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### De-terrorising the Palestinian national struggle: the roadmap to peace

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## ARTICLE

# De-terrorising the Palestinian national struggle: the roadmap to peace

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This article follows the representation of Palestinian nationalism as a history of terrorism. This representation was produced in the Israeli media and academia, and broadcast by the state's political elite in international arenas. In the West, this image was accepted in many circles and affected the chances of the Palestinians having a fair hearing in the peace negotiations which began after the 1967 war. The article follows the construction of the equation of Palestinian nationalism with terrorism, assesses its impact on the peace process, and suggests the deconstruction of this narrative as the best way forward in future negotiations.

**Keywords:** terrorism; Palestinian nationalism; Zionism; Israeli army; FATAH; HAMAS; Palestine; peace process

## Introduction

The peace process in Israel and Palestine has been stuck in a deadlock for a very long time. Ever since the collapse of the 1993 Oslo peace accord, new initiatives have ended in total failure. The official Israeli explanation for this debacle as well as for the demise of previous reconciliation attempts can be summed up in two words: 'Palestinian Terrorism' (Steinberg 2002). This term, 'Palestinian Terrorism' covers any Palestinian political position and action that is unacceptable to Israel. Even those Palestinians who are not at present depicted as terrorists were so, according to this allegation, in the not too distant past (people such as Mahmoud Abbas, for instance) and can easily become ones if they do not dance according to the Israeli tune. This narrative can be found on the Israeli Knesset website where the research department of the IDF's Intelligence Service jointly with leading academics in the country has prepared for the politicians in 2004 a report on the 'The Terror Organizations Fighting against Israel' (Ben David 2004).

Such a portrayal is fully accepted by the Israeli media and 'substantiated' academically by the Israeli academy. More importantly, this description is also endorsed by Western Governments involved in the peace process since it was first attempted in the late 1960s. These international Western actors have occasionally rebuked Israel for obstructing the peace process, but the Jewish State's positions or actions were never condemned as acts of terror or terrorism; at worst, they were 'bad decisions'. A quarter of the *global* outfits described as terrorists by the US State Department are Palestinians (US State Department 2005). Meanwhile, Mearshimer and Walt (2006) have documented and presented what they call 'a strong prejudice against criticising Israel' in American administrations since 1967.

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This characterization is so gripping that it leaves very few chapters in Palestinian history outside the world of ‘terrorism’ and hardly absolves any of the organisations and personalities that made up the Palestinian national movement from the accusation of being terrorists. The demonisation of Palestinian nationalism as a terrorist entity and the condemnation of its resistance policies against the occupation as acts of terrorism, while vindicating Israeli crimes and atrocities as acts of self-defence, is one of the most crucial imbalances which impede peace in Israel and Palestine. This article attempts to trace the roots of this demonised Israeli image of the Palestinian struggle as ‘terrorism’, deconstruct its sources, and analyse its impact on the failed peace process in recent years. As this journal focuses on the critique of scholarly theoretisation and conceptualisation of terror and terrorism, it is probably useful to clarify from the outset that the discussion here of ‘terror’ and ‘terrorism’ is not conducted within this framework. ‘Terror’, ‘terrorism’, and ‘terrorist’ appear in this article as negative nouns and adjectives which intuitively and politically exclude those described in such a way from a legitimate role in the normative and conventional world, and more specifically for our case study, from a legitimate place around the negotiation table in Israel and Palestine.

This is thus more about the public relations (PR) of terror and terrorism and less about its essence. There are some parallels between some of the typologies suggested over the years by the experts in the field – especially those centred on motivations for terrorism (Fleming *et al.* 1988, pp. 153–196). However, the impressive scientific typologies of terrorism in recent years should not obfuscate the ethical discussion about terror: namely, its depiction in simplistic terms as violent means employed by political groups for achieving their goals at all cost, even that of innocent lives. The desperate use of such means can be explained by a rainbow of motives stretching from mental instability to victimisation of the most brutal kind. Or, put differently, it is a spectrum between violence for the sake of violence on the one hand and violence as a last resort, on the other. From this perspective, it seems that the Israeli perception of Palestinian violence is of terror for the sake of terror, or as a product of cultural pathology. A typical analysis is that of Shaul Shay in which he depicts Palestinian terrorism as a strategy that could be satisfied in the same way that what he calls ‘secular terrorism’ could be answered, namely, by removing the social and political causes of the initial violence. The roots, Shay explains, are in tenth century Islamic internal terrorism (Shay 2003, pp. 214–225).

This analysis was supported by Tom Friedman of the *New York Times*: ‘Let us be clear: Palestinians have adopted suicide bombing as a strategic choice, not out of desperation. This threatens all civilizations because if suicide bombing is allowed to work in Israel, then, like hijacking and airplane bombing, it will be copied and will eventually lead to a bomber strapped to a nuclear device’. Why are they doing it? Because they are driven by ‘a narcissistic rage that they have lost sight of the basic truth civilization is built on: the sacredness of every human life’, as, for instance, of course, Israel and the United States (Friedman 2002). Ariel Sharon confirmed this rhetoric in 2003: ‘We are confronting Terror for 120 years, we once called it Arab Terror and it is now Palestinian Terror’ (Sharon 2003). This terror was also analysed as a natural product of culture in the Israeli educational system (Ministry of Education 2006). A less biased view of Palestinian violence, including one which accepts some Palestinian operations as terrorism, describes it as a last resort out of desperation due to a very brutal oppression.

The reference to Palestinian history and nationalism as ‘terrorism’ in this most negative way can be better understood in the context of general knowledge production in Israel about the Palestinians and the Palestine reality in the past and the present. Knowledge about Palestinians is produced in several sites in Israel: in the government, in the

academia, the media, in the army, and in the NGOs of civil society. All these agencies have taken part in constructing the negative image mentioned above. They have provided as such, a 'scientific explanation' for equating Palestinian nationalism with 'terrorism'. This explanation is unpacked in this article in three parts. The first explanation is historical – the Palestinians were always engaged in terrorism against the Zionist movement and have not ceased to do so; their propensity to engage in terrorism grew exponentially. The burden of proof for this part of the explanation was cast on the shoulders of professional historiography in Israel.

The second explanation seeks to understand why despite this historical proclivity, the PLO agreed to enter the Oslo peace process. The condition of Israel for this entry was that the PLO would forsake its 'terrorist' policies and reform its 'terrorist' nature. The explanation here is that the PLO has not been transformed and therefore returned to old habits which are the main Israeli explanation for the demise of the Oslo accords. The task of explaining this part was entrusted to the hands of the security octopus' spokespersons, with the help of some academics, who spoke its words of wisdom through a very loyal and obedient media.

