



ISRAELI PALESTINIANS AND THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY⁽¹⁾

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This article discusses the economic, social, and mainly political relationship between Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians living under the Palestinian Authority. Whereas once the PLO regarded Palestinians in Israel with apathy and even disrespect, close--though informal--relations have developed between Palestinian leaderships on either side of the Green Line.

When studying Palestinian society in Israel, researchers have generally focused on the relationship between Palestinian citizens of Israel and other Palestinians communities, especially those in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This research has yielded terms such as “Israelization” and “Palestinization” to describe the sociological processes the two communities have experienced since their separation in 1948.

Less attention, however, has been paid to the nature of relations between Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinian national movement’s leadership, mainly the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Further, so far there have not been any noteworthy studies on the relationship between Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA).

When exploring the PA’s relationship with Palestinians Israelis, some methodological problems arise. First, the PA, established in 1994, is still very young, making it difficult to arrive at conclusions. Second, because of the dearth of material on this subject, newspaper articles and extensive interviews with PA officials and others in Israel serve as the main sources of information. Third, hard facts and figures are hard to come by. Interviewees, for example, could not name the number of

economic or social projects being carried out by Israeli Palestinians within the lands under PA jurisdiction.

THE PLO AND PALESTINIAN IN ISRAEL

The PA, established in 1994, is in a sense an extension of the PLO. Thus, it is important before beginning a discussion of the Israeli Palestinians-PA relationship by examining the similarities and differences between the PLO and the PA, as well as the patterns that developed over the years between the PLO and Palestinians inside Israel.

Palestinian citizens of Israel did not occupy a high place on the PLO’s agenda. (2) In fact, from the 1964 establishment of the PLO through the end of that decade, Palestinian citizens of Israel were rarely even mentioned by the various Palestinian groups. When they were mentioned, it was usually with disrespect, as they were labeled collaborators with Israel. (3)

This negative image started to change at the beginning of the 1970s due to a number of possible factors. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, dozens of Israeli Palestinian political activists joined Palestinian organizations, mainly the

PLO. Also, the “resistance literature” (*adab al-muqawamah*) of Palestinian writers and poets in Israel caught the attention of PLO leaders.

Once Palestinian Israelis were no longer considered a lost cause, the PLO became very interested in gaining their sympathy and moral support to enhance its legitimacy, though PLO leaders did not perceive their support as essential, as shown by the following examples:

1) The PLO did not have a plan for recruiting Palestinian Israelis as it did for Palestinian communities in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip. (4)

2) The 1977 PLO decision to establish contact with liberal forces in Israel referred to Jews rather than Arabs. And, indeed, in the 1980s, the PLO, moving toward a political solution, started extensive contact with Jewish Israelis.

3) The PLO often spoke of Israeli Palestinians in sentimental terms, as “Arab brethren of 1948” but had no rational plan for enhancing relations with the Arab community in Israel.

4) Contacts between the PLO and Palestinian leaders in Israel such as Ahmed Tibi, a Palestinian Israeli who served as PA chairman Yasir Arafat’s former advisor for Israeli matters and is now a Knesset member, were employed to serve as a bridge with Israel’s Jewish establishment. But, the “bridge” was more of a slogan than a fact. Excluding Tibi, no Palestinian Israelis fulfilled the role intended by the PLO and when negotiations between Israelis and the PLO finally were established, they were direct, without any Israeli Palestinian mediators.

5) Even when the PLO opted for a political solution with Israel and recognized the potential political importance of Israeli Palestinian voters, their activities were only reactions to their activities rather than initiatives to affect the situation. Still, the

relationship between the Israeli Palestinian electorate and the PLO was significant and mutually beneficial. The PLO hoped to influence Israeli politics through the Arab vote, and Israeli Palestinians hoped to receive PLO legitimacy--important as part of their identity construction. The many visits of politicians to Yasir Arafat when he was headquartered in Tunisia were called “pilgrimages to Tunisia” by Israeli Palestinians.

In sum, the PLO approached Israeli Palestinians with a “reactive policy.” It had no initiatives, plans, or programs--political, social, economic, or otherwise--to enhance relations between Palestinians on either side of the Green Line.

