

*The Intifadah and the 1936-1939 Uprising: A Comparison of the
Palestinian Arab Communities* 1

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Executive Summary

When comparing the 1936-1939 Palestinian uprising in various parts of western Palestine to the present intifadah, 2 taking place in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, the most striking conclusion is the large number of general similarities between these two manifestations of Palestinian national consciousness. 3 The two most significant differences between the uprisings, however, are first, that the intifadah generated a deeper and more prolonged Palestinian national coherence across all classes than did its predecessor. Second, the intifadah clarified and crystallized Palestinian opinion which in conjunction with other events helped to create a historic compromise in Palestinian public policy. Other major differences between the two uprisings are self-evident. Many pertain to the political environments in which both uprisings unfolded. During the 1936-1939 uprising, there were no existing UN resolutions

about Palestine. There was no Israel, no Israeli Arab population, no Palestinian political organization of the stature and strength of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), no decade-old Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty as a backdrop to an ongoing larger negotiating process, no decision made by the Hashemites in the midst of the uprising to place the responsibility of diplomatic progress on the shoulders of the Palestinian leadership, no willingness by a significant number of leading Palestinian Arab politicians to accept a Jewish state in a portion of Palestine, and no corresponding willingness on the part of an equally important number of Zionist/Israel leaders to assent to the legitimacy of Palestinian national aspirations. Of course fifty years ago Britain, not Israel, controlled all of mandatory Palestine. And whereas the Palestinian Arab community was then almost totally resident in Palestine, during the intifadah, the community was geographically divided and dispersed, with major population segments living in Jordan, Israel, and elsewhere.

At the writing of this paper in early 1990, the duration and political outcomes from the intifadah are still unknown. Therefore, making fully accurate and judicious juxtapositions between the two Palestinian uprisings is at best problematic. Comparisons made in this paper are therefore presented with considerable caution and with the severe limitations imposed by historical analysis of a current event.

This paper focuses primarily on just one variable present in both uprisings: the Palestinian Arab community. Here, I will attempt to analyze and compare participant composition, organizational structures, and political reactions of this community. By way of introduction, Part One is a general composite prose that stresses the general similarities between the two uprisings. This part should be read as if it could describe either uprising. Part Two focuses on the Palestinian Arab community.

Conclusions of this paper are:

- *The intifadah, unlike the 1936-1939 uprising, blurred social distinctions and strengthened communal bonds between classes within the Palestinian community.*
- *Whereas the 1936-1939 uprising was an uncontrollable insurgency from the viewpoint of the Palestinian leadership, the unfolding of the intifadah demonstrated some coordination of goals, tactics, and policies between the emerging leadership and those demonstrating against Israeli presence.*
- *An Islamic dimension was present in both uprisings, but in the intifadah, the Islamic component was not completely absorbed into a Palestinian national identity dominated by a secular ideology.*
- *As a result of other changes in the inter-Arab system, the present Palestinian political leadership, whether outside or inside the territories, possesses greater autonomy for political action than the Palestinian leadership enjoyed during and after the 1936-1939 uprising.*
- *The intifadah became a political engine for recognition and action by the Palestinian community. Additionally, it created an opportunity for diplomatic progress. But it challenged the Palestinian community to retain a semblance of unity and to avoid the debilitating political disharmony and communal disintegration that occurred after the 1936-1939 uprising.*

Part I Similarities

Which of the two uprisings is described below? Over the last several years, Palestinian Arabs engaged in civil disobedience and political violence in different parts of the Holy Land. ⁴ Palestinians were frustrated politically and economically. In general, they possessed a sense of despair and of being overwhelmed by forces beyond their control.

Several general factors can be identified as direct or ancillary causes of the recent uprising against the occupying administration. Among Palestinians, these factors collectively generated a sense of despondency about the future. A political stalemate was impending while Jewish presence continued to envelop Palestinians. None of the world powers, especially those with dominant influence in the Zionist-Palestinian Arab struggle, seemed prepared to change unilaterally the Palestinians' discomfiting *status quo*. Economically, the underemployment and unemployment among Palestinians was caused by local factors and regional insecurity. On the issue of religion, the shared disillusionment among many

Palestinian Muslims infused an Islamic component into the ardor which they directed against the Zionists and the West in general. In addition, political leaders in neighboring Arab states, while showing sincere interest in the Palestinian cause, were truly more interested in their own domestic agendas.

