

# SURVEY OF ARAB AFFAIRS

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## WHEN MUSLIM FUNDAMENTALISTS USE WESTERN WORDS

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### **Muslim Fundamentalists Champion Freedom and Democracy**

People use the same words to signify different meanings and notions. Each word, developed in its socio-cultural environment to respond to a local cultural need, has been borrowed, very often by default, and molded into a different mind set, in which it necessarily carries a whole gamut of various significances which are culturally different from the culture from which it was borrowed. Thus, Muslim fundamentalists can claim that Islam had invented (or created) freedom, democracy, socialism, human rights, etc. before the West. Indeed, they reproach the West for its departure from those norms, while they in fact intend to impose Islam as the only way to create a "just and equal society" which would bathe in freedom and democracy. At the same time, they vilify Jews and Christians and express their inherent hostility to the West and to the norms it embraces. The prime example of this is found in the Charter of Allah:

the platform of the Islamic Resistance Movement — Hamas (published in full in the author's forthcoming *Fundamentalist Islam and Israel* [JCPA/UPA, 1993]).

The Arab Islamic fundamentalist movement, which includes the Iranians as well, admits no possibility of settling the painful Arab-Israel conflict directly with Israel, and calls for the outright destruction of Israel and its replacement by an Islamic state — all in the name of "justice, democracy and the rule of law (Islamic law, of course) inherent in Islam." Whenever the Arabs decide to wage war against Israel the act is always legitimized by the "right" to retrieve their territory.

Some Westerners listen to these messages with naivete, not taking these threats at face value, or worse, to conform to their "interests" (commercial or political), always put the blame on the victim (Israel), under the grotesque claim that if Israel submitted to the fundamentalists' "reasonable demands," all would fall neatly into place. It was not

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until Islamic terrorism began to shake the entire West, seen most prominently in the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, that several American and European governments have awakened to this "new" universal threat.

### Islamic Democracy

Israel's discourse with the Arab and Islamic worlds has been limited to a great extent by this difference in the meanings attributed to words. Tolerance, peace, justice, democracy, etc, when pronounced aloud by Arab/Muslim leaders, seemingly carry exactly the same well-known Western connotations, and therefore Israel is scolded for not responding to them. But how can one discuss human rights in the Middle East, for example, while militant Muslim fundamentalists and extreme nationalists deny the right of Israel to exist? The threat to eliminate others must be considered the most extreme breach of human rights.

The litany of charges against Israel by Arabs and Palestinians as a group and other Muslims as well, and their use of words which sound moderate and reasonable to Western ears, is no more than a misuse of Western vocabulary to fight the West by its own means. For example, they attack Israel's democracy, the equal of which one cannot find in any Arab/Muslim environment. Israel allows its Arab citizens to speak their minds in the Israeli parliament and in their free press in a way not seen in any Arab/Muslim country. Even in the Israeli-administered territories, the Palestinians enjoy far more freedom of speech and assembly than anywhere in the Arab/Islamic world.

Some Arabs/Muslims claim they are the epitome of democracy. Take, for example, Egypt and the PLO, both of whom say they are "democratic." Egypt has banned Muslim fundamentalists and even prohibited the more quietist Muslim Brotherhood from organizing politically. Their rationale is the need to fight against revolutionary elements who threaten the stability of the state. The PLO and Palestinian fundamentalists have been killing each other on a much larger scale in the past two years, causing more casualties than the Israelis in quelling the Intifada, in order to settle domestic accounts or impose their views on rivals and dissidents, all under the pretext of preserving the "democratic" PLO. And the world accepts these exercises in democracy as reasonable.

Fundamentalist Islam has always been anti-democratic in its essence according to Western standards. Whenever it won, often by "democratic" means, it put in place another dictator (as in Khomeini) much worse

than the previous dictator (the Shah). The fundamentalist wave has already succeeded in Iran, Sudan and Pakistan, and has targeted Egypt, Algeria, and Arab Palestine, if left to itself, with Jordan and Tunisia to follow. This rather horrifying specter from the Western and Israeli point of view has the support of Muslim masses everywhere.

