1963, the movement then opened up to other currents and segments, especially after

• **Yasir 'Arafat and Khalil al-Wazir**

the Brotherhood leadership in Gaza issued orders that compelled members to choose between being members of Fatah or the MB Movement.[8] Fatah took on a nationalist secular inclination that still represents its general identity to this day. The movement formed its military wing, *al-'Asifah* (The Storm), and conducted its first military operation in early 1965. It was able to conduct around 200 military operations from then up to the war of June 1967.[9]

As for the **Arab Nationalist** Movement, most of its founding members were Palestinians who studied at the American University of Beirut in

the mid–1950s, including George Habash. The movement's slogan was nationalist unity and the liberation of Palestine, and it supported Nasserist policies and established the Palestine Committee in 1958. After the failure of the Egyptian-Syrian union, the movement adopted socialist patterns in both its ideology and activism. May 1964 saw the foundation of the National Front for the Liberation of Palestine and its military wing "Shabab al-Tha'r," which launched resistance operations in November 1964. In 1966, it adopted Marxist ideology.[10] In December 1967, it founded the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in collaboration with other factions.

• Salim al-Za'nun

• Salah Khalaf

• Muhammad Yusuf al-Najjar

• Kamal 'Adwan

• 'Abdul Fatah Hammoud

• Rafiq al-Natshah

• Sa'id al-Muzayyan

Fourth: The Establishment of the PLO

Meanwhile, Arab regimes became aware of the covert activities, movements, and organizations that preoccupied the Palestinian arena. Nasser wished to keep things under control, especially in light of the differences between the Arab regimes. This gave rise to a trend that sought to include the Palestinians within a recognized controllable official entity. In 1959, the Arab League took a decision calling for reorganizing the Palestinian people and uniting them through representatives chosen by the people. However, this kept being postponed, until the death of Ahmad Hilmi 'Abdulbaqi, the delegate of the All-Palestine government at the Arab League in 1963.

• **Ahmad al-Shuqairi**

With Nasser's support, Ahmad al-Shuqairi was chosen to replace 'Abdulbaqi and was entrusted with examining the Palestinian issue and the means to reinvigorate it. When the First Arab Summit was held in Cairo on 13/1/1964, al-Shuqairi was entrusted with contacting the member states and the Palestinian people, in order to reach an adequate basis for organizing the Palestinian people and enabling them to perform their role in liberating their homeland and determining their fate. Al-Shuqairi did not submit a report to the Arab League on the proposed means, as he was convinced that it would be subjected to even more stalling. He therefore decided to put the Arab League face to face with the *fait accompli*, and established, with Egypt's support, the PLO.

The first Palestinian national conference was held in Jerusalem on 28/5/1964 in the presence of 422 representatives of Palestine, and was sponsored by King Hussein bin Talal of Jordan. The birth of the PLO was officially announced, and the Palestine National Charter affirming armed struggle with the aim of liberating all of Palestine and refusing to cede any part of it, was ratified. Ahmad al-Shuqairi was voted president of the PLO, which decided to create the Palestinian liberation army, in addition to taking tactical and public relations measures. In general, the Palestinians welcomed the establishment of the PLO, since it represented the Palestinian entity and national identity that had previously been absent. However, some, like the Fatah Movement, doubted the basis of its foundation and its ability to perform its tasks.[11]

• **The First Palestinian National Conference in Jerusalem 1964**

Fifth: The June 1967 War and Its Repercussions

An Arab-Israeli war erupted on 5/6/1967, after mutual escalation during which Egypt shut off the Straits of Tiran in the Red Sea and asked the UN observers on its borders to leave, and the Arab states declared their readiness for the liberation of Palestine. However, on the morning of June 5th, the Israeli forces launched attacks on the air forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, and within six days, the whole matter was settled with a new and catastrophic Arab defeat. The Zionists occupied the rest of Palestine, including the WB 5,878 km^2 and the GS 363 km^2; in addition to the Sinai 61,198 km^2, and the Golan Heights 1,150 km^2.

According to Palestinian anecdotes about the event, Jewish soldiers entered Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque while chanting slogans offensive to Muslims. The Arab and Islamic peoples awoke to a catastrophe they had never expected to happen, and discovered the extent of deception and illusions fed to them by the Arab regimes during the 19 previous years. Indeed, Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian aircrafts were destroyed on the tarmac, before even

• **Israeli soldiers celebrating the occupation of Jerusalem**

taking off. 80% of the Egyptian army's equipment was destroyed, and around 10 thousand Egyptian fighters were killed, along with 6,094 Jordanians and one thousand Syrians; thousands of others were injured.