For several decades, Palestinian national identity had developed in response to Zionist presence, growth, and development. Palestinians were seeking self-government and self-determination in areas where they were clearly the demographic majority and where they had resided for generations. But Palestinian demands went unheeded. Since Palestinians lacked a viable military option, they used pressure, boycotts, demonstrations, and physical attacks against the administration which had denied them fulfillment of their political aspirations.

Palestinians thoroughly disliked the occupation of their land by what was from their perspective a foreign force. Palestinian Arabs openly feared that continued Jewish immigration, as well as the establishment and expansion of Jewish settlements, would eventually push them from what they considered to be their homeland. Spatially and demographically, Palestinians feared that unrestrained Jewish growth would ultimately leave them landless and totally disconnected from their patrimony. There was an existing fear among Palestinians that they would be steadily pushed eastward, perhaps even across the Jordan River, and totally expelled from western Palestine.

Prior to the outbreak of the unrest, the most important great power in the region resolved to support Zionist growth and development. These objectives basically entailed the protection of Jewish security and presence in Palestine. Not unexpectedly, Palestinians developed an extremely skeptical, if not hostile, attitude toward the great power because of its willingness to assist the Jews, particularly since previous great power promises about limiting Jewish settlement

in parts of Palestine had not been enforced. It seemed that the sympathizers of Zionism were extraordinarily adept at lobbying politicians and gentile advocates to support continued Jewish security and growth in the Holy Land. Whenever the great power tilted slightly toward the Palestinian view, the Zionists were able to neutralize policy options which might have damaged either Jewish political preogatives, demographic expansion, or physical safety. For some of the great power's decision-makers, the Jews in Palestine were seen as a strategic asset which enhanced the great power presence in the larger Middle Eastern theater. The uprising occurred in an economic setting in which many middle and lower class Palestinians found themselves suffering from several years of severe financial hardship. Dramatic price drops, particularly in agriculture, caused enormous strain on the local economy. Although present in previous years, traditional sources of capital import into Palestine were stringently reduced by changes in regional and international conditions. There were intense discussions, plans outlined, and promises made about development assistance for portions of the Palestinian Arab economy. But after Palestinian Arab expectations had been raised repeatedly, these externally promised funds were not made available. In response, Palestinians already sullen from years of promises made and not kept, became distraught about their present economic condition.

In the half decade prior to the uprising, the mosque and Islamic symbols became a focus and platform for political action. The immediate presence and influence of a forceful Islamic religious leader catalyzed the Palestinians' resistance against Jewish presence, the occupation of their lands, and the unwanted administration of their lives by foreigners. Among other central themes, the religious philosophy which was posited included the promotion of fundamentalist Islam, a pronounced rejection of the West, the adoption of a militant course of political action through armed struggle, and a keen desire to expel the influence and presence of the great power and the Jewish invaders. In addition, prior to the outbreak of the

uprising itself, philosophies associated with the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt emerged with some degree of prominence in a few urban areas.

Surrounding Arab states, which were very attentive to the Palestinian quest for self-determination, were consumed by their own parochial national aspirations. Indeed, some political leaders in these states made public statements in support of the Palestinians. Others supplied monies and logistical support for the Palestinian resistance against occupation, but most of the support was rhetorical and self-serving.

Leaders of neighboring Arab states, while sympathetic to the Palestinian demand for majority self-rule and supportive of Arab cooperation in general, were primarily concerned with their bilateral relationships with countries outside the region. After the uprising began, concerted diplomatic efforts by the Palestinian political leadership caused Arab politicians through-out the Middle East to convene a meeting as a demonstrative sign of their solidarity with the Palestinian demand for self-government and their collective opposition to Jewish development in Palestine.