In recent decades it has been the rule that whenever a Muslim society became relatively democratized, as in Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, and even the Palestinians under Israeli rule, both inside Israel and beyond the Green Line, the crowds took this democracy seriously and voted for Islam. In Jordan, the fundamentalists won more than one-third of the vote in 1989 and are looking toward the 1993 elections. King Hussein has lately been shifting toward Islamic piety, stressing his descent from the family of the Prophet and his sponsorship of the holy places in Jerusalem. The Hamas has already made great strides, ironically under Israeli rule, in elections for Arab professional and student organizations, and their gains threaten the primacy of the PLO. In Algeria, which had the courage to allow free elections, the FIS movement swept huge crowds to its side, "forcing" the military government to cancel the elections and declare emergency rule.

Muslim fundamentalists exploit democratic systems in order to propagandize, seek asylum from their countries of origin, and use freedom of speech to condemn the West and its values, to spread fanaticism, and even to mount terrorist attacks under the protective wings of their humane countries of residence.

Despite their protestations to the contrary, Muslim fundamentalists remain basically inimical to the West and to Israel, and they consider Western ideology and values the enemies of Islam. For Muslim fundamentalists, there is only one sovereign, Allah, who has already dispensed to humanity, via His Prophet, the most perfect code of law, the Shari'a, principally based on the Quran and the Hadith.

### Islamic Tolerance

Muslims insist that Jews have always lived in peace and security under the protective wings of Islam, and that compared to Christendom, Islam has always been far more tolerant of minorities in general and Jews in particular, until the advent of Zionism and world imperialism, which have sought to undermine Islam since their inception.

One of the common Western interpretations of "tolerance" is: "I value you as a human being, but I don't value what you value." Any *dhimmi* (Christian

or Jew in the Islamic world) who would dare to state publicly this meaning of tolerance, which seems so banal and so much a matter of course in the modern world, has always risked losing his head even under the most "tolerant" Muslim rulers. Tolerance in the modern European sense means that in any pluralistic society man accepts man in spite of their ethnic, religious, linguistic, and/or national differences. Islamic tolerance sees it from a totally different angle: "I tolerate you in spite of your being inherently *inferior*, provided you submit to the rule of Islam." Under *pax Islamica*, everyone is assured justice, democracy and freedom as long as one acts according to Islamic norms, and even then, full claim to equality cannot be wholly executed until one embraces Islam.

Basic Muslim attitudes toward the Jews are anchored in their holy books and expanded upon in an immense literature called the *Isra'iliyyat*, perpetuating today widespread negative images of the Jews, Zionism, and Israel. It is true that some early verses of the Quran speak about the Jews in laudatory terms, but they were replaced by much more numerous and much more virulent verses against the Jews when they broke off from the Prophet in Medina. Even in Egypt today, which has avowedly concluded peace with Israel, Muslim Brotherhood-controlled media continue to vilify the Jews, day in and day out, in an abhorrent medieval fashion.

### Self-Determination and Human Rights

When the Arabs/Muslims say "oppression," they mean what others do to them, even if it is vastly more civilized in terms of human rights than the way they treat the people inside their own political entities. When they clamor for "justice" they mean justice for themselves, i.e., others should submit to all their demands. They do not recognize that others have rights too.

For example, the principle of self-determination that the Arabs/Muslims learned from President Wilson at the Versailles Conference is only applied to Arab/Muslim peoples, but not to the Copts and Nubians in Egypt, to the Black Christians and animists in the Sudan, to the Jews all over the world, or to the Kurds in Iran-Iraq-Syria-Turkey, but yes to the Muslims of Bosnia, the Palestinians in Israel, and the Muslims of Mindanao in the Philippines. Above all, they think human rights are due only to Arabs/Muslims wherever they are a minority. Where Islam rules, there is no need to worry about all those concepts. There they will be carried out by blood and sword in the name of

Islamic justice and democracy.

