

Conference Paper

The Two Palestinian National Movements today: The process of converging of the “secular” Fateh and the “religious” Hamas

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Introduction:

The perception (I'd rather argue: misperception) is widely held that

- Fateh represents secularism, enlightened and modern secularism, open to the West, reformist, capable for democratic transformation
- Hamas represents fundamentalism, backward, traditional (if looked at positively), anti-Western, pro-Iran, authoritarian, incapable for democratic transformation, simply using democratic slogans in order to reach power.

I want to argue that these are misperceptions which misjudge reality to a high degree.

I. My first major argument is therefore:

- Fateh has moved over time towards a movement with a much more visible role of religion
- Hamas has moved over time towards a more nationalist movement with a less visible role of religion
- Both have been converging very much to embody nationalist movements which provide an ever more central role for religion (Islam as well as Christianity – witness the growing role of “religious” spokesmen: Sheikhs, Priests, Bishops etc.)
- Fateh: From Filastinuna (1959-1964), via the Democratic State Demand/Offer (1968/69, the Two-State-Solution (1973 and after) with its culmination in the State Proclamation of 1988, up to the Basic Law from 2003 (amended 2005 – election law)

- Hamas: From the Hamas Charter of 1988 to the Political Program (election program) of 2006

1.Fateh:

Filastinuna: 1959-1964

Watan (fatherland), National Liberation Movement, Revolution, idaiyun, Sons of an-nakba (shabab an-nakba)

But all through and simultaneously to the use of the above enumerated terms, every leaflet and declaration begins with the Islamic evocation. (Nels Johnson: Implicit Religiosity 'Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism')

Democratic State Demand/Offer (1969/70):

The Seven Points passed by the Central Committee of Fateh, January 1969 (and before):

“1. Al-Fatah, the Palestine National Liberation Movement, is the expression of the Palestinian people and of its will to free its land from Zionist colonization in order to recover its national identity.

2. Al-Fatah the PNLN, is not struggling against the Jews as an ethnic and religious community. It is struggling against Israel as the expression of colonization based on a theocratic, racist and expansionist system and of Zionism and colonialism.

5. Al Fatah ... solemnly proclaims that the final objective of its struggle is the restoration of the independent, democratic State of Palestine, all of whose citizens will enjoy equal rights irrespective of their religion.

7. The struggle of the Palestinian People, like that of the Vietnamese people and other peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, is part of the historic process of the liberation of the oppressed peoples from colonialism and imperialism” (Abdel Hadi - Documents on Palestine I 1997,216)

Palestinian Declaration of Independence, Algiers, 15 Nov. 1988

First sentence: Islamic invocation

“Palestine, the land of the three monotheistic faiths, is where the Palestinian Arab people were born, on which it grew, developed and excelled...

...The Palestinian Arab people forged its national identity ...

...The call went out from temple, church and mosque to praise the Creator, to celebrate compassion, and peace was indeed the message of Palestine...

.. The valiant battle for liberation and homeland ...

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The Palestine National Council, in the name of God, and in the name of the Palestinian Arab people, hereby proclaims the establishment of the State of Palestine on our Palestinian territory with its capital Jerusalem (al-Quds ash-Sharif).

The State of Palestine is the state of Palestinians wherever they may be..... In it will be safeguarded their political and religious convictions and their human dignity by means of a parliamentary democratic system of governance, itself based on freedom of expression and the freedom to form parties.”

Ends with sura (Say: O God, Master of the Kingdom, Thou givest the Kingdom to whom Thou wilt, and seizest the Kingdom from whom Thou wilt.... Thou art powerful over everything.
Sadaqa Allahu al-‘Azim

Basic Law of 2003 (2005):

National Homeland of Palestine

Independent Palestinian State

Art. 4:

1. Islam is the official religion of Palestine. Respect for the sanctity of all other divine religions shall be maintained. (i.e no longer secular democratic state!)
2. The principles of Islamic Shari’a shall be a principal source of legislation (not the only source!)

