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Israel

Although there was a strong Islamist current in the Palestinian national movement of the British Mandate Period, the Israeli War of Independence (1947-49) and subsequent policies adopted by the Israeli government kept Islamism largely at bay until the 1970s. Islamism regained popularity in the wake of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, spreading to the Palestinian Territories and even into Israel itself as Israeli Arabs have shown increasing identification with their Palestinian cousins in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in recent years. Israeli preoccupation with secular Arab nationalist groups in the 1970s and 80s enabled Islamism to metastasize unfettered. Today, the phenomenon is manifested most concretely in the Islamic Movement of Israel. Increasingly, Israeli Islamists collaborate with secular Arab Israeli nationalists to undermine the security of the State of Israel and erode its Jewish identity.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Islamism, usually fused with Arab nationalism, was prevalent in the British Mandate of Palestine. The most powerful religious and political leader of the Palestinian community during that time, Mohammad Amin al-Husayni (Grand Mufti of Jerusalem from 1921-36 and chairman of the Arab Higher Committee) promoted an Islamist Palestinian national identity at odds with religious coexistence. A popular slogan among al-Husayni's supporters during the 1936-39 Arab Revolt, which was aimed at expelling the British and Jews from Palestine, was "after Saturday, Sunday"; that is, after the Palestinian national movement drives out the Jews, it will turn on the Christian Arabs.[1]

Soon after fleeing Palestine in 1937 to avoid arrest, al-Husayni began advocating for a transnational *jihad* against the British presence in the Islamic world. When Iraqi officers launched a pro-Axis coup in 1941 against Iraq's pro-British monarchy, al-Husayni called upon all Muslims to wage *jihad* against Britain, which he accused of launching an all-out war on Islam.[2] Al-Husayni then travelled to Berlin to cement an alliance with the Third Reich, where he recruited Bosnian Muslims for the SS and disseminated Islamist Nazi propaganda on Berlin Radio. After World War II, al-Husayni returned to Palestine and resumed his influential role in Palestinian politics, playing a leading role in the Israeli War of Independence and becoming the face of Palestinian nationalism until the formation of the PLO in 1964.

Despite Islamism's prevalence during the Mandate Period, a combination of factors served to marginalize the ideology for considerable time after Israel's creation. The first was the exodus of most of the Palestinian population of what would become Israel during the Israeli War of Independence. The second was the subjection of those who remained to military rule until 1966. (Until then, Israeli Arabs were deemed a security threat and lived under military control, which restricted their mobility. That year, however, Israeli Arabs were placed under civil government authority.[3]) Cumulatively, these trends prevented the organization of Israeli-Arab Islamist groups until the late 1970s, when Iran's Islamic Revolution gave new impetus to Islamism.

Following the Israeli War of Independence, Israeli authorities sought to suppress Islamism and craft an Israeli-Arab identity. To encourage Israeli-Arabs to identify with Israel, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, sponsored the creation of Arab political parties that advocated Jewish-Arab unity (e.g., the Democratic List of Nazareth in the 1st Knesset and the Democratic List for Israeli Arabs in the 2nd and 3rd Knessets) and were aligned with his own *Mapai* party. Ben-Gurion included those Arab parties in his government, with considerable effect. While most Muslim Israelis did not

completely abandon their Palestinian identity, their inclusion in the political process and isolation from the rest of the Palestinian and Muslim worlds facilitated assimilation. However, in the wake of the 1967 Six Day War, Israeli Arabs were reunited with their Palestinian relatives in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and became eligible for the *Hajj*.[4] Muslim preachers from the West Bank and Gaza Strip started imbuing Israeli-Muslims with a more conservative strain of Islam[5] and Israeli Muslims began studying in Islamic institutions in those territories. Soon, Israeli Muslims began calling anew for gender segregation in their schools and other conservative practices that had been on the wane since 1949. While the simultaneous re-exposure of the Israeli-Muslim community to the wider Muslim world and end of military rule over Israeli-Arabs contributed to a drift towards Islamism, the radicalism did not reach threatening levels until after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

In 1979, Farid Ibrahim Abu Mukh founded Israel's first violent Islamist group, *Usrat al-Jihad* (the Family of Jihad). Born in 1937, Abu Mukh grew more religious at the age of 40 under the direction of Sheikh Abdullah Nimar Darwish, who would later found the Islamic Movement in Israel. Influenced by the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, Abu Mukh raised a band of 60-70 *Usrat al-Jihad* fighters and they trained with weapons in the "Triangle" area (a concentration of Israeli Arab towns and villages located in the eastern Sharon plain). The group sought to destroy Israel and forcibly impose Islamic mores on Israel's Muslim population. To this end, they burned Israeli forests and orchards[6] and burned down a cinema in Umm al-Fahm for screening inappropriate films.[7] However, the group was short-lived; in 1981, Israeli authorities arrested its leadership—including Darwish—forcing it to cease operations.