Finally, there is a need to explain why in the twenty-first century there is no hope for peace, and therefore, no need for changing basic Israeli attitudes and policies. The answer is that terrorism is even more intrinsic than before to the Palestinian reality, as can be seen by the emergence of HAMAS as a leading force in Palestinian politics. In other words, Palestinian terrorism is not only part of history or political culture as was the case in the past of the PLO, but is part of religion. The Islamisation of Palestinian terror indicates an even deeper association with terror or terrorism as a way of life, not just a strategy or a tactic. The assignment here was given to the Israeli orientalists who toiled, especially after 9/11, to reaffirm in the public mind in Israel and abroad the association between Islam and Palestine, Islam and Terror or more specifically 'the War against Terror' with the Israeli struggle against Palestinian nationalism.

### **Historicising Palestinian terrorism, 1882–2009**

#### ***Positivism and ideology in Zionist historiography***

Most of those who write on the history of Palestine and the Palestinians in the Israeli academy do it from within their focus on Zionist or Jewish history. Conceptually, as I have tried to show elsewhere, this historiography subscribes to an impossible combination of positivist and ideological approaches to history: the facts, believed to be found exclusively in political archives, are treated as the basis for proving the validity of the ideologically based Zionist narrative (Pappe 1995). The professionalisation of Zionist historiography took place when Zionism had already appeared as a significant social and political force in Palestine, and Israeli historiography, its successor, was formulated during the early years of statehood. As in the case of other national movements that have established nation-states, the professionalisation of history meant the accessibility of political archives for scholarly research. However, when the archives were opened, there was no disagreement between researchers and politicians on what should be found there. They both sought the roots of Jewish nationalism in Palestine long before the creation of the movement and the colonisation of Palestine in 1882. A pre-1882 Jewish Palestine meant a de-Arabised one, or, an empty land as long as the Jews were in exile. Some were content to seek them in the seventeenth century; others went back as far as biblical times. Ben Zion Dinur, one of the dominant Zionist historians in the pre- and early State years perceived the quest for roots as both professional and ideological, ignoring ipso facto the inherent contradiction of such

an approach. The Israeli historians, he asserted proudly, ‘fused the scientific mastery of the material with a clear and correct understanding of Zionism’ (Katz 1950, p. 93). The contemporary Israeli historian, Shmuel Almog, has remarked that this was a natural need of Jewish nationalism: ‘Zionism needed history in order to prove to Jews wherever they were that they all constitute one entity and that there is historical continuity from Israel and Judea in ancient times until modern day Judaism’ (Almog 1978, p. 202).

The Israeli academic historiography of the land of Palestine was institutionalised already in the pre-state period when a ‘Jerusalem School’ emerged in the Hebrew University in the 1930s, constructing the chronicles of the People of Israel with the Land of Israel as its epicentre. When scholarly proof for a conscious recognition of the Land of Israel as the focus of Judaism was inadequate – there was insufficient empirical evidence for that – an unconscious recognition was claimed retrospectively. Very little has changed in Israel since. In the two leading journals in Hebrew on Zionist history, *Cathedra* and *Ha-Ziyonut*, many of the articles published are following this positivist and ideological vein. The only difference is that early Zionist historians showed a proclivity for macrohistorical works, whereas the new generation of Israeli historians have provided us with an abundance of microhistorical and empirical works. The present Israeli historiography of the Mandatory period (1918–1948) is a case in point. It combines its function as a national educational tool with a claim to scholarship that strictly adheres to the positivist rules of scientific research (this was presented as the main purpose of the journal *Cathedra* in its opening volume; see Kolatt 1976).

The Zionist attempt to combine positivist methodology and committed historiography generated a strong conviction that the Zionist historical narrative was indeed the truth. Since it was based on sound scientific evidence, it could withstand the challenge of Palestinian or non-Zionist narratives. The refusal of professional historians in Israel to seriously consider methodological and theoretical questions, such as the role of power in knowledge production, bred an impressive accumulation of empirical data on the history of Zionism without any critical analysis of its essence. Analysis is confined to the deeds of the political–ideological elite. The basic behavioural paradigms according to which this elite operated, or the impact of the historians’ ideological commitment on the research, are left unattended. For the most part, Zionist historiography is an admixture of an ideological paradigm, scholarly ethnocentricity, and impressive empirical bookkeeping. From this perspective, as we shall presently see, the indigenous population of Palestine constituting 90% of the population in the late nineteenth century and 66% in 1948 appears as a constant nuisance and an obstacle to the progress of Zionism – very much as do the desert, the mosquitoes, and the climate. Empirical bookkeeping here meant recording every Palestinian act against Zionism from very early on as terrorism.

This approach stems from the recognition of the importance of historical narrative to the political and moral struggle against the Palestinians. The historical narrative as constructed by the academic system is the principal tool for cultivating and preserving national collective memory on the one hand, and denying the memory of the rival national movement (Gur-Ze’ev and Pappé 2003, pp. 93–108). Political archives are treated by historians as shrines of Truth. Hence, in Popperian terms, the Zionist historical narrative can withstand the test of empirical and logical falsification, and as long as the test is conducted in an objective, ideologically free way, it is considered scientifically validated. Researchers, teachers, the Israeli educational system, those responsible for national ceremonies and emblems, and the canonical literature have asserted that there is scientific and empirical proof justifying the Zionist claim to Palestine. This attempt to prove the validity of an ideological truth on the basis of a positivist – namely, objective – epistemological and

methodological claim was not challenged until the late 1980s. From this perspective, there was no Palestine or Palestinians, but only Arabs who terrorised the people who returned to redeem a lost and empty homeland in the late nineteenth century. In the last decade of the twentieth century, these assumptions were seriously challenged and debunked by what became known as the 'new history' and post-Zionist scholarship of Israel (Pappe 2002, pp. 3–20).

This challenge was an attempt to deconstruct both basic paradigms that informed traditional and mainstream Zionist historiography and rewrite some of its main chapters, especially that of the 1948 war. The result was a short-lived debate about historiography in general, and Zionist historiography in particular, that abated with the collapse of the peace process in 2000. The new history of 1948 was no more than two or three books challenging the accepted Zionist narrative of a voluntary Palestinian flight in 1948, prodded by hostile Arab states wishing to destroy the newly born Israel that was just recognised by the UN partition resolution of November 1947 – a resolution accepted by the Jews and rejected by force by the Arabs (Shlaim 2007, pp. 139–160).

The new books revealed an intentional policy of expulsion and documented the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Zionist movement in 1948 with various degrees of conviction. I choose not to dwell too extensively on this critique, as it has died and its short appearance throughout the 1990s is now an anecdote and not, as was predicted by this writer and others, a prelude for a new period in knowledge production in Israel. I have summarised the reasons for its demise elsewhere (Pappe 2002a). In 2009, what I have described above as the essence of Zionist traditional historiography is still dominating the historiography of the land and in it the story of 'Palestinian terrorism'.

