

# War without Context: Fatah, Hamas and Flawed Language

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From a distance, the struggle between Hamas and Fatah appears commonplace, a typical third world country's political scuffle over interpretation of democracy that went out of control, or simply a 'power struggle' between two political rivals vying for international aid and recognition. In fact, the conflict may appear as if it popped out of nowhere and will continue as long as the seemingly power-hungry Palestinians carry on with their self-defeating fight.

Therefore, it's typical to read such deceptive news reports as that of Ibrahim Barzak of the Associated Press: "Hundreds of Palestinian patients have been trapped in the Gaza Strip, unable to travel abroad for crucial treatment for cancer and other diseases, because of political infighting between Gaza 's militant Hamas rulers and their Palestinian rivals."

Such sinister terminology as " Gaza 's Hamas rulers" - which happened to refer to a democratically elected government - is now in common use, in most Western news agencies, and those who readily recycle their reports.

Barzak makes no mention of the Israeli factor in the decried Palestinian rivalries, and the only reference to the US in his report was that of the "U.S.-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, which controls the West Bank ."

Is Barzak serious? Even if we willingly overlook the fact that Palestinian rivalry has little influence on Israel's decision to block the Gaza borders, thus subjugate its inhabitants, and purposely disregarded the US-led international campaign to isolate Gaza and its government, how can one allow such a misreading of so obvious a fact: since when does Abbas "control" the West Bank? What should one make of the Israeli military occupation of several decades, the hundreds of illegal Jewish settlements, the countless checkpoints, 'bypass roads', numerous 'military zones' and the giant Israeli wall, an entire matrix of control, in fact, which has been described by many leading international observers as "apartheid"?

True, the situation in Gaza has reached such harrowing levels, that the injustices committed in the West Bank are being relegated as if non-consequential. But the fact is, the Israeli assault on Palestinian freedom, human rights and international law in the West Bank never ceased for a moment, even when thousands of Palestinians in Gaza were being brutally murdered.

But neither the inhumane siege and murder of Gazans, nor the suffocating occupation - with all of its lethal and non-lethal manifestations - of the West Bank seem to awaken the

curiosity of many, who foolishly, or cunningly blame the victim for his own misery.

Of course that shouldn't mean that Hamas and Fatah, or any other Palestinian party should be absolved from their own missteps, such as violations of human rights, infringement on freedom of speech or any other aspect of which they possess even if an iota of control. If individuals from Hamas violated human rights in Gaza, then such actions should be recognized, condemned and corrected. The same is true when Abbas' government continues to violate the edicts of democracy in whatever limited jurisdiction it has; that too must be recognized and duly censured. But for the media to make such outrageous claims, whether indirectly blaming Hamas for the deadly Gaza siege – and its consequences – or haphazardly granted Abbas a position of 'control' over the occupied West Bank, is certainly contemptible.

The manipulation of the term "democracy" is also worthy of mentioning. An unsuspected media consumer would never guess that Hamas was elected democratically, and that a democratic government with a majority in the parliament cannot possibly stage a 'coup' against itself.

That same reader would find it hard to believe that the legal term in office of celebrated president of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas has already expired, and its renewal would require re-elections or the consent of the Hamas-dominated parliament.

President Abbas, however, is reportedly assembling a new government, which is expected to, once again, exclude the majority-party in the parliament

The government, if formed, will likely to be headed by Salam Fayyad, whose international prestige stems solely from the fact that top US officials, including former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has praised him as trustworthy. Fayyad was never elected and is little popular among Palestinians.

More, even if Hamas agrees to Abbas' appointed government, it would be impossible for the parliament to convene and vote, for a large number of elected Palestinian legislators are political prisoners in Israel. That too seems too trivial a context to mention.

When a story is dominated by selective terminology, numbers, names and dates without proper and balanced context, a media consumer is sold nothing but misinformation.

Consider, for example, the report of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), published in late 2008, which ranked and classified 167 countries based on various democratic indicators into four categories: full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes. The Palestinian Authority was ranked number 85, digressing from flawed democracy into hybrid regime category. The explanation? According to the report: "The Islamist Hamas movement that won the parliamentary election in early 2006, and Fatah, who hold on to the presidency have failed to bridge their differences. Instead, factional infighting has worsened in recent years, culminating in the takeover of power in the Gaza Strip by Hamas while the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, of Fatah has tried to maintain his grip on the West Bank. Political violence has worsened."

The word, "Israel", was not mentioned. Not once.

Despite the fact that "factional fighting", and failure to "bridge their differences" are largely attributed to external pressures (for example: Israeli and American ultimatums to Abbas,

violence against Hamas, and conditional international aid to both), Palestinians are ranked as an independent nation in complete control of its own affairs. Meanwhile, Israel was ranked number 38, merely a “flawed” democracy, perhaps for the sheer fact that it recognizes itself as a “Jewish state” and discriminates against anyone who doesn’t fit the criteria.

“If you control the language, you control the debate,” it’s often said. But when the perception of an entire nation depends on how terms are coined and sentences are constructed, then language takes on other meanings, deceptive, demonizing and immoral.

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