Upon his release, Darwish and some of his *Usrat al-Jihad* colleagues chose to pursue their Islamist goals peacefully. Although Darwish claims that the Islamic Movement dates back to the following he acquired in the early 1970s through preaching, the organization as it exists today actually emerged from the Muslim Youth Movement created after Darwish was released from prison in 1983.[8] Darwish's movement rejected violence and commanded its members to obey Israeli law. It prioritized bringing secular Muslims back to Islam and providing public services, ranging from building schools to bus stop shelters, which the Israeli government did not provide.[9] Since the Israeli government largely neglected the Arab sector, the Islamic Movement's provision of public services made it very popular over time.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Israeli government deemed secular Palestinian nationalism, as represented by Yasser Arafat's Fatah and George Habash's

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the greatest threat to the peace. Therefore, Israel's political establishment increasingly viewed Islamism as an advantageous distraction from secular Palestinian nationalism. As a result, the Israeli government consistently overlooked the growth of Islamism within and beyond Israel's Green Line. In the 1970s, over the objections of moderate Palestinians,[10] the Israeli government permitted Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip, to register an Islamist group called *Mujama al-Islamiya*, first as a charity and then, in 1979, as an association.[11] At first, the group devoted itself primarily to building schools, clinics, and libraries. Although *Mujama al-Islamiya* refrained from anti-Israel violence in its early years, its members sometimes clashed violently with members of the PLO. When the first intifada erupted in December of 1987, Yassin and some of his *Mujama al-Islamiya* colleagues founded the militant Hamas movement. In addition to promoting Islamic mores, such as the wearing of the *hijab* and polygamy, Hamas committed itself in its charter to waging an armed struggle to obliterate Israel. In 1989, an Israeli court convicted Yassin of ordering Hamas militants to kidnap and kill two Israeli soldiers. Then, in 1994, Hamas launched a wave of suicide bombings that would last, off and on, until 2005.[12]

Hamas's uncompromising approach, especially after the 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords, split the Islamic Movement of Israel. While the Islamic Movement's founder, Abdullah Darwish, supported the accords, a hard-line faction within the group identified with Hamas and consequently rejected the Accords. Sheikh Ra'ed Salah and Sheikh Kemal Khatib, the mayors of Umm al-Fahm and Kafr Kanna, respectively, led the hard-line faction, which was called the "Northern Branch" because its leaders came disproportionately from the Triangle region in Northern Israel.[13] Darwish and Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsour led the more moderate Southern Branch.

This schism led to serious internal divisions within the movement. In 1996, Sheikh Ra'ed Salah advocated that all Arab citizens of Israel boycott elections.[14] By contrast, Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsour of the Southern Branch ran for elections together with the Arab Democratic Party (now known as the "United Arab List"). Both Salah and Sarsour have been reported to support the eventual establishment of an Islamic Caliphate.[15] Yet when Sarsour sought to run for the Knesset in the March 2006 elections, he argued that he was misquoted, and the Central Elections Committee permitted his list to participate.[16] Conversely, Sheikh Salah has confidently declared that Israel "will not survive another 20 years," and that Jerusalem will soon be transformed into the world capital of Islam.[17] Sheikh Kamal Khatib, his second in command, has publicly wished that Israel would soon be replaced by an Arab state run by Islamic law (*sharia*) as part of a greater Islamic Caliphate.[18] Nev-

ertheless, the leaders of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement deny that they break the law and demand that the Israeli government accord them all their rights of citizenship.

Yet, during the 1990s, the Israeli Security Agency (GSS or Shin Bet) continuously closed down Northern Branch front organizations that were disguised as charities for transferring funds to Hamas. Then, incitement by the Islamic Movement played a part in perpetuating violence following the start of the second *intifada* in September 2000. Specifically, incitement by the group helped instigate clashes between Israeli Arabs and police in the Wadi Ara region in October 2000—clashes which left 13 protesters dead.[19] The Islamic Movement was also instrumental in encouraging the *intifada* itself, with Sheikh Ra'ed Salah declaring that "the time has come [for us] to start an Islamic Muslim Intifada."[20]

More recently, global *jihadism* has had a similar polarizing effect on some Israeli Arabs. In 2010, four Israeli Arabs were among those charged by Israeli authorities with establishing a terror cell and killing a taxi driver.[21] The accused had watched speeches of Osama bin Laden, and subsequently sought to join the fight against Jewish and Christian "infidels." Two of the plaintiffs had trained at an al-Qaeda camp in Somalia.[22]