• Destroyed Egyptian army trucks in 1967 war

• **General Uzi Narkis (left), Defense Minister Moshe Dayan (center) and Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin (right) entering Jerusalem in 1967 after its occupation**

As a result of this war, another 330 thousand Palestinians were displaced, Gamal 'Abdul Nasser's popularity and clout faded, and the trust in Arab regimes diminished. The Palestinians strove to take matters into their own hands, and the Palestinian nationalist movement grew stronger and more influential. However, one of the most important negative repercussions was that the Arab regimes, and the PLO later, focused on liberating the lands occupied in 1967 (the WB and the GS), i.e., 23% of Palestine's land, with an implicit readiness to cede the land that was occupied in 1948, despite the fact that all these wars and organizations had initially started with the goal of liberating those territories.

Territories conquered
and occupied by Israel
as of 10 June 1967

PASSIA

Mediterranean Sea

Beirut
LEBANON
Damascus
SYRIA
Golan
Heights
Haifa
Tel Aviv
Jaffa
Jerusalem
Amman
Gaza
Port Said
Kerak
El-Arish
Negev
Desert
JORDAN
Ismailya
Ma'an
Suez
Sinai
SAUDI
ARABIA
EGYPT
Sharm
Esh-Sheikh
Red Sea

• **Results of the June 1967 War**

Endnotes

1 As'ad 'Abd al-Rahman, *Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Filastiniyyah* (The Palestine Liberation Organization) (Nicosia: Markaz al-Abhath—PLO, 1985), p. 33.

2 See *Ibid*., p. 34; and *al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah*, vol. 4, pp. 377–379.

3 See Public Record Office (PRO) (The National Archives), Kew Gardens, London, Files: Foreign Office (FO) 371/111077, 111098–111100.

4 *Al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah*, vol. 3, pp. 502–504.

5 *Ibid*., pp. 393–398; and Hussien Abu al-Namel, *op. cit*., pp. 101–123.

6 Dispatch, British Embassy, Tel Aviv, to Lloyd, London, 10/3/1956, FO 371/121773.

7 Hussien Abu al-Namel, *op. cit*., p. 66.

8 See 'Abdullah Abu 'Azzah, *Ma' al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi al-Duwal al-'Arabiyyah* (With the Islamic Movement in Arab Countries) (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1986), pp. 71–96; and Mohsen Moh'd Saleh, *al-Tariq ila al-Quds*, pp. 160–163.

9 Salah Khalaf, *Filastin bila Hawiyyah* (Palestine Without an Identity), 2nd ed. (Amman: Dar al-Jalil li al-Nashir, 1996), pp. 75–83.

10 Fawzi Taym, "The Palestinian Political Forces," in Jawad al-Hamad, *al-Madkhal ila al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah*, pp. 357–358.

11 On the PLO, see As'ad 'Abd al-Rahman, *Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Filastiniyyah*; and *al-Mawsu'ah al-Filastiniyyah*, vol. 4, pp. 313–325.

This Book

This book seeks to present a comprehensive overview of the Palestinian issue, its historical background, as well as its modern and contemporary developments.

The book, in a documented, methodical, and concise style, and in plain language, delves into the history of Palestine from its early history throughout the Islamic era, and the background of the emergence of the Zionist movement, as well as the British occupation of Palestine and the founding of Israel. The book analyzes the various phases of the Palestinian issue and its developments, shedding light on the struggle of the Palestinian people, their uprisings and revolutions, and the role of the Palestine Liberation Organization and its factions, as well as the role of the Palestinian Islamic movements.

The book places particular emphasis on the first decade of the twenty-first century, so that the reader would be able to obtain a clear picture about many of the issues related to the contemporary aspects of the Palestinian question.

The revised edition of the book covers the period up to the year 2013, and contains a large collection of pictures and maps to illustrate its points.

The book is an important source for readers seeking to acquaint themselves with the Palestinian issue, and to become informed of the pertinent facts in a balanced manner. It can also serve as an introduction to further studies of the Palestinian issue.

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