But there was one lasting impact on Zionist historiography in Israel that is relevant to our discussion. For a very long period, there was no need for those articulating the traditional Zionist view to clarify their positions towards the past. The appearance of 'post-Zionist' scholarship forced the gatekeepers of traditional Zionism to reassert their historiographical interpretations as well as their moral convictions. Collective memory and moral self-perception are closely linked to each other and it is no wonder that a post-Zionist critique on the past triggered a public debate from which one can learn much about the present position of Traditional Zionism on history. This position feeds the policies of the present and will affect the posture of the future. Several of the participants from the traditional Zionist camp themselves uttered, albeit disparagingly, that the only merit they see in the post-Zionist scholarship is that it has compelled them to redefine and update more clearly their perceptions of the Zionist and Israeli past (Friling 2003, pp. 11–13). Traditional Zionist historiography in the beginning of the twenty-first century is back in the realm and informing public and political views on the local and regional reality around it.

### ***Terrorising Palestinian history***

With its fusion of ideological commitment and empirical research, traditional Zionist historiography has assumed that any Palestinian resistance to any Zionist presence in Palestine is Palestinian terrorism. Hence, Israeli historians very industriously recorded such acts of resistance from very early on and laid them on a chronological line of exponential escalation. Described in a very poetic way by Anita Shapira, one of the doyens of Zionist historiography, as the 'Dove's Sword', the Zionist narrative describes a reluctant use of force against an escalating Palestinian terrorism (see Shapira 1992). It is not clear from this narrative why it escalates. Probably, one should assume that this is the nature of this kind of terrorism; it grows in numbers, increases its cruelty, and comes in ever-swelling waves. It is hard even to find a speculation that may connect at least Zionist and later

Israeli reaction to the first violence as an explanation for further and more widespread fierce violence. In the tradition of empiricism without analysis in the service of ideology, Palestinian terrorism comes out of the blue – in the land without people against the landless people who returned to redeem it (this is still the version today of the official material in high schools).

Non-Zionist narratives view Zionism as a colonialist project – or at least a fusion of colonialism and nationalism – and hence, depict Palestinian resistance as anti-colonialism and not as terrorism. Its violence is connected to the colonisation, as well as to the retaliation against early resistance. There is therefore, a direct parallel between the expansion of the colonisation and dispossession of Palestine on the one hand, and the level and scope of the Palestinian resistance, on the other (I have summarised this view elsewhere; see Pappé 2006a). However, if one defines, as traditional Zionist historiography does, all resistance as terrorism, it becomes Terror for the sake of Terror.

### ***Pre-state terrorism***

There is a tactical debate in the Israeli academy about who constitutes the first Zionist victim of Palestinian ‘terrorism’. But one point is consensual: the Zionist colonization that began in the late nineteenth century was a just and moral return of the Jews to their homeland, and hence, any resistance of the locals to that ‘return’ is terrorism. In many sources, a Rabi who arrived in 1811 for a religious pilgrimage and was ‘Zionised’ by mainstream historiography later on is the first victim of Palestinian terrorism. He was killed over a feud over building materials in Jerusalem in 1851; but in the memorial site for victims of Terror, he appears as the first.

But in earnest, according to this narrative, it commenced after 1917. It began with the publication of the Balfour declaration, when Palestinian leaders and activists organised popular protests against the pro-Zionist policy of the new British rulers of the land. In 1920 and 1921, these protests, especially in urban centres such as Jerusalem and Jaffa, turned violent as a result of either Zionist provocation (as in the case of Jerusalem in April 1920), or a Palestinian rage and fanaticism that orientated them towards Jewish areas, as occurred in Jaffa in May 1921. These skirmishes are depicted in Israeli textbooks and scholarly works until today as the first waves of Palestinian terrorism (see Horowitz and Lissak 1977, Gorny 1985); a motiveless and unwarranted violence against innocent settlers. This kind of violence turns the Palestinians into terrorists in a period when none of them understood too well what Zionism was about, but when many of them were, nevertheless, outraged by the notion that their homeland was promised by Britain to foreign settlers.

When Palestinian protests under the leadership of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the leader of the Palestinians during the mandatory period, took a more systematic form in 1929, al-Amin too was described as ‘terrorist’. Al-Amin was trying to navigate between a wish to keep a cordial relationship with the mandatory powers on the one hand, and a fierce opposition that demanded more active resistance against the pro-Zionist policies of the British mandatory government, on the other. He and other leaders only in that time began to realise that the implementation of the Zionist dream of a Jewish state in Palestine could bring about partial or total dispossession of the indigenous local population. These leaders were stuck in the old Arab-Ottoman world in which they grew up and were ill-equipped to confront the twin forces of British imperialism and Zionist colonialism, despite the fact that they represented a decisive majority of the population in Palestine (almost 70% in 1929) (Pappé forthcoming). The ultimate Palestinian ‘terrorist’ of the mandatory period

was Izz al-Din al-Qassam who operated in the early 1930s. A Syrian preacher who was exiled to Palestine after taking part in the Syrian revolt against the French mandate there in 1925, he became an inspiring religious leader who motivated young, mainly unemployed dwellers of shanty towns around Haifa, to take up arms against Jewish settlers and British soldiers. His actions and some of his preaching – he did not write much – enthused many years later the military wing of HAMAS which is called the Battalions of Izz al-Din al-Qassam; these fighters decided to name their primitive and main weapon used against Israel the Qassam missiles.

Israeli scholarship very early on described al-Qassam as a ‘terrorist’ (Lachman 1982). More recent scholarship saw him as part of the Palestinian anti-colonialist movement, which like other liberation movements in the Middle East between the two world wars, had a strong Islamic inclination. The proper disciplinary framework for discussing al-Qassam’s actions is within the study of Arab nationalism in that particular historical juncture: moving between pan-Nationalism to territorial nationalism, and between liberal democratic models of nationalism to religious ones. An even wider and better field of discussion is local responses to modernisation and Western influences: moving from emulation to total rejection and a plethora of variations on the two themes in between.

This does not mean that Izz al-Din al-Qassam and those who followed him after he was killed by British soldiers in 1935 were not employing violence in order to advance their political goals. They used violence in order to liberate Palestine from Zionism and British domination and encouraged the local society to return to the values of Islam (which al-Qassam interpreted in a very strict manner) as the best means of defeating the enemy. Al-Qassam used guerrilla tactics of attacking colonies and British installations and fits the professional literature definition of ‘guerrilla’, not terrorist; guerrilla fighter being a ‘person taking part in a irregular war waged by small bands operating independently, often against, a stronger more organized force, with surprise attacks’ (McGraw-Hill dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms 1994 entry); a tactic thus employed to defeat a larger enemy as was used by the FLN in Algeria, the ANC in South Africa, and the Vietcong in Vietnam. After 9/11, one assumes that some scholars would have called it, in hindsight and out of touch with historical reality of the time, insurgency of a kind.