Prior to the outbreak of the uprising, the Hashemite rulers, resident east of the Jordan River, sought ways to influence both the outcome of the Palestinian quest for self-determination and the future territorial disposition of portions of Palestine. Over several previous years, the Hashemite leadership had not hid its disdain for the domineering style of the current Palestinian Arab political leader. In the years before the uprising, the Hashemites maintained less than secret contacts with the Zionists. Certainly, the Hashemite preference was to contain the spread of the Palestinian uprising, in part because the ongoing nature of the uprising enhanced the status of the Palestinian leader they found objectionable. The Hashemites also sought to maintain their territorial fondness for Palestine's future disposition.

One loosely defined umbrella organization represented Palestinian Arab national aspirations. In the years preceding the outbreak of unrest in Palestine, Palestinian political organizations were traumatized by deep philosophical divisions and geographic constraints, and were fragmented by personal animosities. Disagreements within the current Palestinian leadership existed over differences in strategies and tactics and over the right mix of political and military options to be applied in stopping Jewish growth. Sometimes those animosities were directed solely at the leader of the Palestinian community, a man who came to symbolize Palestinian resistance against Zionism, a charismatic leader who insisted on the combined use of armed struggle and a political course to liberate Palestine from Zionist presence. Some members of the Palestinian political elite opposed this leader's arrogant style and, particularly, his enduring personal dominance over the Palestinian cause. His presence became a focal point of anti-Palestinian feeling among Zionists who saw him as a demon.

Most Palestinians were staunch and steadfast nationalists, while a distinct minority eagerly collaborated with the Zionists. They used various forms of intimidation, including death threats and assassinations against other Palestinians they accused of being inconsistent in their anti-Zionist actions. Some of these intra-Palestinian conflicts were strictly personal vendettas; others were aimed exclusively at people who collaborated with the Zionists for what they considered were repeated violations of the national cause. Among the most strident Palestinian nationalists there was a concern that more moderate Palestinian leaders might accept a settlement that was sponsored by the great power. Moreover, the primary Palestinian political leader was worried that there could be future discussions with the Zionists from which he (or his appointed representatives) would be excluded and in which the political conclusion would be something less than national independence.

As the uprising unfolded, many Palestinians found themselves despising Jewish presence but earning a living in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods, urban areas, and rural settlements. A mutually beneficial vocational relationship developed between Palestinian Arab workers and Jewish employers.

Nonetheless, the uprising itself hurt the Jewish and Arab economies to varying degrees.

In a spontaneous fashion, without the knowledge of either the organized Palestinian or Zionist leadership, Palestinian Arab youths physically rebelled against the occupying administration. More radical in their orientation, these younger Palestinians felt frustrated that their established leaders, though fully committed to Palestinian self-government, had succeeded neither in obtaining basic Palestinian rights nor in liberating Palestine from unwanted Zionist control. As the general strike unfolded, local and national committees were established in the areas of the largest concentrations of Arab population. Quickly, the traditional national leadership sought to organize and direct the uprising. After the uprising began, more than several dozen nationalist leaders were deported from Palestine by the occupying administration for what were considered insidious and dangerous political actions. Elements of this external leadership remained deeply committed to Palestine's liberation.

Within the circles of Jewish leadership, there were distinct political divisions about the substance of the Zionists' future relationship with the Palestinian Arabs in *Eretz Yisrael* and the relationship of both Zionists and Palestinians with the Hashemite neighbor east of the Jordan. In Palestine, a vast majority of Zionists possessed one of two general ideological philosophies: one group saw all of Palestine and even the lands east of the Jordan River as historically part of *Eretz Yisrael*; the other group was willing to make a territorial compromise about sharing Palestine with the Arab population.

Because of previous experience in Europe, the Jewish leadership emphasized its relationship with the dominant great power in determining the nature of the Zionist relationship with the Palestinian Arabs. Zionists clearly wanted the great power to assist them in their physical protection. Regardless of other philosophical differences, Zionists always seemed able to coalesce when their security was threatened. Those Jews who followed "Revisionist" Zionist philosophy wanted to arm Jewish settlers, believing that Palestinian Arab violence against Jewish presence was inevitable. Among some Zionists, there was talk of transferring the Arab population to areas distant from Jewish demographic settlements. Many Jews in the Diaspora felt akin to the Jewish community of *Eretz Yisrael*, many were equally disturbed by the current unrest and loss of life. Beyond its philosophical differences, however, the Jewish community in the Diaspora and in *Eretz Yisrael* was equally committed to the uncompromising preservation of the Jewish community's identity, presence, and security.