Salah himself was arrested in 2003 and imprisoned for two years for raising millions of dollars for Hamas.[23] He served another five months in prison for assaulting a policeman in 2007 at one of his many rallies against a notional Israeli plot to demolish the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock.[24] In February 2011, he was arrested again, this time for setting trees on fire in protest of Jewish National Fund policies.[25] Then, in June 2011, the British Home Secretary, Theresa May, banned Salah from entering the country due to a history of "fostering hatred which might lead to intercommunity violence in the UK," and ordered his detention when he arrived in the country five days later.[26]

During the first *intifada*, the Islamic Movement established the "Islamic Relief Committee," the stated purpose of which was assistance to injured Palestinians. However, experts have pointed out that this and other initiatives by the movement serve a larger strategic objective. "This is the way they work, from [providing] medical services to religious services to even soccer teams," Yitzhak Reiter of Hebrew University has noted. "If the government doesn't give enough money for sports activities or sports facilities, they will construct them by donations and provide the services. By so doing, they will attract particularly the poor – those that don't have enough money to pay."[27]

Today, that influence is extensive—and growing. Orna Simchon, director of the Israeli Education Ministry's Northern District, told a June 2010 Knesset Education committee hearing that out of approximately 500 recognized unofficial schools and preschools operating in the northern district, approximately 100 are operated by the Islamic Movement, with students subjected to Islamist indoctrination.[28]

On April 5, 2011, the Northern and Southern branches of the Islamic Movement signed a reunification deal and agreed to resume collaborating on projects and coordinate their positions on various issues.[29] It is not yet clear whether the coordinated positions will follow the Southern Branch's more moderate line or the rejectionist line of the Northern Branch. As of May 2012, the reconciliation between the two branches appears to have stalled.

Israeli Arabs have collaborated with Palestinian terrorist groups from Gaza and the West Bank. In 1996, an Israeli Police anti-fraud unit discovered that two Israeli-Arab charities, one in Nazareth and the other in East Jerusalem, were distributing funds collected abroad to the families of Hamas suicide bombers.[30] Then, in the summer of 1999, Hamas recruited Israeli Arabs to bomb two buses in northern Israel.[31] In May 2011, the Haifa District Court sentenced an Israeli Arab to five years imprisonment for conspiring with his brother-in-law to gather an arms cache in Green Israel for Hamas.[32] Around the same time, Israeli authorities arrested two Arab residents of East Jerusalem holding Israeli citizenship who were planning to attack Jerusalem's Teddy Stadium during a Premier League soccer match. Authorities divulged that the two men had longstanding ties with Hamas.[33] Israeli Arabs have also collaborated with the smaller Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). In August 2008, Israeli authorities arrested a five-man PIJ cell, which included two Israeli Arabs, accused of planning an attack on an army checkpoint near Ramallah and of planning to assassinate Israeli pilots, scientists and university professors.[34] Then, in January 2013, Israeli police detained three members of a PIJ cell at the Eyal Junction in the Sharon region. The arrested, including two Palestinians from Jenin and an Israeli Arab from Tira, planned to kidnap an Israeli soldier and trade him for the release of incarcerated Palestinian terrorists.[35]

Legal counsel for incarcerated terrorists have sometimes served as middlemen, illegally conveying messages between terrorist detainees and their colleagues outside of prison. For instance, in April 2011, Israeli authorities arrested four Arab-Israeli lawyers, one from Acre and three from Umm al-Fahm,[36] for passing messages between prisoners and the Gaza-based leader of *Mahajat El Kuds*, a group with close ties to PIJ.[37]

Israeli Arabs likewise have proven susceptible to external influence from foreign media and foreign Islamist groups. Now ubiquitous satellite dishes enable Israeli Muslims to watch inflammatory Arab television channels, from al-Jazeera to Hezbollah's al-Manar. In February 2002, the head of Israel's General Security Service reported to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that Iran had succeeded in penetrating a minority of Israel's Arab population.[38] According to Israeli Security Agency (ISA) assessments, following Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah—an Iranian proxy—has also focused upon penetrating the Israeli Arab sector. Hezbollah sees Israeli Arabs as advantageous operatives because they have the advantage of "being Israeli citizens" who enjoy freedom of movement and accessibility to targets, including security targets; they are familiar with the language and culture, hold social and economic contacts with Israelis, and also have access to both the Territories and abroad."[39] Most of the infrastructure operated by the group exists in the West Bank and, to a lesser degree, in the Gaza Strip. While the majority of its activities are affiliated with Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Hezbollah also cooperates with Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).[40]