Needless to say that the romanticisation of al-Qassam by HAMAS that emerged as a significant political party in 1988 and even more so after winning the Palestinian elections in January 2006, intensified the wish in official and scholarly Israeli circles to lump together al-Qassam of the 1930s and HAMAS of the twenty-first century as case studies for the continued presence of Islamic Palestinian terrorism on the land of Israel.

Israeli and Zionist historiography is no kinder towards the big Arab Revolt: a popular uprising that took the British authorities in Palestine three years to quell between 1936 and 1939. The British army used the RAF and resorted to a repertoire of collective punishments as brutal as those the Israeli army would use years later in its 40 years of occupation. This was a complex resistance that included strikes, petitions, and guerrilla warfare. It also included attacks on some of the Jewish colonies and neighbourhoods in the mixed towns of Palestinians. In Israel, it appears usually as a chapter in the history of Palestinian terrorism (a view formed already by one of the leading Arabists of the Zionist movement, Ezra Danin, and adopted by generations of Israeli historians thereafter; see Danin 1944, 1981). In Palestinian and also in less biased updated historiography, this is the first and in many ways one of the few successful popular revolts of the Palestinians that achieved some political goal: it produced the British White Paper of 1939 that limited somewhat Jewish immigration and land purchase. This policy, and the emergence of



Nazism in Europe, led to a Jewish revolt against the British Empire – a heroic deed against all odds in Israeli historiography, and terrorism in the eyes of the Mandatory government of the day (and even longer after that, as leaders of the Irgun and the Stern Gang, such as Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, were regarded as *persona non grata* due to their terrorist past in the UK).

An episode in the life of al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni in which he flirted with the Nazi regime in Germany demonised him further, not just as a terrorist but also as a Nazi. In the Israeli *Encyclopaedia of the Holocaust*, his entry is the second largest next to that of Hitler. Amin was expelled by the British for his role in the revolt in 1937 and ever since looked for new allies, which pushed him into the hands of the Nazis and the Fascists. He resided in Berlin during the war and served the Nazi propaganda machine. This episode allows Israeli historiography to this day to infuse Islam, Nazism, and terrorism into the characterisation of the Palestinian resistance to Zionism and avoid a more serious deconstruction of his activities, as suggested above (see Laval 1996).

Finally, for that period, the Palestinian rejection of the UN partition resolution of 29 November 1947 is regarded as an act of terrorism as well; larger than previous ones and a genocidal one at that: intended to destroy the Jewish community in Palestine altogether. This is reiterated in an introduction to a new mainstream historiography published recently in Israel (Kadish 2004). That resolution, 181, was rejected by the Arab world at large for good reasons, although it may have been a political mistake in hindsight. The point to be made in this context, however, was that the Palestinian leadership was not engaged in any act of terror. It regarded the Zionist movement as a colonialist one and refused to partition the land with it. It was furious at being offered less than half of the land when it represented the indigenous people who constituted 66% of the overall population in November 1947 – whereas most of the Zionists arrived only a few years earlier and yet, were accorded not only a larger share of the country but a better one (Khalidi 2007).

The leadership organised a few days of demonstrations and strikes after the resolution was adopted; some of these deteriorated into riots – which hardly falls into the category of terrorism. It also endorsed the arrival of volunteers from neighbouring Arab countries who came to defend the Palestinians from what began to unfold as a Zionist plan to dispossess the Palestinians from any region in Palestine the Zionist movement deemed as part of a future Jewish State. As I have shown elsewhere, between February 1947 and February 1948, a small group of Zionist leaders and military commanders prepared a master plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine (Pappé 2006). The plan began to be executed in February 1948 with the expulsion of five Palestinian villages, and escalated in April 1948 when, under the watch of the British mandatory authorities and in some cases, with their silent consent, the Zionist forces expelled the Palestinians from the country's main urban centres. Almost 200,000 Palestinian were ousted in those operations. This was not terror. It was in many ways worse: ethnic cleansing; a policy which is today regarded as a crime against humanity by the international community.

As traditional Zionist historiography does not recognise the events of 1948 as ethnic cleansing, let alone as a crime against humanity, it is not surprising that it does not acknowledge the events which became known as al-Nakbah – the Catastrophe – as a motivating force behind Palestinian resistance after 1948. Critical post-Zionist and non-Zionist scholarship in Israel and neutral scholarship around the world, on the other hand, was quick to appreciate the enormity of the trauma suffered by the million Palestinians who found themselves in refugee camps, under harsh military rule in Israel and the Egyptian Gaza Strip and as second-rate citizens in the Jordanian West Bank.

It was not only the trauma that motivated the Palestinian struggle. It was fuelled also by the loss of 80% of the homeland to a process of dispossession that began in 1882 and was completed under the British mandate. Many factors fuelled the post-1948 resistance: the imposition of military rule on the Palestinians left in Israel, the adamant refusal to allow the repatriation of the refugees as sanctioned by the international community in the UN General Assembly Resolution 194 from 11 December 1948, and the total demolition of hundreds of Palestinian villages and urban centres and their transformation into Jewish colonies and recreational forests. The employment of violence in this struggle however, was less retributive, as it was, under the influence of liberation theologies and philosophies, an attempt to rebuild a lost identity and a community. In the Israeli narrative, the one still heard today officially and academically, it was Islam, Arab political culture, and external anti-Semitic incitement that produced Palestinian terrorism before and after 1948.

### *Palestinian 'terror' of the 1950s*

Palestinian refugees attempted to infiltrate the Jewish state and look for lost herds, uncollected crops, and abandoned properties. Very few came for revenge. In the mid 1950s, this energy was channelled into the Fidayain movement, encouraged and organised at first by the Muslim Brotherhood branches in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, but later turning into an independent national movement trying to recover from the trauma of the 1948 Nakbah. Out of these beginnings emerged in the late 1950s the FATAH movement. As the principal independent national outfit, it eventually took over the less genuine and more cynical organisation created by the Arab world to redeem Palestine: the PLO. The takeover occurred in 1968 after the failure of the pan-Arab effort to defeat Israel in the June 1967 war.

Israeli historiography lumps together the sporadic and desperate acts of the expelled and the guerrilla warfare of the FATAH as acts of terrorism. It is presented as a direct continuation of the Palestinian terror in the pre-state period. A summary of this point of view can be found in English among other works in a book by the pro-Zionist novelist and essayist, Jillian Becker, who relied heavily on Israeli sources and perspectives (Becker 1984). Some Palestinian actions were directed against innocent citizens, such as what is considered the worst of its kind, the attack on a bus on 17 March 1954, in which 11 passengers were murdered. Conceptually, professional historiography would regard such an act as 'terrorism', but would not depict a whole national movement as a 'terrorist organisation' for these individual acts.

