



PERSPECTIVES

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The Palestinians are Part of the Old Arab Order

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The Palestinians are part of the old Arab order because time and time again they have aligned themselves with the worst dictators of the Arab world. Their own governments in the West Bank and Gaza are cut from the same cloth as the regimes of the old Arab order; they are one-party police-states where the opposition and the media are suppressed. They demand the right to self-determination for themselves but deny it to others. They are also part of the old Arab order of terrorism.

Many have wondered since the beginning of the Arab upheavals why the Palestinians have not taken part in the hoped-for 'Arab Spring.' The answer is that with the positions they hold today, the Palestinians are an integral part of the *old* Arab order, and therefore are unable to participate in a democratic, tolerant Arab renaissance.

The Palestinians are part of the old Arab order because time and time again they have extolled the Arab leaders who make up the old Arab order and aligned themselves with the worst dictators of the Arab world.

With overwhelming Palestinian public support, PLO leader Yasser Arafat, risked international isolation and condemnation for himself, his people and his movement in order to support Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait. Saddam was the most brutal leader of the old Arab order. (After their liberation from Saddam, the Kuwaitis expelled over 100,000 Palestinians in retaliation for eager Palestinian cooperation in suppressing Kuwaiti citizens.)

This is the same Arafat, the same PLO, and the same Palestinian People who today rail against Israeli 'occupation.' Take for example, Azmi Bishara, the former Israeli-Palestinian Member of Knesset who called himself as a

democratic liberal. He defied Israeli law forbidding the visiting of an enemy state in order to eulogize Hafiz al-Assad, the strongman of Syria, after his death in 2001. Assad was one of the most murderous of Arab leaders. His son Bashar is presently suppressing Syrian citizens with great brutality. (Bishara later fled Israel and resigned from the Knesset after being questioned by police on suspicion of aiding and passing military information to Hezbollah during wartime).

Another Palestinian-Israeli Arab Member of Knesset, Ahmad Tibi, led an entourage of Israeli Palestinians to pay homage to Muammar Qaddafi, the fallen Libyan dictator, just before the outbreak of the revolution that led to Qaddafi's downfall. In neither case were these Palestinians forced to act as they did. They did it out of love – for the 'old' Arab dictators and their regimes.

Palestinians are also part of the 'old Arab order' for supporting Arab nationalism, which in retrospect, was clearly an ideological smokescreen for Sunni Arab domination over the minorities in the Middle East. As mentioned above, the Shiites of Iraq drove the Palestinians out of their midst for collaborating with the Ba'thi regime in suppressing the Shiite majority and the Kurdish minority in Iraq – in the name of Arab nationalism.

More recently, no Palestinian leader, faction, or 'human-rights' organization has had anything critical to say about the brutal suppression of Shiites in Bahrain, just as they were silent in years past about the wrongs and atrocities against minorities in the Arab-speaking world.

The Palestinians are part of the old Arab order because they demand the right to self-determination for themselves but deny it to others. The Palestinians supported Saddam's regime against Kurdish self-determination; they support the Moroccan occupation and colonization of Western Sahara (which denies the indigenous peoples a right to a state of their own); and they support the Algerian regime in suppressing Berber/Amazight language and culture.

Both Mahmoud Abbas' Palestinian Authority and the Hamas government in Gaza are cut from the same cloth as the regimes of the old Arab order. They are one-party police-states whose main line of business is suppressing the opposition, incarcerating political prisoners, and denying media freedoms to the opposition. The rump parliaments in both the West Bank and Gaza have been moribund since the outbreak of Palestinian civil war in 2006.

The PLO itself is the ultimate example of the old Arab order. The dozen or more factions that constitute the PLO are over forty years old; yet in none of

them has leadership change taken place except through the natural or unnatural death of the leader. The same can be said of the relatively younger Islamist Jihad al-Islami and Hamas movements. There is no internal democracy in these groups.

Remember: More than anything, the Arab upheavals of the past year are about instituting a change of leadership in the Arab world. The Palestinians are having none of that.

The Palestinians are also part of the old Arab order of terrorism. The Palestinians, who introduced wide-spread and indiscriminate terrorism to the world, served as an inspiration to Hezbollah and al-Qaeda terrorism, presumably the movements hurt most by the would-be Arab spring. The Palestinians continue to take part in this old Arab terrorist agenda through indiscriminate missile attacks and conventional acts of terrorism.

Does all this mean that the Palestinians are doomed, and barred from the promise of an Arab spring?

Not necessarily. Palestinians could begin a promising journey towards a democratic renaissance by acknowledging the rights they demand from Israel and the world to others. They could, for example, support the right to self-determination of the Kurdish, the Berber and the Jewish peoples, including recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. Palestinians could and should take a stand against the oppression of Egypt's Copts. They could and should renounce Arab national movements that betray these principles. They could and should become a voice for civil rights if and when the new Islamist regimes in the Arab world begin to deny these rights to their minorities.

Without question, the journey to a Palestinian democratic spring is long and arduous. Fortunately, the Palestinians have an example nearby of a democratic and prosperous state worthy of emulation – Israel.

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