There are no "universal" concepts of human rights, nor is there a concept of "basic rights." Each society has a regime it wants and deserves. Otherwise it would have risen against the tyrants who rule it. Only by a long process of democratization in its Western sense might the prospects grow for a long-term involvement of human rights and justice, etc. There is no point in persuading the Iranians that their writ of death against Salman Rushdie is unjust as long as they and others claim it is the epitome of justice the way they comprehend it. Everyone wants justice, their own brand of justice. Adopting a word, as we see, does not mean adopting its contents too.

### No Tanks on the West Bank

What has become important for the West and the Arabs/Muslims is not the killing of often innocent human beings, but the identity of the killer. Arabs/Muslims can slaughter each other with very few disapproving eyebrows being raised. Yet everyone wakes up when Israel does the killing, generally under much more justifiable circumstances. During the 5 1/2 years of the Intifada, the rate of victims of Israeli shooting was about 1 in every 100 large-scale violent demonstrations. Compare that with the 20,000 slain in Syria during the one-week uprising of Muslim fundamentalists in Hama; the 400 Muslims slaughtered by the Saudis during a four-hour intifada in Mecca; the dozens of Muslim fundamentalists being murdered every day by their government in Egypt; or the equal numbers of Christian Copts who have been killed by their Muslim fundamentalist neighbors in Egypt.

When riots break out in the Arab/Islamic world (and even during the Los Angeles riots a year ago), one of the first sights are tanks and soldiers in armored cars. In recent years we have seen these armored vehicles in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Los Angeles and elsewhere in the U.S., as well as Sudan, Iran, Somalia, Eastern Europe, Russia, South America and many Asian countries. In Israel, by contrast, during the Intifada there has never been any massive use of armored vehicles in the West Bank and Gaza.

The fact is that while the Palestinian population in the territories includes tens of thousands of militants, there are hundreds of thousands of quietist Palestinians who may admittedly hate the Israeli occupiers as intensely as the others but who elect to look for work to feed their families and want a more or less peaceful existence for their children.

Before the Intifada one hardly saw Israeli soldiers

on the roads of the West Bank and Gaza, and very few roadblocks separated those territories from Israel. People circulated freely in both directions and no apparent tension was felt in the air. When the violence began, Israel sent in troops to maintain order in the territories and to man roadblocks to prevent free passage, as a precaution against terrorism in Israel and in retaliation against the Arab population. Nevertheless, a semblance of routine was maintained with tens of thousands of Arabs crossing to Israel daily to work, receive health care, and even enjoy recreation facilities. The Arab standard of living more than quadrupled since the beginning of Israeli rule and five Arab universities were established in the West Bank and Gaza during that period. None existed there before 1967, due to King Hussein's concern that a rising intellectual social stratum might challenge his rule.

### **Jordan Breaks the Armistice**

Prior to the 1967 war, Israel supplicated all Arabs, including King Hussein and the Nasser regime in Egypt, who directly occupied the West Bank and Gaza, respectively, to sign a peace treaty turning the armistice lines of 1949 (the Green Line) into permanently recognized international boundaries. The Arabs refused and promised war and violence instead.

In 1967, King Hussein, without provocation of any sort, decided to join the Nasser bandwagon which seemed about to win in its latest attempt to destroy Israel. Israel, in return, asked the U.N. to transmit a message to the King, that it had no territorial claims on the West Bank, and that if Jordan refrained from attacking during the hostilities which had broken out with Egypt and Syria, nothing would occur to the West Bank. King Hussein's reaction was a massive bombardment of Israeli west Jerusalem, where 1,000 houses were damaged and many citizens killed. Then, on June 6, the Jordanian army, under Egyptian command, launched an attack to occupy the U.N. headquarters (Government House) in south Jerusalem. Israel retaliated and within forty-eight hours Nasser's and Hussein's bravado was smashed to pieces.