By 1954, the Israeli retaliation policy against the more innocent infiltrations was quite known: shooting on sight any Palestinian trying to enter or return to Palestine. State policies of any kind, even as brutal as that, of course, are not mentioned in Israel apart from the work of the revisionist historian Benny Morris, in the days when he was still a critic of Zionist policies and before he endorsed again the propagandist line of mainstream academia (Shavit 2004). The depiction of Palestinian resistance on Israel's borders as pure terrorism was used by the Israeli government in 1956 to justify the collusion with Britain and France in the Suez operation. More updated historiography has revealed that the principal objectives of this operation were a wish to topple Gamal Abdul Nasser who was a thorn in the thighs of Britain (due to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal), France (for his support to the FLN), and Israel (for his attempts to radicalise Israel's more favourable states in the Arab world: the Hashemite regimes of Jordan and Iraq, as well as Lebanon) (Shlaim 2007a).

***The PLO: epitomising Palestinian terrorism***

On 2 June 1964, the Arab League founded the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on the basis of the old Arab Higher Committee which was the official Palestinian representative body during the later parts of the mandatory period. The PLO gave its blessing to the FATAH movement which began military actions against Israel in January 1965. The objective of both the PLO and FATAH was to restore Palestine to its pre-1948 status by creating a secular democratic state in ex-mandatory Palestine to which the Palestinian refugees would return. An unhelpful stated goal was to demand the return of Zionist settlers from a certain period (it varied from 1917 to 1947) to their countries of origins.

The acts of FATAH in 1965 and 1966 were quite limited: detonating a pump which was used by the Israelis to divert the water of the river Jordan for Israel's use at the expense of Lebanon and Syria (hence the logistic support of these two countries for the operation), and detonating small devices near houses in Jerusalem which caused slight wounds to five residents (October 1966). Against these very unimpressive acts, one of which fits the definition of terrorism, Israel retaliated with a series of bloody operations against Palestinian villages and refugee camps in Jordan, the Gaza Strip, and in the West Bank in which dozens of Palestinians were killed. Ariel Sharon wrote in 2003 that these Israeli operations were a formative chapter in the struggle against Palestinian terrorism (Sharon 2003). Israeli operations culminated in the massive killing and destruction of the large village of Samoa' in the West Bank on 13 November 1966 (for a typical narration of this operation as part of terrorism, see Oren 2002, pp. 34–35).

***The struggle against the occupation as terror***

The occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in June 1967 by Israel and the defeat of the pan-Arab military forces sharpened the focus of the Palestinian national movement. In between 1967 and 1974, under the influence of Third World revolutionary theories and dogmas, armed struggle was deemed the exclusive means of ending the Israeli occupation and even liberating Palestine as a whole. In practice, the movement was engaged in an abortive attempt to organise a popular revolt against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and a more successful effort to attract world public opinion to the plight of the Palestinians.

The armed struggle in those years resorted to every possible tactic in the book: terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and direct military confrontation with the superior army of Israel. Terrorism was manifested mainly by the hijacking of airplanes: a speciality of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (Naif Hawatmeh's organisation) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (headed by George Habash). Here for the first time, several Palestinian groups associated directly with what the professional literature would define without hesitations as a pure terrorist group, such as the Baader Meinhof gang and the Red Army band in Japan, but also with other liberation movements such as ETA and the IRA. This was, however, a short-term association and mode of operation that is highlighted as crucial and pivotal in Israeli historiography (Katz 2003). The murder by a Red Army member of 25 passengers in Ben Gurion airport, still called then Lod Airport, was the most notorious operation of that kind and undoubtedly an act of pure terrorism. This chapter ended with growing tension between the PLO and the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan on whose territory the units trained and operated. When as a result of that deterioration (ending with the massacre of thousands of Palestinians by the Jordanians in September 1970) the PLO moved to Lebanon, this kind of activity decreased.

The guerrilla operations included an attempt to infiltrate into the occupied West Bank in order to organise the popular resistance there. It also consisted of similar operations after 1970 from Lebanon which targeted civilians in Israel for kidnap and negotiation purposes: quite often ending in disaster and the murder of civilians either because of an aggressive Israeli salvage action where prudence dictated further negotiations, or the callousness of the kidnapers. This was the result of the infamous operation in the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich and the one in Maalot where a school was taken and in the salvage operation, 22 children and three adults were killed. (One has to say that today Israeli scholars do refer to this as a failed salvage operation, but nonetheless, present it as a classical case study of Palestinian barbarity and terrorism; see Wiesel 2000, p. 74, Netanyahu 2001, Alon 2006, p. 123). Another part of the guerrilla efforts was a war of attrition in which the PLO bombarded Israeli settlements in the Jordan valley that stopped after September 1970.

After the Munich operation, the Israeli Mossad initiated its own campaign of terror with appropriate names, including Operation 'The Wrath of God' (killing PLO personnel in Europe) and more cynical names, such as 'the Spring of Youth' (the assassination of PLO leaders in Beirut in 1973). Direct military confrontation was against Israeli retaliation operations, the most famous of which was the Karameh operation which the Israelis called *Mivtza Tofet*, Operation Hell, which is indeed what awaited them unexpectedly from a very brave Palestinian and Jordanian resistance (March 1968).

The balance sheet of Palestinian actions was a failure: not one square inch was liberated. There were achievements though; the PLO became the sole and authentic liberation movement. Losing the battle of liberation but winning the struggle for legitimacy transformed the PLO's strategy. In the mid 1970s, the organisation developed what its commanders called the 'stages plan': a realistic political plan accepting the failure of a pure military strategy and opting for a diplomatic effort and solution for the conflict with Israel.

This pragmatism was not reciprocated by Israel. On the ground, the occupied territories became a mega-prison under strict military rule – which in many ways continues to this day. The Israeli discourse of peace was soon exposed as an attempt to conceal the vast Judaisation of these Palestinian territories while enclaving the Palestinian population in the rest of the territories. With time, the Palestinians would be offered to turn these enclaves into a state and declare an end of conflict, which they would refuse.

This pragmatism was also not reciprocated in the continued depiction of the PLO as a mammoth terrorist organisation, at least until the Oslo Accords signed in October 1993. The PLO was employing all kinds of means, including what would be defined by scholars as terrorism when either they are used by non-state actors or states (see the Israeli scholarly description of the PLO, terrorism, and Oslo in the entry 'PLO' in the popular Internet encyclopaedia in Israel, Ynet, of the most read daily *Yedioth Ahronoth*). Since the beginning of the occupation, Palestinian paramilitary activity included attacks on three different kinds of targets: the military, the settlers, and the society of Israel. The latter only appeared in earnest after the failure of the first uprising, the first Intifada, which erupted in 1987. There are hardly any academic analyses of the first Intifada in Israel, but there are journalistic assessments that appeared as books and represent the mainstream perception of it. Although it consisted mainly of stone throwing and mass demonstrations and even successful short-term takeovers of villages and neighbourhoods, the more popular books still summed it up as another chapter of terrorism (Schiff and Yaari 1990). Later scholarship written under the influence of the short-lived Oslo accords, which produced for a while a more critical Israeli scholarship, provided a more balanced view of this uprising (Mishal and Sella 2000).

