

DON PERETZ

INTIFADA



THE PALESTINIAN UPRISING

WESTVIEW PRESS

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SUNY-BINGHAMTON

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PREFACE

This book is intended as an overview of the uprising—the Intifada—of the Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank and Gaza, territories occupied by Israel since the June 1967 war. In the two years since the Intifada began during December 1987, it has acquired unusual international importance and visibility and has led to a number of significant changes in the policies of the principal actors involved, especially Israel, the United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied territories. The Intifada has altered, in many ways, the dimensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict by rearranging the order of political and diplomatic priorities of those involved and by thrusting the conflict to the forefront of international attention. This book describes the background, origins, and causes of the uprising and its impact on the actors; it also examines the prospects for coping with it.

I am obligated to my wife, Dr. Maya Peretz, for her assistance in preparing the manuscript and in helping to meet the publisher's deadlines, which sprang upon us more quickly than anticipated. Thanks also go to Deena Hurwitz, to *Palestine Perspectives*, and to the UNRWA Liaison Office in New York for the photos used. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to the Rockefeller Foundation for the time I spent at its Study Center in Bellagio, Italy, during the final editing stage of this book.

Don Peretz

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1

ORIGINS OF THE INTIFADA

The Palestine uprising, or Intifada, that erupted in Gaza and the West Bank during December 1987 was the latest manifestation of the 70-year-old Arab-Israeli conflict. The roots of the struggle can be traced to the nineteenth century, which witnessed the rise of Arab nationalism and of Zionism, the movement to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine. Both movements were influenced by modern European nationalism, but each had its own distinctive characteristics.

Arab nationalism was in part a reaction against the Ottoman government, which had controlled Palestine and other Arabic-speaking areas of the Eastern Mediterranean since the sixteenth century. In the early twentieth century, the Ottomans attempted to make the Turkish language and culture dominant in their empire, a course of action opposed by Arab nationalists who wanted to revivify their own tradition.

Jewish nationalism—in part a reaction to European anti-Semitism, in part an attempt to revive the Hebrew language and culture—sought to unite the Jews of the world in support of a home in Palestine, which, according to the Old Testament, was the land of their ancestral origin. The organized Jewish national movement was called Zionism; its goal, a return to Zion (after Mount Zion in Jerusalem). By the end of World War I, the Jews constituted about 10 percent of Palestine's population; more than 90 percent were Muslim and Christian Arabs.

After Turkey's defeat by the Allied Powers in World War I, the new League of Nations divided the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire into mandates assigned to Great Britain and France. Britain received the mandate for Palestine and remained in control until 1948. During the war, the British had promised to aid both Arab nationalists and Zionists in the achievement of their goals in exchange for assistance, promises that were difficult if not impossible to reconcile in Palestine. Arab nationalists in the country opposed establishment of the Jewish national home there and demanded independence like the other neigh-

boring Arab countries. The Zionists wanted Palestine to become a Jewish state and insisted that the British help them by permitting large-scale Jewish immigration, settlement, and development of the country. Despite continued conflict among the Arabs, British, and Jews during the mandate, the Zionists greatly expanded their presence, increasing the Jewish population by ten times, from 60,000 to 600,000—a growth from a tenth to a third of Palestine's population.

During World War II, liquidation by Nazi Germany of nearly 90 percent of European Jewry underscored the urgency of emigration from the continent. Zionists became more militant in their demands that the British open the gates of Palestine to Jewish refugees and increasingly impatient to establish the Jewish state. By the end of the war, Great Britain, weary of conflicts throughout its far-flung empire, decided to give up the mandate and turned the problem over to the newly formed United Nations. In November 1947, the UN General Assembly recommended partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states and an international zone encompassing Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. The Zionists accepted the partition proposal; but the Arabs of Palestine, supported by other Arab states, opposed it, and civil war broke out between the Jewish and Arab inhabitants. When the mandate ended, in May 1948, surrounding Arab states joined the fighting against the new nation of Israel declared on May 14, 1948, as the last British troops left the country.

Between 1947 and 1949, as a result of the first Arab-Israeli war, most Arabs left their homes in areas controlled by Israel. They became refugees in the surrounding Arab countries. During the next forty years, four more wars were fought between Israel and these states, in 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. In 1967, Israel defeated Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, thereby acquiring additional territory—the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, Arab East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Sinai was returned as part of the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt; however, Gaza, the Golan area, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank have been occupied by Israel since 1967. In Gaza and the West Bank there are several hundred thousand refugees who fled from Israel during the first war in 1947–1949 in addition to the indigenous Palestinian Arab population who remained in their homes. These nearly 2 million Arabs, both refugees and indigenous inhabitants, consider Palestine their homeland. And there are another approximately 2 million Palestinians scattered among surrounding countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Arabian Peninsula) as well as beyond the Middle East, who continue to identify with their homeland and with their compatriots living under Israeli occupation.