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DOMAIN

Visits between Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza illustrate this point. Arafat’s arrival in Gaza in 1994 triggered a stream of visits from Israeli Palestinian groups, regardless of their political views. (5) Israeli Palestinians also invite PA and institutional officials from the West Bank or Gaza to visit them. For instance, the heads of Arab councils in the Galilee invited the heads of the PA police for a visit in 1994. (6)

Summer camps which have also been established mainly by Palestinian citizens of Israel are a recent phenomenon whose purpose is to deepen relations between various Palestinian communities and to teach children about the history of their families. (7) These camps were held mainly in Arabs cities in Israel.

Undoubtedly, social activities between Israeli Palestinian and the Palestinians in the West Bank have drastically increased since the establishment of the PA, though no figures available. It is important to note that Israeli Palestinians initiate most of these activities. Ahmed Tibi explained that these kinds of contacts

increased because they are easier to arrange now. He emphasized that there are no PA cultural programs for enhancing these relations

THE ECONOMIC DOMAIN

The establishment of the PA and Arafat's arrival in Gaza led to high expectations among Palestinians and Israeli Palestinians for investment and general economic improvement. Arafat called on Israeli Palestinians to invest in projects in the Palestinian-ruled areas (8) and, indeed, some Israeli Palestinian investors offered their services to the PLO. (9)

Economic relations between the two communities are diverse. The Israeli press, for example, reported that the heads of Arab councils transferred money to councils in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. (10) Some Knesset members accused the heads of Israeli Palestinians' local government of also transferring money to intifada activists who were injured in clashes with the Israeli army, requiring the convening of the Knesset Committee for the State Comptroller. (11)

The PA did in fact request help from Israeli Palestinians on occasion. For example, Arafat asked Nimer Hussayn, the former head of the local government association of Israel's Arabs, to arrange material aid--beds, food, and other items--for the Palestinian police in Jenin. (12)

Despite these transfers, economic transactions are generally not planned nor is there any joint economic program between Israel's Palestinian communities and the PA, according to Ahmed Tibi. He maintains that the dozens of projects that do exist are of a small or average scale. (13)

All the Arabs interviewed stressed that there is a willingness to strengthen economic relations between the two communities, but denied that there is any program, or even vision, for doing so. There

are only slogans. Many explained that the PA is still too young and that its performance is not always positive.

THE POLITICAL DOMAIN

Political connections between Palestinian citizens of Israel and PA Palestinians are multi-layered and touch on local conflict resolution, Knesset elections, the PA regime, and the local government representatives of Palestinians in Israel.

Daoud al-Zeer, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), said that while the PA does not currently represent Palestinians inside the Green Line from a political or legal perspective, it does represent them from a national perspective, as leader of the Palestinian people. (14) Another PLC member, Salah al-Ta'mari, said, in contrast, that the PLO represents Israeli Palestinians because it is a more inclusive organization than the PA. (15)

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Solving local disputes rarely brings Israeli Palestinians and PA Palestinians together, though some prominent Israeli Palestinian leaders have offered their services to the PA. For example, the Islamic Movement in Israel has played an important role in improving relations between the PA and Hamas (16). Hamas, on few occasions, has turned to Shaykh Abdallah Nimer Darwish, a leader of the Islamic Movement, to mediate between the PA, on the one hand, and Hamas and Islamic Jihad, on the other. (17)

Similarly, PA officials have offered to help solve local problems among Israeli Palestinians. Arafat, for instance, instructed senior PA officials to interfere in the local conflict in the village of Tur'an between Muslims and Christians. As in the social and economic domains, however, this channel of contact is not part of any plan or program.

As Tibi explained: "The mediation of Palestinian elements from Israel between the PA and Hamas is not systematic or consistent." It happens in response to crises because "only Muslim leaders in Israel have extensive and continuous contacts that allow them to conduct mediation." (18)

Occasionally, leaders of Israel's Palestinian community offer to mediate between Hamas or the PA and Israel. Darwish, for instance, asked to meet with former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to discuss Hamas leader Shaykh Ahmed Yasin's proposal to stop violence. (19) An Israeli Arab Knesset member from the Democratic Arab Party, Talab Al-Sani, and Islamic leaders attempted to mediate between the government of Israel and Hamas leaders following the kidnap of Israeli soldier Nahshon Waxman in 1994, though Israel denies this.