It was brutally squashed by the army, but it also forced the international community to attempt in a more serious manner to solve the conflict and even prodded the more pragmatic

sections of Israeli politics to seek for the first time a political solution with the PLO. The solution did not come, however, and the occupation continued and deepened with a new kind of terror inflicted by settlers on the Palestinians alongside the official oppression by the military rule. (Despite the fact that some areas under the Oslo accord were now controlled by the Palestinian Authority, they were not immune from Israeli operations).

The collapse of the peace process escalated Palestinian operations against civilians. Some of these operations resulted in casualties also among the Palestinian citizens of Israel (as occurred when Hezbollah launched rockets into northern Israel in the summer of 2006). These operations against civilians were intensified with the escalation of Israeli brutality towards the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. The actions against the army and the settlers are not defined anywhere, apart from Israel, as terrorism, but those against civilians are. These particular operations were never endorsed by the Palestinian Authority, although against the background of demolished houses, massive killing of Palestinians, hundreds of humiliating checkpoints, expulsions and tortures, they enjoyed for a while wide support among the occupied population. Defining these actions as 'terrorism' does not indicate yet an understanding of its motivations or sources as a way of defusing it. This is where the historical assessment of the history of Palestinian nationalism and resistance as a history of terrorism fuses with the present scholarly, journalistic, and political analysis of Palestinian violence in Israel (and in certain sectors in the West) as terrorism. While the phenomena of suicide bombers, planting bombs in shopping malls and buses or spraying innocent civilians with gun fire, are acts of terrorism and are part of the repertoire of Palestinian resistance in recent years – even if it receded in recent years – analysing it can take more than one form. When it is related to a certain historical narrative and attributed to a certain essentialist orientalist perception of reality, it is seen as imminent, intrinsic, and in many ways, insoluble. When it is perceived instead as a reaction to an oppressive, inhuman reality, then the conclusion is that a change in this reality decreases its likelihood to persist.

When the Oslo accords were reached in October 1993, they were achieved against the background of fatigue from violence on both sides. It was based on a mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO and a very complicated, and in hindsight abortive, attempt to produce a modular peace solution that could not work. However, before the process fell apart, the PLO for the first time in its history and the history of Palestinian nationalism was 'de-terrorised' and treated as a legitimate political partner. When the process collapsed, the main Israeli scholarly, journalistic, and political narrative was that this recognition was a mistake, as Palestinian nationalism was as it had always been: 'terrorist'. The main producer of this explanation, however, was not the academy, as in previous chapters, but the army, its intelligence service, the secret service, and the Mossad. The press was the main loudspeaker for these views.

## **The second Intifada as mega-terrorism**

### *The militarisation of knowledge*

In his book, *The Making of Israeli Militarism*, Uri Ben-Eliezer described Israel as a nation-in-arms (Ben-Eliezer 1998). This meant that the Jewish collective identity in Palestine was constructed mainly through the militarisation of society; the Zionist leadership used the army as the principal agent of development and integration. Through the regular and reserve services, the army became the forger and source of national entity. But the army did more than that as the years went by: it affected the character of Israeli policy

inside and outside. It produced external aggressive policies towards the country's neighbours, and coercive domestic policy towards any group with an agenda that contradicted the overall objectives of Zionism as understood by the political elite. Moreover, civil spheres of governmental activities were militarised from the very early years of statehood and remain so today: the army is a dominant factor in the economy, politics, administration, and culture.

The media was recruited for the nation-in-arms very early on. Military reporters helped to invent the mythology of Israeli heroism on the battlefield, even when the materials were spun out of bloody reprisal operations against civilian populations in 1948 and the 1950s. These heroes would become the core group from which many future leaders of Israel would emerge: Rabin, Netanyahu, Barak, and Sharon. The media's co-optation, as is the case with other cultural systems, curbed any significant criticism or alternative thinking. The Israeli media was corrupted by this total submission, if only because of the secretive nature of the army. The media could serve as the IDF's spokesman, but not as its watchdog; very rarely was the army's immunity from outside supervision questioned or challenged.

In the more optimistic atmosphere of the Oslo period, critical Israeli sociologists reported the beginning of a new era: they found abundant evidence to claim that the nation-in-arms model weakened (Pappe 1997, pp. 37–43). And then came the second *Intifada*, and all those sanguine assessments of a different Israel have been crushed by the powerful IDF's re-entrance into Israeli public space.

There were reasons for this optimism, particularly in the media's coverage of the military. In the heyday of Oslo, for the first time editors and reporters refused to pass their pieces to the military censor, as had been the case since 1948. It had begun in the first *Intifada* when reporters felt that the IDF's coverage of the events was false and misleading and wished to bring a more accurate picture. But at the end of the day, it was only in *Ha'aretz* that alternative reporting on the first uprising could be found, the rest of the printed and electronic media did not venture a counter version to that provided by the IDF's spokesman. Following Rabin's assassination and Netanyahu's first term in office (1996–1999), and even more so under Sharon's two governments (2001–2006), these buds of less militarised media disappeared. It became even worse under Olmert in 2006.

As noted before, the critical instinct in both the media and the academy died when the *Intifadat al-Aqsa* broke out. In its wake, both the military and the media adopted an agenda that demonised the Palestinian policy as terrorism and the Palestinian leadership, and in particular Yassir Arafat, as an arch-terrorist. This happened the moment the media allowed the army to be its only source of information and interpretation, instead of relying on the conventional and traditional journalistic sources of information.

Scholarly and NGO research on the Israeli media's conduct at the beginning of the uprising indicated a high level of self-censorship and distortion for the sake of producing a narrative which showed the second Intifada as a Palestinian return to the old ways of terrorism. The printed and electronic press provided its readers and viewers with a one-dimensional and distorted picture of reality. Worse, they preferred the military and the security octopus through its various media as a source of information, interpretation, and analysis to their own correspondents on the ground. As we shall presently see, their correspondents had one explanation for the 're-emergence of Palestinian terrorism', and the IDF in particular provided another, opposing one (Dor 2001).

### ***The 'explanation' for the 'return' to terrorism***

The army provided (and the media eagerly swallowed) a ready-made, well-structured explanation for why the Palestinian national movement, or rather the new outfit constructed with

the help of Israel, the Palestine Authority and Yassir Arafat, 'returned' to terrorism. The explanation was a new mythology that helped to avoid any deeper analysis. There were several intertwining myths in this wrapping; each myth was substantiated by 'facts' provided by the IDF, the Secret Service (the Shabak), and the Mossad. This meant that in many cases there was no need to expand beyond the elusive reference to the source, let alone furnish any details about it. The first was the Camp David myth: Israel made an unprecedented generous offer to withdraw from the whole of the occupied territories in the summer 2000 peace summit organised by President Clinton – and the Palestinians rejected it. This was a falsification of a much more stingy and unsatisfactory Israeli offer. This myth was reinforced by providing the public with a distorted picture of the overall Palestinian behaviour during the days of the summit, such as ignoring what later emerged in the evidence given by American personalities present in Camp David about the genuine Palestinian effort to comply with the Oslo accord (see Malley 2001).