After the Arab defeat in the 1967 war, a new phase of Palestinian Arab nationalism began. Several new guerrilla organizations and other Palestinian groups were formed, most eventually becoming part of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), established in 1964. The PLO underwent a metamorphosis after the 1967 war. Both the United Nations and the prevailing international consensus acknowledged it as the representative of the Palestinian people. Since 1967, the PLO and its various affiliated factions have become the organization that most Palestinians regard as their spokesman. Although the PLO did not initiate the Intifada, it soon played an important role in the organization of the latter and in maintaining contact between Palestinians under occupation and the outside world.

Israel has refused either to recognize the PLO or to enter direct negotiations with it. While the stated reason is the organization's "terrorist" activity, even more important is the fact that relations with the PLO would be tantamount to recognizing the national rights of the Palestinians. Many Israelis are reluctant to validate Palestinian nationalism because they fear it would undermine their own claims to the country. Even before 1967 there were Israeli nationalists who believed that all of mandatory Palestine belonged by right to the Jewish people. After Israel conquered the territories in 1967, a strong movement emerged calling for annexation of the West Bank and Gaza (Golan and East Jerusalem were annexed by 1982). As a principal goal of the large Likud party has been to annex the territories, its leaders have been more reluctant than those in Labor, the other large party, to make territorial concessions for peace. Former Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin was willing to return Sinai to Egypt as part of the peace settlement, but he and his Likud colleagues regard the West Bank and Gaza as part of the historical Land of Israel; therefore, they refuse to consider the possibility of departure from these territories.

Differences between Likud and Labor over the future of the territories have been a major obstacle to changing the status quo of continuous occupation—and it is the occupation that, after twenty years, led to the Intifada. The uprising soon attracted world attention. In 1988, it dominated events in Israel and the occupied territories, becoming the focus of media coverage of the Arab-Israel conflict and the Middle East. Repercussions of the Intifada were widespread, affecting not only the policies of Israel but also those of the Arab world, Western European nations, and the United States.

Within the West Bank and Gaza, the Intifada had far-reaching influences on the political, economic, social, and even cultural life of the Palestinian Arab population. As a result, fundamental changes began to appear in most aspects of daily life—in the power structure of the community;

in relations between men and women, youth and their elders, Christians and Muslims, and urban and rural settlements, and among the various regional centers of the West Bank and Gaza. It is probably still too early to determine whether these changing relationships will become permanent or to what extent they will have a truly revolutionary impact on Palestinian society. But it seems likely that the "shaking up" of this society has been so traumatic that many aspects of the change that occurred during 1988 will be long-lasting. (In Arabic, Intifada means "to shake off.")

The outward manifestations of the Intifada were not new or unique during the twenty years of Israeli occupation. On many occasions since 1967, there have been eruptions of discontent among the Palestinians and countermeasures taken by occupation forces to repress them. The years since 1967 have been replete with incidents involving stone throwing, Molotov cocktails, strikes, demonstrations, refusal to pay taxes, large-scale arrests, imprisonment without trial, deportations, punitive destruction of homes and property, beating, and the use of tear gas and live ammunition against crowds. What, then, is new or unique about the events that began in December 1987, and why have they become the focus of so much local and international concern?

The major purpose of this book is to examine the Intifada in the context of regional and international events; to place the uprising in the time-frame of past, present, and future; to determine why it is unique; and to discover its significance in the contemporary history of the Middle East.

ORIGINS OF CIVIL RESISTANCE

Within weeks of the conquest and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel initiated policies intended to integrate the territories into its security system and economic infrastructure. It was clear from the nature of Israeli investments in military facilities, the road network, and water and electricity supplies that the occupation would be prolonged beyond a mere matter of weeks or months. Although the legal framework of the previous Jordanian authority was maintained in the West Bank, within three weeks of occupation the Israeli Knesset amended its own basic legislation, the Law and Administration Ordinance, empowering "the Government to extend Israeli law, jurisdiction and public administration over the entire area of Eretz Israel [former mandatory Palestine]."¹ This law was accompanied by legislation empowering the minister of interior to enlarge by proclamation any municipal corporation designed under the Law and Administration Ordinance. On the following day, June 28, 1967, the borders of Jerusalem were extended and Israeli

legislation was applied to the enlarged capital under the terms of the new laws.