Egypt gave up its rule in Gaza when it signed the peace treaty with Israel in 1979, and King Hussein renounced his rule on the West Bank in June 1988. That meant that the rulers from which Israel had taken over the territories were no longer interested in them.

### **A Problem of Legitimacy, Not Territory**

Arabs, in general, and Palestinian nationalists and fundamentalists, in particular, have always presented

their grievances against Israel in terms of territory. They lost territories to Israel in a war, therefore they deserve to retrieve them, thus ending "occupation," "oppression," and "humiliation." But what price were they prepared to pay? Until recently, most Arabs and Palestinians wanted Israel's unconditional withdrawal from the territories but no peace. Assuredly, they vowed to use any "liberated part of Palestine" as a springboard to "liberate" the rest of Palestine, with suicidal consequences for Israel. Israel, by contrast, has always advanced the qualitative argument of legitimacy. If the Arabs acknowledge Israel's right to exist and express that acknowledgement by entering into diplomatic relationships with Israel and by normalizing their daily behavior, the rest could be handled by negotiations. When Egyptian President Sadat came to Jerusalem in November 1977 and declared his intention to recognize and accept Israel, the territorial problem became more easily soluble, because quantities can be negotiated, while qualities can only be agreed to or rejected in their entirety. There is no possible negotiation about whether a state exists or not.

Why should twenty-one Arab countries and another hundred newly-made nations exist as a matter of course, while Israel's existence is held hostage by Arab/Muslim countries? Israel has contributed to the world and to humanity at least as much as Gabon, Yemen, Cape Verde or Fiji, all of whom are indisputably and universally accepted.

The state of human rights in Israel and the territories will not improve until there is a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. There will be no peaceful settlement until the Arabs change their concept to qualitatively accept Israel as a separate entity and accord it the right to live in their midst. The quantitative territorial agreements will follow by necessity, when Israel's existence and presence is acknowledged. However, if the Arabs continue to insist on settling the question of territories first, the conflict will go on with continued suffering on both sides.

### **The Territory to be Discussed**

The "great empire" of Israel, including the territories, is about half the size of Switzerland. Next door there exists a full Arab state, mostly Palestinian and three times as large as the "greater Israel" in question, that is Jordan.

All historical Palestine, i.e., Israel, the West Bank, Gaza and Jordan, should be subject to quantitative negotiation with a view of partitioning that vast territory of over 100,000 square kilometers (one-fifth the size

of France, one-quarter of Germany) into two separate independent states because both of them can purport to be the owners of it all: the Jews by the force of right, the Palestinians by right of force and possession for hundreds of years.

Israel should negotiate with any Palestinian who accepts the premise of dividing *entire* Palestine, West and East, among its owners: Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews. This would put an end to the absurd situation where there is already a Palestinian/Jordanian government acting under the whims of an autocratic king, governing half the Palestinians on 75 percent of their territory; and at the same time a claim to establish another Palestinian government in the West Bank and Gaza (another third of the Palestinian people, on 8,000 square kilometers of West Palestine), while another sixth of the Palestinians continue to live in Israel proper on 20,000 square kilometers and are already claiming their right of autonomy, which will probably be scaled up if a Palestinian state were to be created in the West Bank and Gaza. Thus, three separate Palestinian identities would be created: one in "Jordan," one in the territories, and one by the "Israeli Arabs" in tiny Israel.

Without such a comprehensive outlook, the Israeli Arabs, who more often side with their people rather than their country, will continue to be restricted in terms of their integration into Israeli society. They will continue to claim equal rights, without sharing the same sense of responsibility towards the defense of their country. They will also continue their separate system of education, resulting in a deepening of the value-gap between these two sectors of Israeli society. The final result can only be a further alienation of these Arabs from their country, and ultimately their total rejection of it.