The second myth was of the Intifada being a pre-planned Palestinian campaign of terror and not a popular uprising. Despite the fact that there was no Palestinian decision on its outbreak, the press accepted the army's lead that this was a pre-planned massive act of terrorism. This is why the early demonstrations in the Intifada were reported as 'assaults on soldiers' and not as what they actually had been: peaceful protests and marches against the occupation. Even the most violent ones, triggered by the invasive visit of Ariel Sharon, then leader of the opposition, to the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, were unarmed protestations. Recent research has shown that the reporters of the daily newspapers in Israel conveyed these facts to their respective editorial boards; however, these editors chose not to publish them and opted for the ready-made narrative prepared by the army (Dor 2001).

The third myth was the humane Israeli reaction: the troops only used their weapons when they were in direct danger. The fact that the IDF shot unarmed demonstrators was never revealed to the Israeli public (Dudai 2002).

The fourth myth was constructed independently by media captains after the 9/11 attacks in the USA and pictured the PLO as part of the al-Qaida network of terrorism. The army soon joined in providing, as media sources have put it, classified information on the connection between al-Qaida and the Palestinian Authority; information that was, of course, never disclosed (Druker and Shelah 2004). These mythologies were cemented with the help of a new discourse prepared by military linguistics. The army provided a words launderette which was gladly used by the media. With the help of the media, the audience could polish its new jargon and not call a spade a spade. They compounded several dictionaries for describing the Palestinian action within the realm of 'terrorism' and the army's actions within the realm of 'anti-terrorism'. These dictionaries helped to de-humanise the Palestinians, in general, and the armed Palestinians, in particular, in the eyes of the Israeli public. 'Bloodthirsty' is according to Khalil Rinnawi, an Israeli-Palestinian analyst, the most common adjective (Rinnawi 2002). In such ways, the media adopted uncritically all the adjectives suggested by the army for describing Arafat as an arch-terrorist, preparing the ground for his long-term confinement in the *Muqata'* in Rammallah which led to his death in curious circumstances (Smith 2004).

When Arafat died and his successor, Abu Mazen, emerged, official Israel hailed him as a new partner for peace who distanced himself from Arafat's 'terrorism'. However, the government was quick to point out that he was a weak and unreliable partner, as the real Palestinian force was once more a terrorist organisation: HAMAS. This time, Palestinian terrorism was explained as being part of worldwide Islamic terrorism, a global threat to the free world. The Orientalist experts in the state were replacing the military experts and

the journalists in explaining how the Palestinian terrorism of the past led to the one in the present, and would inform its persistence in the future.

### **The ultimate terror: the HAMAS**

The ‘explanations’ for Palestinian violence and terrorism in the past are also at play in the way the HAMAS’ policies and actions are deciphered, and in the way that operations against this organisation are justified (including the attack on Gaza in January 2009). They underlie the propaganda and Zionist ideology that led not only Israel to demonise and delegitimise a democratically elected government of HAMAS, but also the USA and the European Union to follow suit. HAMAS was equated with ‘terrorism’ because this was the Israeli verdict, not because any serious analysis of the organisation was consulted, despite its prevalence in the West.

HAMAS, Islamic Jihad, and also the leftist secular movements involved in active resistance against Israel ever since the eruption of the second Intifada, are associated with the most negative interpretations of terrorism first and foremost because they represent yet another juncture in the long history of ‘Palestinian Terrorism’. HAMAS, in particular, is the epitome of this equation and association, as it is a classical case study vindicating the old essentialist Orientalist perception of ‘Islam’ as a religion producing violent political culture (see Shay 2002). This was not the verdict of every expert in the Israeli academia; however, it was the ‘expertise’ that appeared in the media and in the policies pursued. While it may have been difficult to associate previous chapters in Palestinian nationalism, which was in the early stages Christian, and in the 1960s secular and socialist, with Islam, HAMAS provides an obvious connection to Islam.

With this mindset of historicism and Orientalism, HAMAS’ actions and declarations (such as its covenant) are only interpreted in one way: Islamic and Jihadist Terrorism. The Islamophobia engulfing the USA, Britain and other countries in the wake of 9/11 and the ‘war against terror’ only strengthened the conviction of this approach. The phenomena of al-Qaida, the Palestinian resistance, the very intriguing case study of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the growing dissatisfaction of Muslim minorities in Europe, and many other case studies, were all painted as part of Islamic Terrorism. Very recently, the ex-Jihadist, Ed Hussein, and now the main pundit advising British journalism on the topic, lumped HAMAS together with Islamic radicalisation among Muslims in Britain (Hussein 2009). While American scholars belonging to MESA (the Middle Eastern Studies Association of America) resist successfully such a reductionist approach to a world where there are Islams not Islam, and where violence against oppression is different from oppressive violence, regardless of the nationality, ethnicity or religions of both victims and victimisers, the Western political and mainstream media adopted it quite gladly and enthusiastically. The situation in the British academy is also far more positive on this, with some recent works on HAMAS presenting a good counter-balance to the simplistic demonization of the organization as a terrorist organisation and the continued boycotting of it as such by the USA and the EU (Hroub 2006, Gunning 2007).

### **Conclusions: the impact on the peace process**

‘Since its foundation the state of Israel confronts the problem of terror. In the first years it was just as a nuisance, but ever since 1996 it became a strategic problem, when the perpetrators succeeded in halting the Peace process’ (Pinchas 2004, p. 1). This is a typical Israeli scholarly verdict of the cumulative impact of Palestinian terrorism on the peace



process. The reality is in many ways a mirror image of this conclusion. The ‘terrorization’ by Israeli commentators of the Palestinian national movement and its struggle emptied the peace process, from its very onset, of any meaningful content.

The peace process began immediately after the June 1967 war and focused on the fate of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It was almost exclusively an American show, with junior partnerships from Europe and the UN. The basic assumption underlying the American effort was an absolute reliance on the balance of power as the principal prism through which the possibilities of solutions should be examined. Israeli superiority was unquestioned after the war and hence, whatever official Israel produced as a blueprint for peace served as a basis for a *Pax Americana* in the region. The American pro-Israeli bias which developed after 1967 was also, of course, a decisive factor in dictating this guideline (Pappé 2007).

This attitude meant that it was left to successive Israeli political leaderships to formulate the basic outlines of a solution. Within this formulation, whatever the ideological colour of the Israeli government, the perception of the Palestinian national movement as a pure terrorist – with the most negative connotations associated with the adjective – entity was a crucial factor until 1993 and then again after the collapse of Oslo. As the peace process progressed under American supervision and in terms of successive administrations in the White House, from the days of Lyndon Johnson to Bill Clinton, five guidelines emerged as permeating the process.