Since the occupation began, Israeli law has been extended only to East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, not to the West Bank and the Gaza region. However, Israelis who favor annexation have exerted strong pressure on the government to take advantage of the legislation that is in place and to apply Israeli law to all the occupied territories—a step tantamount to annexation. Instead, the West Bank and Gaza have been ruled under a system of military government initiated in June 1967. There are separate military government administrators for the West Bank and Gaza, but both are responsible to the minister of defense. In each area the military governor is vested with the authority held by the ruler prior to occupation—in the West Bank, with the authority of the previous Jordanian government, and in Gaza, with that of the former Egyptian administrators. The military governors have total executive and legislative power, which enables them to make new laws, cancel old ones, and suspend or annul existing ones.² They are responsible only to the minister of defense, not to any other public authority or body. Legislation and actions of the military government are not subject to review or supervision (although in some respects the Supreme Court of Israel has very limited authority over military law), and the minister of defense may be called to account in the Knesset for the actions of his subordinates. The general practice of military government is to maintain the Jordanian or Egyptian legal system that existed prior to the occupation. Since 1967, however, Israeli commanders have modified the previous legislation by unilaterally issuing some 1,500 new military orders governing all aspects of life including education, agriculture, land and water rights, taxation, and social welfare, as well as security and military matters. Changes in pre-occupation legislation have been so extensive that for all practical purposes, a new Israeli legal and administrative structure imposed on the old evolved during the last two decades.

While the international consensus frequently perceives Israeli policies and their implementation to be in violation of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention dealing with occupied territories, Israel maintains that it has not contravened international law because it does not recognize Gaza and the West Bank as occupied territories. According to Israeli perception, neither Jordan nor Egypt has legal claims within the area of former mandatory Palestine; indeed, Israel is seen as having proprietary rights (both legal and moral) to all of Palestine, which is regarded as Eretz Israel even by political factions opposed to outright annexation. Most Israelis base their claims on Israel's ancient borders and on the borders set during the British mandatory period from 1920 to 1948. From the official Israeli view, this common perception thus vitiates any

rights of the Palestinian Arabs to establish an independent political entity within the borders of former mandatory Palestine because all the country belongs to the Jewish people.

This fundamental difference in perceptions of "national rights"—in reality a continuation of the seventy-year conflict between the Zionist and Palestinian Arab nationalist movements for control of former mandatory Palestine—is the root cause of tensions leading to the Intifada of 1988. Israel's conquest of all of mandatory Palestine in 1967 forced the issue to a head by confronting Palestinians with a new reality—the reality of total Israeli control of "their" land and of approximately half the total population that identifies itself as Palestinian. In the period from the establishment of Israel in 1948 to 1967, only a small number of Palestinians, the Arab citizen minority of Israel, were subject to the authority of the Jewish State. The Arab defeat in the 1967 war, followed by the extension of Israel's rule over all of Palestine and over approximately one and a half million additional Palestinians, was a major factor in the resurgence of Palestinian nationalism, demands for self-determination, and emergence of the Palestinian resistance movement.

From the beginning in 1967, the resistance movement had two forms: paramilitary and civil. Israel quickly ended most significant paramilitary activity within areas under its control, and since 1967 such armed resistance has been carried out by the various Palestinian commando or guerrilla organizations operating outside of the occupied territories. Most of these organizations are affiliated with the PLO; all are labeled by Israel as terrorist organizations. These diverse paramilitary factions periodically stage incursions into Israel and the occupied territories; but in terms of damage to or losses by Israel, they are more of a nuisance than a serious military threat. From the Palestinian perspective, their value has been in consciousness raising and propaganda.

Far more serious has been the rise and persistence of civil resistance. From the early days, there has been widespread opposition to Israeli occupation and to the policies for its implementation. Within weeks of the war, several Palestinian notables, mostly spokesmen for Jordan, were deported for leading protests against the occupation and unification of Jerusalem.³ The first deportee, in September 1967, was Sheikh Abd al-Hamid al-Sayih, president of the Jerusalem Sharia Court and a leader of the Muslim community. Former mayor of Jordanian East Jerusalem, Ruhi al-Khatib, was deported in March 1968 after being charged with inciting the population to strike and with spreading false information about Israeli policies. Deportation of Palestinians charged with disrupting security or public order has remained a constant form of punishment throughout the occupation period. An estimated 2,000 residents have been forcibly deported since 1967.⁴



UNRWA distributes food to children at Agency schools in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA photo by Zaven Mazakian.

Sparked by Israel's unification of Jerusalem, widespread public opposition to the occupation began in July 1967 and quickly spread throughout the territories. Other issues causing protests were military censorship of school texts and punitive demolition of Arab houses; but most important of all was the protest against the occupation itself. A pattern of civic resistance soon developed that persisted for the next twenty years, consisting of strikes by merchants, businesses, and schools, demonstrations by marchers, the display of Palestinian flags or national colors, and the chanting of slogans calling for independence. High school and university students were often in the vanguard, shouting slogans that identified them with the guerrillas labeled as terrorists by Israelis. These demonstrations often degenerated into stone throwing, spitting, and insults aimed at the Israeli troops.