Within the world community, many documents, policy statements, and reports were published within the several preceding years which suggested that a measure of self-determination should be granted to the Palestinians. There was an increasing awareness by the great power that the dual obligation to Zionist and Arab should be equalized and that some geographic division of western Palestine should be undertaken. Dividing Palestine into Jewish and Arab states had been suggested, but it seemed that neither the Zionists nor the great power was fully convinced that the time was right for partition. It was abundantly clear that the Palestinians did not want to participate in any political solution in which they attained less than the right to govern themselves and to determine their own future. Those in physical occupation of Palestine wanted to provide only limited self-rule, including full autonomy for the Palestinians through governance by a council, with circumscribed legislative authority, and maintenance of control by the occupying power over security matters and foreign affairs. At that time, the

occupying power wanted to retain for itself the ultimate source of power over all of western Palestine, which negated the prospects of full independence for the Palestinian Arabs, and which preserved the occupying power's security interests. Clearly those in control of Palestine had no interest in sharing power with the Palestinian Arabs. A perception existed that the Palestinian Arabs could not be trusted as equals in the future administration of Palestine or portions of it. Many Palestinians were seen only as thugs, terrorists, or insincere nationalists. Yet at all costs, the great power wanted to preserve its strategic presence in the region, protect the security of Jewish presence, and maintain access to Middle Eastern oil. The occupying administration refused to adopt a policy of accommodation under the pressures of duress created by the contemporaneous violence. Since the occupying administration did not want to appease or condone violence, it required that the uprising end before serious political discussions and negotiations could commence. Then the occupying administration used force to gain control of the uprising.

Meanwhile, in European capitals, there was notice of the Palestinian quest for self-determination. After the uprising entered its third year, the genuine concern expressed by the Europeans for the Palestinians was overshadowed by dramatic changes in eastern Europe, the strategic military balance between the powers, a resurgent Japan, and the continued consolidation of authority by the leader of the Soviet Union.

Concerning the status of political discussions about Palestine's future, there was serious and constant debate among Palestinians about who was eligible to represent them at any future negotiations and about the proposed international conference. Palestinians wanted the great power to coerce the Jewish community in Palestine into making political concessions. Zionists wanted direct negotiations and shunned outside pressure aimed at changing their political positions. There was already public discussion about several key issues: the

nature and duration of a transitional period before a state or states would be created, the future special status of Jerusalem, and the continuing interests and guarantees to be provided by the great power during the transitional process. Prominent Palestinians from the Husseini family in Jerusalem had cautioned that a transitional period would never come as long as the Jews felt they could delay Palestinian independence or the establishment of a Palestinian national authority. ⁵ Meanwhile, prominent Zionist officials warned that if the great power forced the Zionists to make political concessions, then the Arab world would later support the Palestinian Arabs for further concessions from the Zionists. ⁶ Is this not a description of both uprisings?

Part II Comparisons

Palestinian Leadership

Prior to the outbreak of both uprising, ⁷ the self-anointed Palestinian political elites focused on high politics, maintenance and control of their political communities, fractious organizational issues, and the increasing role which Islam was playing in influencing Palestinian national awareness. As a consequence, both elites were somewhat surprised by the uprisings' outbreak. Both dominant Palestinian leaders were keen to retain their respective control over the direction of the national movement. Both were eager to enhance regional and international support for the Palestinian problem. They directed their attention toward political proposals made previously by dominant great power(s), were anxious to maintain their own status as (un) official representatives of the Palestinian national movement, and were greatly concerned about other emerging contenders for leadership. They were aware of a growing Islamic dimension in Palestinian self-consciousness, which in turn necessitated the formation and implementation of a response that would coopt, if not control, politically modling Islamic sentiments. Both Palestinian leaders and their associates consistently preached absolute opposition to the foreign occupations.