### Bosnians and Palestinians

The Bosnian Muslim plight has been compared to the plight of the Palestinians, but a closer look reveals this to be a misleading comparison. Firstly, the Bosnian Muslims have never terrorized Serbia, while the Palestinians have been continuously waging their "armed struggle," in its secular parlance, or "*jihad*" (holy war), in the Hamas-Muslim vocabulary. Secondly, since the outset of the war, tanks were used by all sides, bringing about the massacre of tens of thousands of innocent people and generating "ethnic cleansing." Can the Palestinians claim that armored vehicles were used against them or that they were "ethnically cleansed"? As against the terrifying and growing numbers of Serbian and Bosnian casualties, Palestinian

casualties were relatively minor and diminishing during the five and a half years of the Intifada. Thirdly, hunger is what decimated many thousands in Bosnia, as well as the lack of immediate care for the wounded. In the Israeli-held West Bank and Gaza, no one has ever been threatened with starvation, and Israeli army medics often treat Palestinian wounded and evacuate them to Israeli hospitals.

As a point of historical fact, the Mufti of Jerusalem, who cooperated closely with the Nazis in World War II, visited Bosnia during the war to help recruit Muslims to fight for the Germans.

### The PLO vs. Hamas

The Palestinians in the territories present an acute dilemma for Israel because they are divided into two camps. The nationalists (the PLO and its splinter allies) sometimes speak in quantitative terms of "territorial compromise," that is, a total withdrawal of Israel from what they consider as "occupied" territory. The fundamentalists (the Hamas and its allies in thought but rivals in politics) reject any compromise with Israel and will not settle for anything short of the total disappearance of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state over all of historical Palestine.

Feisal Husseini, the PLO leader of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, declared in Amman that the Arabs must make peace with Israel as the only way to make it melt (*indimaj*) into its Arab environment. This "peaceful" message was even exceeded by Sheikh al-Sa'ih, the former Mufti of Jerusalem and now the Speaker of the Palestinian National Council (the PLO "parliament"), who declared in Teheran his adherence to the fundamentalists' vow of *jihad* to bring about the total annihilation of Israel. One delegation of the PLO was talking "peace" with Israel in Madrid while one of the heads of the same PLO was in Iran with the rejectionists and vowing to pursue the totally opposite path.

Can the PLO impose its authority on the Hamas? What assurance does Israel have that its concessions in negotiations will end Hamas violence? Hamas, after all, is not a marginal group. Combined with other rejectionist organizations in the territories (Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front, and the Democratic Front), they probably make up more than half the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza. How can the PLO, which purports to represent them, actually speak in their name, much less bring them into the fold?

In May 1993, for the first time Hamas and the PLO announced that they had cooperated in a joint attack that

killed Jewish and Arab civilians in Gaza. However, it is not clear at all whether this is an indicator of future cooperation.

#### **Continued Threats from the Outer Circle**

Furthermore, what advantage is there for Israel to make concessions for "peace," i.e., withdrawal from the territories, while the sponsors of the PLO (Iraq) and of the Hamas (Iran and Saudi Arabia) continue to sit in the background, quietly watching how Israel is reduced in size, stripped of vital strategic areas, and made fragile and vulnerable to the outside "coup de grace" of Iran, Iraq and others who control massive conventional and unconventional military force. There is no point to concluding peace between Israel and the inner circle of its enemies, only to see Israel menaced under unfavorable conditions by the outer circle.

The U.S. bombings of Libya and Iraq are widely interpreted by Arabs/Muslims as part of a war of aggression against Islam by the "new crusaders" (Amer-

icans and Europeans) who not only support the "Jewish crusaders" in Muslim Palestine but have now penetrated Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the West should continue to show its resolve to resist the universal danger of fundamentalist Islam.

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