Even al-Qaeda has attempted to penetrate Israel; according to the IDF's Southern Command, the bin Laden network has attempted to penetrate the Egyptian border in order to establish terrorist cells in Israel.[41] In July 2008, Israeli Police and the Shin Bet arrested six Israeli-Arabs, two of whom were students at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, with alleged links to the al-Qaeda terror network who planned to assassinate U.S. President George W. Bush during his trip to Israel.[42] The conspirators had been in contact with al-Qaeda over the Internet with the purpose of establishing a terror cell in Israel.[43] There likewise have been cases where Israeli Arabs have aligned themselves with global *jihad* after exposure to Islamist material on the Internet.[44]

This trend has generated growing worries among Israeli policymakers. In 2007, Yuval Diskin, the head of Israel's General Security Service (GSS), was reported to have warned the Prime Minister's Office that Israeli Arabs were rapidly becoming a "strategic threat."[45] The GSS report said that the "threat of Arab irredentism exceeded that of any external danger including Iran,"[46] and that Israel's Arab population was a "genuine long-range danger to the Jewish character and very existence of the State of Israel."[47]

The Arab Spring has dramatically and negatively impacted Israeli security. First and foremost, the overthrow of the Mubarak regime in Egypt in February 2011 undermined law and order in the Sinai Peninsula, enabling al-Qaeda to establish a base there. As of May 2011, senior Egyptian security

officials were estimating that over 400 al-Qaeda militants were then operating in the Sinai Peninsula.[48] The growing Islamist presence in the Sinai has coincided with increasing terrorism originating from the territory. In August 2011, a cross border attack by militants belonging to the Mujahideen Shoura Council from the Environs of Jerusalem, an al-Qaeda affiliate founded in 2011 and operational in Gaza and Sinai, killed eight Israelis. The Mujahideen Shoura Council has since launched rocket attacks on Sderot in August 2012[49] and March 2013, during President Obama's visit to Israel,[50] as well as Eilat in April 2013.[51]

To prevent future infiltration into Israel from the Sinai the Israeli government is building a steel barrier across its southern border from Gaza to Eilat.[52] Jerusalem expects to complete the barrier's construction in early 2013.[53] Attacks on infrastructure have likewise intensified; as of April 2012, Islamic militants had carried out at least fourteen attacks on the Egyptian pipeline passing through the Sinai that previously provided Israel with 40 percent of its natural gas.[54]

As the Syrian Civil War drags on, Israel increasingly fears the prospect of jihadists infiltrating the Golan Heights, which Israel conquered from Syria in the Six Day War in 1967 and annexed in 1981. Syrian Government troops have largely abandoned the Israeli-Syrian border, enabling opposition forces, including jihadists, to fill the void. In March 2013, fighters identifying themselves as the "Martyrs of Yarmouk" kidnapped 21 Filipino members of the UN Disengagement Observer Force, which monitors the buffer zone established between Syria and Israel after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Ultimately, the Filipino peacekeepers were released unharmed.[55] However, to prevent terrorists from infiltrating Israel or a torrent of Syrian refugees fleeing the civil war, Israel is constructing a steel fence along the Israeli-Syrian border like the one along the Egyptian border.[56]

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

On the eve of Israel's 64th Independence Day in 2012, the State of Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) reported an Israeli population of 7.88 million. About 20.6 percent of that population was Arab[57] and 17 percent was Muslim.[58] However, the Muslim total fertility rate per woman (TFR) exceeds the Jewish TFR. In 2012, the Jewish Israeli TFR stood at 3.0, while the Muslim (TFR) equaled 3.5.[59] And, a 2009 Bank of Israel report found that, as of 2007, the Muslim Bedouin of the Negev boasted a TFR of 5.62.[60] Israel's Muslim population is concentrated in the Negev, East Jerusalem, the Galilee and Wadi Ara. Large patches of these localities already have Muslim majorities. But, the demographic trend is changing due to the high fertility

rate of ultra-orthodox Jews. While 67.4 percent of newborns were Jewish and 26.2 percent were Muslim in 2000, in 2012 the numbers were 73.5 percent and 21.0 percent respectively.[61] Nevertheless, the percentage of the population that is Muslim is growing.