POLITICAL COORDINATION

There is almost no political coordination between politicians in both communities, though a few cases can be found. In July 1997, for example, Faysal al-Husayni, the PA's representative in Jerusalem, took part in a meeting of the Follow-Up Committee of Israeli Palestinians in order to gain support from Israeli Palestinians against an Israeli policy of Judiazation of East Jerusalem. (20)

As Al-Zeer noted, there are continuous meetings between PLC members and, as well as ongoing meetings between representative of Arab institutions in Israel, such as the Follow-Up Committee, and PA institutions. Delegations of Israeli Palestinians meet with Arafat frequently.

Both al-Zeer and al-Ta'mari point to the mutual sympathy between Israeli Palestinians and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Al-Zeer said that PA politicians, institutions, and media supported the rights of Palestinian Israelis through

direct messages, articles, and demonstrations. (21)

However, in spite of the sympathy between the two communities, al-Ta'mari claims that "the PNA now does not represent the Palestinians inside the Green Line from political and legal perspective, but from a national perspective we consider the representation as one. Anything that comes from the PNA I think will be supported by our brethren inside the Green Line." (22)

KNESSET ELECTIONS

Arafat was against establishing a new Arab party to run for the Knesset during the 1996 elections. (23) In the Israeli newspaper Davar, Michal Sela beautifully and metaphorically described the legitimacy that Israeli Palestinian politicians and parties seek to obtain from Arafat:

"The Koshier signature of Arafat is a concrete factor in party competition. There is serious competition between political parties and movements and politicians wishing to join the political game, which is not always sportive, as to the extent of connection with him and the number of visits in his office. There is an atmosphere of elbow war, as if without the Koshier signature of Arafat it is impossible to run for the Knesset. This started with the coming of Arafat to Gaza, when delegations made pilgrimages to the president's office." (24)

As in previous election campaigns, Palestinian leaders in Gaza and the West Bank called on Israeli Palestinians to be unified in order to strengthen their political power in Israel. Arafat's aim was to increase the number of Arab Knesset members, which together with the hoped-for election of Shimon Peres's Labor party in 1996 and

Ehud Barak in 1999, would continue the peace process. Israeli Palestinian political figures explained, however, that they did not want to combine into a single party and asserted their own standpoint on issues and strategy. (25)

Thus, although the PA and Israeli Palestinians agree on the benefits of increasing the number of Arab Knesset members and a Labor party victory, concrete intervention by Arafat is totally rejected by Israeli Palestinians. (26)

THE PA REGIME

Many Israeli Palestinian leaders and intellectuals interviewed expressed disappointment with the PA. Lutfi Mash'ur, editor of al-Sinara, a leading Arab newspaper, said he wishes to see more democracy and believes that the current PA governing style is such a catastrophe that the Israeli occupation is preferable in some cases. He is very pessimistic as to the PA's factionalism, tribalism, and lack of respect for democracy and freedom. (27) Walid Sadik, a Knesset member, agrees with Mash'ur and adds that "everything is based on tribalism rather than achievements, and the achievements of the Intifada are lost." (28) Salah Murshid, the former chairman of the Communist party in the Knesset, shares his colleagues' disappointment with the PA, but attributes its shortcomings to the Israeli occupation. (29)

In short, all the Israeli Palestinians interviewed want to see more democracy in the PA and in the future Palestinian state, though--depending on their specific orientations--a Tunisian, Lebanese, or slightly modified Iranian model (as opposed to an American model) would satisfy them. All the interviewees, regardless of their political affiliation and orientation, strongly protested the PA's human rights violations, but differences emerged concerning the PA's culpability. Members of Zionist parties

accused Arafat and his associates of creating this situation, whereas members of the Communist and Democratic Arab parties believed that the Palestinians' lack of a sovereign country is a mitigating factor and even explain the misconduct as the heritage of the Israeli occupation.

