

Gaza Drowns in Blood because of the Conflict between Fatah and Hamas Movements

By [Palestinian Centre for Human Rights](#)

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This appalling catastrophe is just what Israel and the US have been aiming at for the past five years. Particularly prominent in egging on interfactional chaos and bloodletting is Elliot Abrams, whose plan I recall reading about a few months ago: it was a plan specifically to get PLO and Hamas fighting each other. The apparent object is to destroy Palestinian political and civil society. Amira Hass had an excellent article about this months back [see below Dr. Sarraj's article]. The thrust of the article – now Israel has got what it wanted, having driven the population backs to the wall, ravaged in health, starving, etc., they turn against each other.

The best explanation for what is happening is contained in the unfortunately all too brief essay by Dr. Eyad Sarraj (see below the PCHR report). It is an exploration of the psychosocial origins of the catastrophe in Gaza. He sees it rooted in the Israeli occupation post-1967, particularly in Israeli torture which was adopted as well by the PA in its own prisons. It is a "Must Read." One hopes that Dr. Sarraj will be able to expand this essay at some point, since it is the start of a profound analysis of the mass psychology of oppression – how and in precisely what particulars the occupation has destroyed the human fabric of Palestinian society.

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PCHR

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For the 3rd consecutive day, Gaza City has witnessed unjustifiable violent internal fighting, and an atmosphere of tension has spread over Gaza that is not less violent than that which has spread as a result of the offensive that has been launched by Israeli Occupation Forces for nearly a month. Since Monday evening, violence has extended to most areas in the Gaza Strip from the north to the south, and militants have deployed in the streets, at the entrances of towns and near governmental headquarters and security compounds. Militants from Hamas and Fatah movements have used various kinds of weapons and have occupied a number of official buildings belonging to the Palestinian presidency and government. The attacks have even targeted the house and the office of Prime Minister Ismail Haniya and the presidential compound. Militants have been more violent than ever before as they have

stormed hospitals and forced medical crews out. They even fired inside hospital and killed a number of persons. Moreover, mutual kidnappings and field executions have been reported. The two movements have even threatened to escalate the situation and extend the fighting to the West Bank. In this atmosphere of terror, approximately 67,000 students have attended the exams of the General Certificate of Education (Tawjihi), in addition to thousands of university students who have attended their final exams. The current situation threatens the overall educational process. PCHR strongly condemns such fighting which is not of the ethics, sacrifices and struggle of the Palestinian people, and warns that it threatens the overall national aspirations and lives of innocent Palestinian civilians, whose daily activities have been paralyzed.

PCHR would like to apologize for not being able to report on many details of this fighting as its staff members have not been able to move freely and its office in Gaza City has been besieged by the exchange of fire. Branch offices have also worked with a limited capacity and under severe challenges. According to information available to PCHR so far, 21 Palestinians have been killed and at least 150 others have been wounded in the past 72 hours.

PCHR strongly condemns the bloody internal fighting between Fatah and Hamas movements, and:

1. Calls upon the Palestinian President and Government to fulfill their responsibilities, and to take immediate steps to restore order and security, and to protect civilians from the effects of these disgraceful clashes.
2. Holds the two movements fully responsible for any damage to the educational process, warns of the consequences of the continuation of fighting on Twajihi students, and stresses that there no justification to sacrifice the educational process and push students into disgraceful fighting and a conflict over authority.
3. Calls for a serious investigation into all these incidents, and for the prosecution of the perpetrators regardless of their identity.
4. Calls for the withdrawal of all forms of militancy from streets, intersections, and residential buildings, including members of security forces and militias, as continued militant presence threatens the lives of innocent civilians.

The Psychosocial causes for the Palestinian Factional War

By: Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj

14 February 2007

Many questions even after Mecca meeting remain ... what has become of us? Our people have suffered for 59 years from displacement, homelessness, discrimination, impoverishment and expatriation, but they withstood that suffering and never killed each other; so what happened to us? The late Arafat rejected a plan to kill Abu Nidal, who had already killed a number of Palestinian leaders, and said, "If we start this series of killings, we will never stop." So what happened? I have heard stories about new forms of cold-blooded and callous murder, and about Palestinians denigrating and holding as infidel other Palestinians or accusing them of heresy and bigotry as a prelude to ostracizing or murdering them. I have also heard numerous stories about children who have been horrified and traumatized and have fallen victims to nightmares, loss of appetite, insomnia and fear of street-walking. What is happening to us?

How could things amount to assaulting homes, mosques and universities?

Politics and political difference alone do not provide the answer. There are several additional social and psychological factors for what is befalling this society. A safe and stable environment is one that produces normal children, while the environment we have been living in since the occupation is one in which violence proliferates and becomes rampant.

I- Torture

After the 1967 Israeli occupation, a legitimate national armed resistance movement emerged involving multitudes of freedom fighters. I can recall that, while I was working at Al-Shifa hospital in the early seventies, we received several murdered and injured freedom fighters every day. Reacting to that resistance and in order to contain and destroy it, Israeli forces arrested tens of thousands of Palestinians and subjected them to systematic and various forms of torture as documented by research teams of both Palestinian and Israeli institutions acting in the area of defending human rights.