These demographic changes are taking place as Israeli Arabs become increasingly alienated from the state. Seemingly indicative of this shift, a University of Haifa study conducted in May 2009 found that only 41 percent of Israeli Arabs recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state; in 2003, 65.6 percent had. It also noted that Holocaust denial cuts across all class sectors, with 40.5 percent of respondents believing that the Holocaust did not take place. In 2003, 28 percent made the same claim.[62] The study's author suggested that through denying the Holocaust, many Israeli Arabs believe they are expressing opposition to Israel's existence.[63]

Similarly, a poll released by Haifa University professor Sami Smooha in 2011 found that over 62 percent of Arab Israelis said that Jewish Israelis are "foreigners who do not fit in in this region, and they will eventually leave the country."[64] Two-thirds of Arab Israelis oppose defining Israel as the Jewish state and 30 percent want the state to disappear altogether.[65] Yet, a June 2008 poll by Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government found that 77 percent of Israeli Arabs surveyed would rather remain in their native land as Israeli citizens than reside in any other country in the world.[66] Former Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman proposes creating a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank and trading Israeli Arab towns, such as Umm al-Fahm, bordering the West Bank for Israeli settlements in the West Bank. But, a 2000 poll found that even in Umm al-Fahm, the headquarters of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement, 83 percent of the population wanted to remain under Israeli jurisdiction. And of those who wanted to remain in Israel, 54 percent gave their preference to remain in a democracy with high living standards as the reason.[67]

However, Israeli neglect of the Bedouin communities in the Negev and difficulty transitioning from a nomadic to sedentary lifestyle has spawned increasing alienation from the state that the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement is exploiting. When the military planned a parade through Rahat, Israel's largest Bedouin town, to celebrate Israel's 63rd independence day in 2011, the mayor of the town, Faiz Abu Sahiban, who belongs to the Islamic Movement, objected, preferring to commemorate the 1948 exodus of the Palestinian refugees instead.[68] This came in the wake of violent resistance to the Israeli government demolishing a mosque built illegally on public land in 2010 by the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement.[69] The Northern

Branch is increasingly penetrating the Negev and successfully discouraging Bedouin from joining the IDF. And, as the Islamic Movement has gained control of more town councils in Bedouin areas, they have been able to use their authority to obstruct the hiring of Bedouin who serve in the military.[70] Concerns that Bedouin alienation might breed violence increased when two Bedouin from the Negev, Mahmoud Abu Quider, 24, and his 21-year-old brother Samah, confessed in January 2013 to planning to fire rockets, mount a suicide bombing at the Beersheba Central Bus Station, and launch other attacks. Before their arrest, the brothers built several explosive devices and traded drugs for an IDF soldier's rifle.[71]

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

A number of former Israeli cabinet ministers, among them former Defense Minister Moshe Arens and Infrastructure Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, have echoed the findings of the Orr Commission, a panel of inquiry established by the Israeli government to investigate the events surrounding clashes that precipitated the second *intifada*. The Commission report stated that successive governments have neglected the Israeli-Arab sector, and Ben-Eliezer has warned that a continuation of this policy may lead to an "internal *intifada*," or uprising against Israel.[72] Similarly, Mohammad Darawshe, Co-Executive Director of the Abraham Fund Initiatives, has advocated greater integration and equality for Israeli-Arabs.[73] To date, however, the Israeli government has not done so; although it has invested economically in the Israeli-Arab sector, it has yet not begun a coordinated approach of integrating Israeli-Arabs into Israeli civil society.[74]

Israel has failed to factor in Islamism when formulating its strategic policies. Officially, Israel sees the issue of the political-legal status of Israeli-Arabs as a purely domestic matter without strategic implications. At the same time, however, it has traditionally refused to recognize Israeli Arabs as a national minority possessing collective rights apart from specific cases (such as in the education system and family law, each religious community being subject to its own clerical elite). This opening in the education system has enabled Israeli Arabs to cultivate a separate national identity—and created an ideological space in which Islamism can increasingly take root.

The education system in Israel has emerged as a notable ideological battleground in this regard. The country's Education Ministry has attempted to counter Islamism by banning the teaching of the *Nakba* ("catastrophe," the common Arabic reference for the establishment of Israel in 1948) in schools; by forcing students to sing *Hatikva* (the Israeli national anthem); and by encouraging military and national service as a criterion for rewarding

schools and staff. Israeli Arab leaders have voiced opposition to the campaign to promote Israeli-Arab participation in national service, terming it a veiled attempt by the government to erode the community's sense of unity.[75] And, many mosques refuse to conduct funeral services for Muslim Israeli soldiers killed in combat.[76]

The Israeli government has long hoped that Islamist tendencies among Israeli Arabs would be mitigated by the liberal-democratic culture of the state. Today, that assumption is being sorely tested, as Israeli Arabs become increasingly receptive to—and involved in—Islamist activities within Israel.

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