The first was that the conflict began in 1967 and hence the essence of its solution is an agreement that would determine the future status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In other words, as these areas constitute only 22% of Palestine, such a solution excluded from any peace negotiations the fate of 78% of the country which the Zionist movement had dispossessed ever since 1882. Any Palestinian demand to include this part of Palestine in future negotiations, as appeared for instance in the official PLO charter and statements, was regarded as part of a terrorist discourse and delegitimised the Palestinians as partners for peace.

The second guideline was that everything visible in those areas was divisible and that such divisibility was the key for peace. Therefore, the peace plans were based on the idea that the area, its people and its natural resources should be divided. Again, the comprehensive Palestinian perception of the integrity of historical Palestine as a whole, and that of the people who lived in it or expelled from it, was regarded in a similar way to the demand not to confine the peace process to the areas occupied by Israel in 1967.

The third guideline was that the dire consequences of the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine were not to form a crucial or a central part of the peace agenda. This guideline removed the refugee issue from the peace agenda and branded as a ‘non-starter’ the most sacred Palestinian demand: the right of the refugees to return. This right was supported by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 from 11 December 1948.

The fourth guideline equated the end of Israeli occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with the end of the conflict. (Later, during the days of the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations the ‘end’ was articulated as the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories). This meant, as it still does today, that Palestinian demands for an Israel withdrawal from the occupied territories in return for non-aggression pacts (as offered by HAMAS), or before a final agreement over the status of Jerusalem or the fate of the refugees are reached, are considered to be intransigent and an indication of the return of the national movement to the days of terrorism.

The last guideline was that as long as there is no political or diplomatic agreement between Israel and the PLO, any active Palestinian resistance would be branded as terrorism and therefore, would prevent the organization from taking part in the negotiations. This was articulated

first in order to allow the Israelis and the Jordanians to exhaust the possibility of reaching a territorial and functional compromise over the occupied territories. When this failed in the 1980s, there was a double Israeli attempt to create an alternative collaborative leadership in the occupied territories (the Village Leagues) which failed too and to destroy the PLO militarily in Lebanon in 1982, which only partially succeeded (see Mitchel 2000, p. 126).

The Jordanian decision to exit the discussions over the future of the occupied territories forced in many ways the Israelis to talk directly to the Palestinians, or rather forced the Americans into a direct dialogue with the PLO (around 1988); this guideline was adopted to appease an intransigent Israeli government that hoped to maintain the status quo for as long as possible. It was the first uprising and the arrival of a more proactive American administration of George Bush Senior that led to the invitation of the PLO, against Israeli wishes, to the negotiation table.

The prize for being de-terrorised transpired as too high and impossible for the PLO. It meant, as became only too clear when the Oslo accords were translated from words into realities on the ground, a demand from the organization to succumb to an Israeli dictate that included giving up the refugees' right of return, control over large parts of the West Bank and the creation of an independent state without an independent foreign, economic and security policy that would also be demilitarised. None of the Palestinian leaders could accept it and Arafat's rejection of it in the summer of 2000 led to his demonization as an arch-terrorist and cast the next uprising, as mentioned, as a mega-terrorist operation.

None of the peace plans that followed, from the Road Map to Annapolis, have deviated from these guidelines and none condition the end of Israeli violence as part of the deal but are quick to demonise any Palestinian resistance as acts of terrorism that foil the peace process. Worse, since the elections of HAMAS, the peace effort has been reduced to a dictate to an impotent and meaningless Palestinian Authority by a succession of right-wing Israeli governments.

In the eyes of the knowledge producers in Israel, be they academics, journalists, or intelligence officers, the Palestinian national movement is a terrorist organisation and its resistance an unfinished saga of terrorism. It is so first because history, from this perspective, shows that the Palestinians, as individuals and as a collective, engaged in terrorism from the very beginning of the Zionist presence in Palestine in 1882. Their terrorism came in waves and became fiercer in an exponential escalation. It is not clear why, but this was a fact the Jewish state had to live with. The apparent deviation from this history – the Oslo accord – proved very soon, in fact, two years after it was concluded, to be a charade or worse a travesty. This, it was argued, was a ploy to gain entrance by the PLO into the occupied territories and to resume the terrorist campaign, as indeed it did in the second Intifada. Why was terrorism resumed? Because of the history of the movement that ever since 1882 was a terrorist one and could not change.

A final proof for this proclivity was the emergence of HAMAS and the assumed association of Palestinian terrorism with Jihadist world terrorism. It is therefore not only the history that explains the continued Palestinian terrorism, but the nature of Islam as a world religion in the twenty-first century.

Academics, journalists, military experts, and politicians produced and continue to produce this narrative of Palestinian nationalism as terrorism to this very day in Israel and in certain sites in the Western world. This narrative is one of the main obstacles for moving ahead in the attempt to reach peace and reconciliation in Israel and Palestine. A transformation of such a demonising narratives facilitated peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and in South East Asia. As with any obstructive and

destructive narrative, only its deconstruction can limit its damaging effect. Thus, only research and study of Zionism as a colonialist phenomenon – emerging in the late nineteenth century but persisting beyond the age of post-colonialism to remain the only settler colonialist state on earth in the twenty-first century – can de-terrorise and re-humanise the Palestinian resistance to the dispossession of Palestine. Such a historical perspective does not idealise the Palestinian struggle and does not condone that part of the resistance which violated human rights, namely, the terrorist actions.

Similarly, it is high time that the mythology of Palestinian responsibility for the demise of the Oslo accords and the subsequent peace efforts is challenged academically and politically. As alternative media and industrious scholarly research has already shown, it was the lack of willingness to compromise and withdraw by Israel that failed the accords, as well as the wish to deter and succumb, that turned the Second Intifada to such a violent event. The official Israeli policy during the Oslo days was one of more settlements, harsher collective punishment, and more systematic abuse of Palestinian human and civil rights. These means escalated in their brutality and scope when Israel ‘retaliated’ to the uprising; a policy that transformed the Palestinian areas into what human rights organisations and the UN describe as ‘sites of a grave human disaster’. If one would want to employ the paradigm of terrorism to this conflict, it is that of state terrorism that is missing in the scholarly analysis of the developments on the ground.

And finally, and most urgently, the demonisation of HAMAS as the ultimate manifestation of Palestinian, and even Islamic, terrorism is not only a travesty of its own, it is a dangerous perception that does not only distance us from peace in Israel and Palestine, it threatens the stability of the world at large and that of countries with sizeable Muslim minorities such as the United Kingdom. For the sake of all of us, we should re-read the deconstruction of the negative Orientalism of the past that essentialised more than a billion people and portrayed them as under-developed, primitive sons of the desert so as to become aware of not replacing this distorted image with a new one of a billion and a quarter ‘terrorists’ adhering to a ‘religion of terrorism’. This image, much more than the actions of those presumed fanatic, is a recipe for future disaster.

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