No one in the Palestinian Arab community was concentrating on the degree of despair and despondency which the lower class Palestinians had endured under foreign occupation and administration - neither Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the titular head of the Arab community in Palestine, and his political opponents; nor PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat and his detractors in the Palestinian community. All groups then and now vehemently opposed Jewish land settlement and Jewish immigration. Although neither political elite was disinterested in its most cherished constituencies, both failed to understand how the duration of duress and the level of regular personal suffering were steadily eroding the patience of Palestinians under the occupation's governance. ⁸ The absence of a fully accurate assessment by the leadership of the depth of disillusionment among *fellaheen* in the 1930s, and the lack of a true understanding by the contemporary leadership of the anger and frustration two decades of Israeli occupation had caused among the Palestinian population, explain to some degree why both political elites were considerably surprised when local violence turned into a prolonged general uprising. Perhaps more startling to the current Palestinian leadership on the eve of the *intifadah* was the "external" leadership's surprise that a sustained confrontation against Israeli presence could be mounted and maintained by what seemed to be a disjointed network of women's and student groups, trade unions, local charitable organizations, and other loosely knit professional associations. Mass mobilization in the *intifadah* was not akin to the formal organization and patrimonial leadership which had traditionally characterized the PLO.

In the years prior to the uprisings, both leadership elites were interested in "internationalizing" the Palestinian question, in gaining recognition for the Palestinian position as it opposed Zionism and Israel. The Mufti hosted the Islamic Conference in 1931 in an effort to focus international attention on the Palestinian issue. But this conference did nothing to alleviate immediate daily problems of the lower classes. ⁹ During the early stages of both uprisings, the

political elites sought to advance Palestinian political demands through inter-Arab action. For his part, prior to and during the *intifadah*, Arafat was traveling extensively, engaging in the highest levels of diplomacy with heads of state, using sympathy for the PLO at the United Nations, constantly seeking international legitimacy, and pursuing recognition and reaffirmation of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

At the time of the outbreak of the uprisings, the two key Palestinian leaders were very concerned with fending off challenges to their leadership of the Palestinian Arab national movement. In the years immediately prior to the outbreaks, both elites had undergone severe political fragmentation. In December 1934, the Palestine Arab Executive virtually came to an end as an unofficially recognized organization that represented Palestinian political interests vis-a-vis the British. The death of Musa Kazem Pasha al-Husseini, the head of the Arab Executive, generated an immediate splintering of the political leadership into a half dozen separate political parties, reflecting deep personal animosities and representing local geographical interests in Palestine. Hajj Amin al-Husseini was an immediate beneficiary of Musa Kazim's death, since it ended an unpleasant competition with his uncle for ascendancy in Palestinian Arab politics. The presence of the more radical *Istiqlal* Party and the so-called "moderates" had already posed a challenge to the Mufti prior to Musa Kazem's death. ¹⁰ At the outbreak of the 1936 uprising and general strike, the Mufti extrapolated from the unrest an opportunity to concentrate authority in his hands and deny it to adversaries. More recently, particularly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Arafat's leadership was personally challenged by a variety of groups and individuals, especially between 1983 and 1986. These included direct challenges from Arab heads of state and other Palestinian leaders. Many Palestinians forced the PLO leader to focus attention on his political flanks. These included Abu Nidal, an Arafat antagonist; Abu-Musa, head of a dissident faction of *al-Fatah*; Ahmed Jibril, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General

Command; and The Palestine National Salvation Front (an umbrella organization opposing Arafat's policies and leadership). The outbreak of the *intifadah* gave Arafat an opportunity to tighten his control over the "external" leadership of the Palestinian Arab community, a process which had begun in 1987 in formal and practical reconciliation between the major PLO factions. Arafat utilized the *intifadah* as a vehicle to fend against rivals, and to prevent further organizational splintering while seeking to reaffirm the PLO's status among Palestinians and in the world community as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."

