
Israeli Security

Where did it start and where does it end?

In occupied Palestine, wearing clothes or painting pictures **with the colors of the Palestinian flag is a security offense**; so is throwing stones, teaching a neighbor's child to read or planting a tree. One can ask whether peace itself is thought to threaten state security: Why else to arrest Palestinians who engage in peace dialogues with Israelis, or prevent Israeli peace activists **from visiting West Bank villages, or convict Israeli politicians for meeting PLO officials?**

Judging by the daily functioning of the Israeli occupation forces, security appears to be a term so broad as to defy definition. The ambiguity and elasticity of the Israeli security concept became obvious to the world during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon; today it stands exposed by the brutality enacted against the unarmed masses of the intifada. Still, when the PLO launched its peace offensive in 1988, it faced a barrage of queries as to whether its proposals would meet Israeli security needs.

In this study, we will examine how the Israeli state views security, hoping to provide a background for assessing the prospects for the PLO's peace initiative, and the intifada's impact on the course of the Arab-Zionist conflict. We will deal with the elements of Israeli security, how this concept has changed over the years, and the impact of the intifada on Israeli thinking in this sphere.

It is our thesis that the main reason for the elasticity of the Israeli security concept lies in the nature of the state itself, **which is based on the Zionist ideology.** As a settler-colonial enterprise, the Zionist movement had to concern itself with all aspects of building a state: territory, natural resources, immigration, industry, infrastructure, etc. It could not be content with a narrow definition of security restricted to the military sphere alone, although this is in fact the bulwark of the whole project. We will not here focus on the military aspect in detail for the simple reason that we previously dealt with this topic extensively in a study on the Israeli role in the region (see DP nos. 24 - 32). Here we ask the reader to bear in mind the primacy of military supremacy in Israeli thinking, both in terms of sophisticated weaponry and the training, combative morale and integrity of the armed forces, for this is a main factor in evaluating the effects of the Palestinian intifada.

Besides imposing a comprehensive definition of security, the Israeli state's nature means that it can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between legitimate security concerns on the one hand, and the Israeli drive for expansion and **military supremacy on the other.** Objectively, Israeli statehood occurred via uprooting and disempowering the Palestinian people, occupying their land and that of neighboring Arab peoples. Thus, Israel engendered the hostility of Palestinians and Arabs, and necessitated their struggle to redress these grievances. As a logical consequence, any expression of Palestinian national identity or Arab progress can be construed as a threat to Israeli security, because it challenges the essence of the Zionist project.

WHO IS THE ENEMY— PALESTINIAN OR ARAB THREAT?

Israeli strategists generally count the Arab «invasion» in 1948 as the major challenge to Israel's establishment. Yet assuming the Zionists exert their military prowess where they **sense a threat, one should note actual practice.** The Zionist militias began their concerted campaign of armed attacks on the Palestinians in December 1947, five months before the Arab armies entered Palestine, and in fact right after the UN approved the establishment of a Palestinian and Jewish state. One can argue that the real brunt of Israeli violence over the years has been most consistently directed against the Palestinians, at home or in exile, as in Lebanon.

There are even indications that the Zionists found the Arab intervention convenient, for it provided them with the appearance of fighting regular armies rather than brutalizing a mainly civilian population. On May 13, 1948, the US consul general in Palestine reported the British view that Deir Yassin, where 250 Palestinians were massacred on April 9th, «might be repeated by the Jews to deliberately provoke a premature attack by the Arab armies» (Stephen Green, *Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with a Militant Israel 1948/1967*, p. 32).

After the Arab retreat, «military stabilization» of the cease-fire lines involved fighting the attempts of Palestinians trying to return to their land and families. The other side of the coin was the imposition of martial law on those Palestinians remaining in the Zionist state, not to be lifted until 1966, whereafter it was imposed on the rest of Palestine occupied in 1967. **Military rule was enacted in the name of security, but functioned mainly to gain control of land resources.**

In another vein, the Swedish UN mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, was assassinated by the Zionists on September 17, 1948, after he submitted a report recommending the return of the Palestinian refugees. **Was this a security operation to forestall the Palestinian return?**

In *My People, The Story of the Jews* (1968), Abba Eban paints a typical picture of Israel's situation after 1948: «... the Arab governments renewed their attempt to harry Israel out of existence. **There is no precedent in modern international history for such a comprehensive and diversified hostility.** Eban builds up to the 1956 attack on Egypt, citing «a massive Egyptian armament program... the seizure of the Suez Canal... Alliances with Syria and Jordan under Egyptian command gave Israel a sensation of encirclement.» In 1967, Eban claims, Syrian initiated hostility, counting on «uncritical Soviet support.» Eban credits the Soviet Union with bringing Egypt into the picture, and goes on to describe an alliance of almost all the Arab states, whereby their troops «converged toward Israel like greyhounds advancing to tear the quarry to pieces... Israel faced the greatest peril to her existence that she had known since the hour of her birth» (pp. 500 - 505).