

Finding Lessons in Gaza's Bloodshed

By [Ramzy Baroud](#)

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The Hamas-Fatah clash that has culminated into a mini-civil war in recent weeks is both old and new, and while some of its elements are uniquely Palestinian, much of it was manufactured at the behest of US-Israeli intelligence and governments.

The tensions between Fatah and Hamas are decades old. Fatah has – since the late 1960s until today – claimed a superior, if not exclusive, position at the helm of Palestinian politics. At times there seemed little margin for any other organization – be it secular, socialist or religious – to share a platform with Yasser Arafat's movement.

Throughout the years, Fatah ensured the relevance of Palestinians to their own struggle. It's important, therefore, that Fatah is not seen as one monolithic body. Fatah security chief Mohammed Dahlan and the likes have tainted the reputation of Fatah forever, but the movement and its decades-long struggle must not be reduced to these individuals. With Fatah through its hegemony within the Palestine Liberation Organization being the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" for so many years, Hamas' rise was never accepted as part of the fold.

The second Palestinian uprising of 2000 can be seen as a revolt against Israel and its occupation, but also against those who did its bidding among Palestinians – the shameful legion of Palestinians whose wealth grew to unprecedented levels as the great majority were steeped further in poverty.

Such shamelessness fostered support for Hamas among ordinary Palestinians, and in January 2006, Hamas swept the polls, to its own surprise and the surprise of many. The elites and wealthy few had espoused a society that was governed by brutality, nepotism and favoritism and was unabashedly managed with the help of Israel. Hamas was the only serious alternative: its anti-corruption record and the tough fight it displayed against Israel made it deserving of the responsibility from the ordinary Palestinian's point of view.

Though Palestinians were ready to give Hamas a chance, the US government, Israel, various Arab regimes and Fatah were not. The latest weeks in Gaza, the tragedy of killings and brutality there, all attest to the lengths the US and Israel are willing to take to keep Hamas at bay.

What took place in Gaza was tragic, but the question remains. Considering the circumstances at the time, did Hamas and Fatah have other options that could have allowed them to achieve their objectives peacefully?

I think there was enough determination on both sides to prevent a civil war at any cost, thus the agreement in Mecca. However, US officials entrusted with ensuring the failure and

collapse of the unity government and the utter corruption among Fatah's self-serving security circles made good intentions simply extraneous.

The violence was heartbreaking, especially when one read the details: people getting thrown from the top of high buildings and summary executions. Palestinians were caught in many violent episodes in the past, but this one is most tragic, for it took place under the watchful eye of Israel, which mercilessly continued to kill Palestinians, young and old at the same time that Palestinians were killing one another.

Now that the tragedy has occurred, one can only hope that common sense and sanity will return and for Palestinians to rediscover, once more, that they are still an occupied nation that has no meaningful political sovereignty.

Unfortunately, the US government and Israel remain most relevant in determining the course of action in Palestine, and naturally, they continue to infuse much harm. Israel is now scheduled to hand back the money it stole from the Palestinians in the form of taxes collected on their behalf to Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank, while declaring it intends to tighten the siege on the already besieged and utterly poor Gaza.

Even personal money transfers, Western Union and the like, will be halted to ensure the total suffocation of Gaza. The US will pump tens of millions of dollars into hand Abbas' hands, and Fatah's warlords – rampaging against Hamas institutions in the West Bank – will also receive more than their fair share of money and weapons. It is quite simple to understand the underlying intents of this generosity after a year and a half of embargo, or to picture the horrible scenario that will result from an empowered, corrupt and vengeful regime.

Israel is committing itself to ensure that the friction among Palestinians will destroy their national project in the West Bank as well. Fatah will now be allowed to do what Israel has failed to do over six decades of occupation.

Despite the painful nature of this conflict, one can only hope that some valuable lessons can be gleaned from all of this, not just by Palestinians alone, but by others who endure along with them the meddling of superpowers and whose democracy is a constant target.

First, Gaza has exposed, like no other experience in modern history, the hypocrisy of the US government's democracy charade; if it was true democracy that the United States was seeking, it would have acknowledged the Palestinian people's collective will and fostered dialogue with their representatives, as opposed to starvation and blockade and covert operations to topple the government.

Second, corruption, although temporarily rewarding, is never lasting, and the people, although forgiving and patient at times, have the ability to withstand pressure, to prevail and force change, even if violently.

Third, proxy politics is most harmful, in Palestine and elsewhere.

Palestinian leaders must learn that selling one's political will to foreign polities for the sake of money, power or political substantiation is unforgivable in the eyes of ordinary Palestinians. After all, it's those "ordinary" people who have stood up and confronted the awesome powers of Israel, the US and the corruption and brutality of some of their own for many decades. They will continue to do so no matter how high the price may be. Freedom

for Palestinians is more precious than bread, no matter how irrational this may sound.

Gaza might have descended into chaos for a few weeks or months, but so also has the US agenda championed by the remnants of the neo-conservative clique in the administration of President George W Bush, which stubbornly fails to operate outside the parameters of the doctrine of violence, secrecy, conspiracies and military coups.

They refuse to knowledge that it is not weapons that Palestinians want. It is simply freedom.

Ramzy Baroud is a Palestinian-American author and editor of PalestineChronicle.com; his latest book is The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle (Pluto Press, London).

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