The effects of torture extend from the individual to his community. Research has found that a high percentage of torture victims become prey of mental illness which transform victims into problems for their own selves as well as for their own families. The commonest problem arising from torture is the violence which the victim directs to women and children, which in its turn makes the home a battlefield. The reason for such phenomenon is that the torture a young man is subjected to makes him harbor a desire for revenge by violent means and subsequently he unconsciously resorts to identify with the Israeli torturer. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the methods of torture used in Palestinian prisons are the same as those used in Israeli prisons; they have at times even been more atrocious and resulted in deaths among several prisoners in the early years of the PNA takeover. Indeed, in many instances, the Palestinian investigator was an ex-victim of Israeli torture. This phenomenon has created a cycle of internal violence. We note here that many Hamas members were tortured in Palestinian prisons. Feelings of immense hatred and desire for revenge started to build up and heighten culminating in accusations of infidelity leveled at leaders of security organs. All of these factors led to a state of polarization and division which has aggravated by Hamas coming to power. Now it seemed that some were willing to retaliate and take revenge from those who tortured them, a desire which was intensified by the fact that Hamas government was besieged and there spread a feeling that it was targeted and conspired against and that some Fatah leaders were accomplices in such conspiracy.

II- The First Intifada

Despite the glorification we attribute to the “children of the stone” whom we hold as examples of heroism, we cannot ignore the fact that they are flesh and blood and that they have been victims of various forms of violence. In our work at the Gaza Community Mental Health Program we conducted a research on three thousand Gaza children. The study has found that those children were subjected to several traumatic and violent experiences including beating, bone-breaking, injury, tear gas and acts of killing and injury, all of which experiences have left indelible effects on their psych. Yet, to many, the most excruciating experience was seeing their fathers beaten helpless by Israeli soldiers without resistance.

Such an experience will ultimately transform a whole generation into something different as the second intifada showed; for the children of the first intifada are themselves the men of the second intifada. Those young men who are pursuing revenge and killing and are at times seeking even their own death are the selfsame children who cherished so many

dreams of a better life but saw them fade away and fall apart the moment they saw their fathers fall helpless and defenseless victims of arrogant force incarnated in the Israeli soldier. No wonder then that the Palestinian child will see his model in that Israeli soldier and that his language will be the language of force and his toys and games will be the toys and games of death.

III- The Effects of Ongoing Violence

Israel systematically assaulted the Palestinian people in all aspects of their lives and it even escalated its aggressions during the second intifada as it resorted to a policy of house demolition; infrastructure, farm and facilities destruction; extrajudicial killing and mass detention of activists and systematic torture. Psychological research worldwide has shown that ongoing armed conflicts result in what is known as chronic social toxication which makes people and children less sensitive and more ruthless, less rational and more impulsive, less conversant and more violent. More significantly, new groups are formed of individuals who are alien to the family system and to the social fabric and who are powerful and violent enough to be capable of heinous killing. Ultimately, those individuals are viewed as untouchable masters and examples to be followed by the disadvantaged and vulnerable. The outcome of this is that brute force, not morality, emerge is the example to be followed.

Another effect of such social toxication is the phenomenon of social disintegration and disunity which is manifest in the decline of the father's authority with all the moral values it embodies; and in the young men's tendency to search for a new identity which they seek to be assertive and different from that of their vulnerable and downtrodden parents. There emerged the new form of identity provided by Islamic organizations and armed militias which in many cases supplanted national and filial belonging and rendered many persons alienated from their community.

IV- The PNA Performance

The PNA performance has had a tremendous psychological impact on the Palestinians. Throughout its term of office, the PNA regime has been characterized by absence of law and justice, violation of human and individual rights, contravention against public lands, disrespect for reason, disregard of accountability and penalty amounting to rewarding of offenders, spread of favoritism and nepotism which created heightened feelings of bitterness, exasperation and hatred among the disadvantaged and destitute. All of these factors made the Palestinian citizen feel that only force in its different forms is the only resort.

The PNA added insult to injury as its security organs penetrated families. This reciprocally allowed families to penetrate security organs which became controlled by Fatah leaders as well as by heads of a large Gaza family. This resulted in gross security violations and social disorder, and culminated in numerous instances of law-breaking and aggressions against public and individual rights and property. In all circumstances, aggressors were backed either by their faction, family or a security organ and sometimes by all of them, which made power concentrated in the hands of influential individuals in the large authority apparatus. This eventually resulted in more disunity and division among those same families, and new armed and rival groups emerged by virtue of the official authority support; only to turn against that authority one day and dauntlessly assault some of its major symbols.

In this regard, it is noticeable that the Palestinian people's performance in the first intifada

was characterized by an overwhelming sense of solidarity, resilience and commitment to moral values, all of which seemed to be nonexistent in the second intifada which has been dominated by chaos, disintegration and division. Some observers attribute such change to the presence of the PNA and to its inability to assume a leading role, as well as to its acting as a barrier between the resistance and occupation. Its corruption and weakness made it easy for both parties to beat it.

V- Absence of a common enemy and uncontrolled arms

The actual non-presence of a common enemy in Gaza diverted the furious and enraged feelings of revenge from their natural path and redirected them into the Palestinian community among individuals, families and the factions contending for power and their militias. Under deteriorating social, economic, political and psychological conditions, it is only natural, as we have already warned that violence will prevail in the Palestinian society and among its individuals and groups. This situation further worsened with the proliferation of arms and plentitude of funds in the hands of contending parties and militias. Those factors on their own, however, cannot account for those bizarre acts of revenge, torture and killing committed in the recent clashes between Fatah and Hamas and which reflect inveterate grudge and hatred. Therefore, there is need to consider the other reasons.

Conclusion

The systematized repression and torture that the Palestinian people was subjected to under the Israeli occupation, the poor performance of the PNA as embodied in the absence of law and justice and maladministration all led the youth to seek and cling to a new identity which is different from that of their helpless parents and which holds that naked force is the only means to avenge themselves over the suppression they have long been subjected to.

The formation of those political, partisan and religious identities and the view that ultimate force is the model of heroism are the major cause of the status quo of Palestinian armed conflict which finds its fuel in many causes such as division, hatred, and vindictiveness of a generation that rebels against the declining family system and the chaotic PNA.

Please visit our site:
Gaza Community Mental Health Programme
www.gcmhp.net

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