ISRAELI PALESTINIANS AS A BRIDGE

Mash'ur did not believe that the phenomenon of Arafat using individual Israeli Palestinians, such as Ahmed Tibi, as advisors would continue because to choose one person can alienate other who view themselves as leaders. 'Atallah Mansur, a journalist, agreed with Mash'ur but suggested that the PA would soon not need such people as it gains more knowledge on its own about Israel and the Israelis. Dr. Mustafa Kabaha, an Arab intellectual, said he viewed Tibi's ties with the PA as personal opportunism and did not believe other Israeli Palestinians would take on this role. Abd Al-Wahab Darawsha, former head of the Arab Democratic Party, on the other hand, looks at Tibi's role positively and believed that Israeli Palestinians can serve as an economic and cultural bridge for peace between Israel and the PA (if not all the Arab world) on the other. Muhammad Nafa', secretary of the Communist party, falls in line with Darawsha but believed that Tibi should choose to be either an adviser to Arafat or involved in Israeli politics, but should not have a foot in both.

Events in 1999 proved most of these views correct. Almost simultaneously, Tibi was fired by the PA after some personal disputes and decided to run for the Knesset. He was elected in the 1999 elections. Arafat did not replace him with another Israeli Palestinian advisor.

In short, in the political domain, too, relations between the PA and Israeli Palestinians are mainly characterized by sympathy and solidarity but very little

political coordination. Generally, though, Israeli Palestinians support in principle the PA's stands.

CONCLUSION

It is too early to draw ultimate conclusions about the nature of the Israeli Palestinians-PA relationship though the following points are relevant:

First, the PA has no political, socio-cultural, or economic program for enhancing relations between Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line. The PA does not show much interest in Israeli Palestinians and is mainly concerned with building its own institutions. Second, the emerging pattern of Israeli Palestinian-PA relations is similar to the one that existed in the time of the PLO. Initiatives usually come from Palestinian citizens of Israel and are later adopted by the PA.

Third, declarations issued by Palestinian Israeli leaders regarding the PA are pretty clear: Israeli Palestinians share a history, culture, language, and identity with their Palestinian brethren, but have a separate political system with which they expect other Palestinians (particularly the PA) not to interfere.

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NOTES

** Interviews with Palestinians in the West Bank were conducted by Dr. Hanna Tushyeh. Interviews with Palestinian Israelis were conducted by Amit Faikofski between September 13 and October 10, 1998.

1) Many identity constructs are used to refer to Israel's Arab minority. The Israeli establishment prefers Israeli Arabs, or Arabs in Israel. Others refer to them as Israeli

Palestinians, Palestinian Arabs in Israel, or the Arabs inside the Green Line. This article will use the terms: Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinian Israelis, or Israeli Palestinians.

2) See Michal Sela. *The PLO and the Arabs in Israel*. (The Institute for Peace Studies, 1996).

3) See Emili Sahliyah, "A survey on the political attitudes of Palestinians in the West Bank and Inside Israel," in Alexander Schoelch (ed.), *Palestinians over the Green Line*. (London: Ithaca Press, 1983).

4) Sahliyah, p. 85.

5) See "A delegation of Palestinians from the Negev visited Yasir Arafat in Hebron," *Kol Al-Arab*, September 5, 1997; "A delegation of the Democratic Front visited yesterday in Gaza," *Al-Quds*, June 5, 1994.

6) *Kol Ha'emek Vihagalil*, May 27, 1994.

7) *Kol-Bo*, August 8, 1996.

8) *Yediot Aharonot*, July 7, 1994; *Telegraf*, August 1, 1994.

9) *Kol Ha'emek Vihagalil*, January 7, 1994.

10) *Kol Ha'emek Vihagalil*, October 31, 1997.

11) *Hatsofeh*, May 21, 1995.

12) *Haaretz*, July 19, 1995.

13) Interview, August 1998.

14) Interview, February 4, 1998.

15) Interview, February 9, 1998.

16) *Haaretz*, October 21, 1997.

17) *Haaretz*, April 16, 1995.

18) Interview, August 1998.

19) *Hatsofeh*, October 21, 1997.

20) *Ma'ariv*, July 4, 1997.

21) Interview, February 4, 1998.

22) Interview, February 9, 1998.

23) *Kol Ha'emek ViHagalil*, October 20, 1995.

24) *Davar*, December 12, 1994.

25) See Barry Rubin, "External Factors in Israel's 1999 Elections," *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (December 1999).

26) *Sulazman Jubran, Davar*, August 6, 1995.

27) Interview, September 1998.

28) Interview, October 1998.

29) Interview, September 1998.