Israeli reaction has followed a consistent pattern as well, gradually escalating over the years until it reached the levels of 1988. Initially, attempts were made to quell demonstrations through such conventional police tactics as the use of water hoses, clubs, and tear gas; then warning shots were fired; and, finally, the demonstrators were directly shot at. When demonstrations persisted, curfews were imposed on neighborhoods, refugee camps, or whole towns and cities. Since 1967, schools and

universities have been periodically closed by the military, which charged that they were the focal points of the disturbances. Both men and women students were among those arrested as "ring leaders" of the resistance. Many were held without trial, and many were deported.

Israeli tactics for dealing with civil resistance to the occupation have scarcely altered in twenty years, although the intensity of one or another method might have changed. The strikes and demonstrations have had little impact within Israel itself, even though "the Israel government came to view them as a threat to its own security, in large part because it believed that local terrorists were recruited from among those who first had been involved in such political protest activities. Thus Israel took an increasingly severe line on demonstrations, which in turn fanned the resistance of the West Bank population and added to the likelihood of violent action during the demonstrations."⁵

The military authorities have had several rationales for dealing severely with civil resistance. Initially, they maintained that use of harsh measures would discourage youths from participating in demonstrations or other forms of protest; that the imposition of fines and curfews or the closing of shops would cause such economic stress that community elders and leaders would deter or contain anti-occupation activities; and that the arrest, imprisonment, or deportation of "troublemakers" would diminish if not eliminate the number of political protests. Little faith was put in attempts to win over the population through "good works," for as ex-Defense Minister Dayan observed: "To be fair, the main source of unrest is that they don't want to see us here, they don't like the occupation." Attempts to "manage" or "manipulate"⁶ civil unrest were made through various tactics, including the use by intelligence services of informers to create divisiveness within the Palestinian community, the instigation or rekindling of family and tribal feuds, and, in 1982, the establishment of Village Leagues.

The twenty-year-long attempts to cope with civil resistance certainly failed to eliminate it. Some might argue that the resistance was contained and would have totally undermined Israeli control of the territories had military tactics been less severe, but indications are that the contrary is true, that the measures used intensified and extended opposition to the occupation. This is evidenced by the rise in new generations of leaders to replace those who were deported over the years. As Palestinian "notables" were deported, new leaders emerged, and as they were imprisoned or deported, still others replaced them; consequently, the number of those in prison or deported has not decreased but instead has grown over the years. It seems that the larger the number of those punished, the greater the increase in the number of dissidents; hence

the tactics used by the military to remove or contain the leadership have been counterproductive.

During the later 1960s, establishment leaders such as school principals, mayors, and other former Jordanian officials attempted to contain demonstrations and other civil resistance, fearing that the situation would get out of hand. In 1969 the mayor of Nablus even assigned municipal constables to calm student unrest, and the Arab head of the Nablus Education Department called on school principals to obtain parental cooperation in ending student strikes. However, such attempts have nearly ended as strikers and demonstrators have increasingly disregarded the advice or admonitions of traditional establishment leaders. Rather, they have found new leaders outside of and beyond the establishment who have made the "traditionalists" all but irrelevant.

"GOOD WORKS" VERSUS ECONOMIC "INTEGRATION"

Israeli "good works" in the territories, a strategy that in the early 1980s was called "improvement of the quality of life," aimed at sustaining the Palestinian economy. Occupation authorities maintained that: "Since 1967 economic life in the area [West Bank] has been characterized by rapid growth and a very substantial increase in living standards, made possible by the interaction of economies of the areas with that of Israel."⁷ There are sufficient indicators to demonstrate areas of economic improvement, such as the annual increase in the value of agricultural production, improved methods of cultivation, decreased infant mortality rates, decline of infectious diseases, larger percentage of girls attending schools, and total increase in school attendance—in sum, an overall rise in living standards. However, the value of such "good works" was vitiated in the eyes of the occupied Palestinians by the steady attrition of control and even influence over their own economic fate.

Most significant was the actual physical loss of territory through acquisition of land by Israeli authorities for Jewish settlement and usage. By the end of the first twenty years of occupation, Israeli authorities had requisitioned nearly half the total land area in the West Bank and a third in Gaza.⁸ Concomitant with loss of the land itself was a sharp decline in the number of Palestinians employed in agriculture, which was the principal occupation until the late 1970s.⁹ Most peasants displaced from agriculture found employment in a variety of mostly unskilled jobs at the bottom of the wage and social scales in Israel; several tens of thousands left the occupied territories to seek work in neighboring Arab countries.