Art.9:

Palestinians shall be equal before the law and the judiciary, without distinction based upon race, sex, color, religion, political views or disability.

Art. 18:

Freedom of belief, worship and the performance of religious functions are guaranteed, provided public order or public morals are not violated

Summary: clear move away from the secular democratic state slogan to a conception of state similar to all states in the region, i.e. with a dominant role of Islam and Shari’a

2. Hamas:

Charter of 1988:

(most probably written within a matter of days by Dr. Rantisi [killed 2004])

Art.1: Islamic Resistance Movement: Islam is the Solution...

Art.3: Jihad confronting the oppressors, in order to liberate the land and the believers

Art.6: Hamas.... is a Palestinian movement aiming to raise the flag of God on every inch of Palestine

Art.7: Jihad in the confrontation of the Zionist invasion ...

Art.9: ...struggle against injustice ... for the victory of justice, regaining the homeland Under the rule of Islam...

Art.11: Palestine is an Islamic Waqf (interesting debate still to be led, in the sense as what can be done with waqf... not yet explored)

Art.11: Patriotisms (wataniya) as part of religious believe

Art.14: liberation of Palestine: three circles: Palestinian, Arab, Islamic

Art.15: jihad for the liberation of Palestine is an individual obligation

Political Program (election program) of 2005/6:

List "Change and Reform"

Goal: "a free, independent and sovereign Palestinian state on the whole territory of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem ... without giving up one inch of historic Palestine..."

Freedom and Independence

Topic one:

Palestine is part of Arab and Islamic countries

End occupation and establish an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital

Purely political program:

- International relations
- Administrative reform and fight against corruption
- Legislative work and political reform
- General freedoms, system of law, human rights
- Educational policy
- Cultural and media policy
- Religious education
- Social policy

- Relations with Christians: “our list does not see any difference between Muslim and Christian citizens in terms of their citizenship” (same rights and obligations)
- Women, children, families
- Youth
- Construction of homes
- Health and environment
- Agriculture
- Economic, financial and currency policy
- Workers
- Borders

But conclusion: Islam is the Solution is our way to change and reform

Summary: tremendous change from Charter 1988 to Political Program less than twenty years later: more matter of fact, more pragmatic, less religiously loaded. Less religious terminology.

II. My second major argument focuses on the Place of Holy Land in relevant Palestinian political documents

i.e. in the documents of Fateh and Hamas

(and in comparison with the Israeli discourse, above all the settlers’ discourse).

I want to argue that in the conflict between the settlers’ discourse and political/physical success, Palestinians, too, gave the idea of the Holy Land a much more central role in their political ideology and program (witness the rise of Hamas and the Second Intifada).

However, it would seem to me that both, Hamas and Fatah, have nevertheless kept a much more prominent place for nationalism in their political program and ideology, than the Israeli settlers.

(Compare quotes from Ehud Sprinzak’s *The Ascendance of Israel’s Radical Right*, and several years later, the conclusive study on the settlers, *Lords of the Land*, by Akiva Eldar and Edith Zertal)

Explosive mix of religious and nationalist arguments and ideology (it would seem even more

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explosive, ideologically loaded, and uncompromising than Hamas even in its early period). Use of religious law in order to categorically prevent evacuation of any settlement in Erez Israel (compare Hamas and its move to the acceptance of a two-state-solution).

Conclusion:

I should like to argue that based on my presentation, both Fateh and Hamas do give religious arguments a prominent role in their political discourse. However, it would seem that their nationalist discourse is the hegemonic one, with religious discourse being functionalized. This whole argument, the analysis of Palestinian developments, both concerning Fatah and Hamas, needs to be put in the context of Israeli developments in the same period, first and foremost the discourse of the settlers and their increasingly dominant, if not today hegemonic role in the broader Israeli political discourse.