In terms of policy focus, both political elites were in the midst of reacting to or negating political ideas and proposals put forth previously by Britain, the United States, and others. When the uprisings occurred in April 1936 and December 1987, neither Hajj Amin al-Husseini nor Yasir Arafat enjoyed a formal and working relationship with either the British or the Americans respectively, yet both men had opened unofficial channels of communication to the great powers in the years prior to the uprisings. In contrast, the leadership under Hajj Amin had developed a longer working relationship with the British than the sporadic and distant contacts the PLO and Arafat had established with the United States. In early 1936, the Mufti and other Palestinian Arab leaders were debating the merits of accepting a British proposal for a Legislative Council in Palestine; between 1978 and 1987, there were internal Palestinian political debates about the contents of the Camp David Accords, the Venice Declaration, the Reagan Plan, the Fez Plan, the Brezhnev Plan, the Jordanian-PLO accord, and a variety of United Nations resolutions on Palestine. Naturally, in the latter period the length and complexity of the debate were greater than the request for a halt to Jewish immigration or land purchases which had accompanied the call in November 1935 for the establishment of a Legislative Council. But at both times, the Palestinian political leadership was focused on proposals, ideas, and resolutions offered primarily by others in response to the Palestinian quest for

self-determination. Both political elites were reactive to events at the time of the outbreak of the uprisings. Equally important, while seeking to engage the great power in political discussions and somehow capture the political initiative unleashed by the physical nature of the unrest, the Palestinian leadership at the outset of each uprising remained initially on the defensive politically. In 1937 the leadership replied to the Peel Commission partition plan. In 1988, the PLO leadership replied to the Shultz Initiative, which aimed at telescoping in time the previously proposed Camp David Accords, and to an Israeli plan for the election of Palestinian representatives for the formation of a delegation for negotiations. ¹¹ But by the end of 1988, the PLO sought to take the diplomatic offensive as it recognized the legitimacy of a two state political solution, renounced terrorism, and conditionally accepted Israel's existence linked to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. No such political solution was offered by the Mufti in the midst of the 1936-1939 uprising. The Mufti and the Arab Higher Committee rejected the adoption of the May 1939 White Paper which truncated Jewish development and promised a unitary state in Palestine in ten years. In 1936-1939, the political leadership saw Britain's concessions as insufficient, while on the second occasion the political leadership accepted Zionist presence and created a diplomatic initiative out of the *intifadah*.

From all available information, there seems to be a uniform understanding that both Palestinian Arab political elites were caught off guard by the outbreak, the spontaneity, and the duration of the uprisings. ¹² At the beginning of the *intifadah*, the Gaza Strip's political leadership was apparently more aware than the West Bank leadership elite of the deep despair felt by local Palestinians, in part because the level of economic deprivation was greater in the Gaza Strip. Prior to the outbreak of both uprisings, there were increasing incidents of violence and deepening tensions between Jewish and Arab populations. In the 1930s there were land disputes, one-day strikes, Palestinian evictions from land, and sporadic attacks against Jewish settlers. ¹³ Particularly in the two years prior to

the outbreak of the *intifadah* in December 1987, communal violence manifested itself in land disputes, in attacks against Jewish settlers, in requisitioning of land, and in one-day strikes. [14](#)

After the outbreak of each uprising, the Palestinian leadership sought to strengthen, to reassert, and to reaffirm control over its community; it sought to enhance its status organizationally, and at least initially, to gain international publicity for its cause. The Arab Higher Committee was physically and socially much more distant from the peasant bands who dominated the 1936-1939 uprising than was the PLO, which was the consensus nationalist symbol for virtually every non-religious organization in the West Bank and Gaza Strip prior to and during the *intifadah*. Moreover, each uprising gave the political elite renewed bargaining power with the occupying administration. [15](#)

Fifty years ago, the Arab Higher Committee took the reins of the revolt within two weeks of the April 15, 1936 outbreak of violence. Though the Arab Higher Committee was not always able to enforce adherence to its directives and tactical choices in either the first phase of the general strike, which lasted until October 1936, or during the more violent second phase, which lasted intermittently from the fall of 1937 until the spring of 1939, the Mufti used the uprising to solidify his status within the Palestinian political community. [16](#) But while he personally asserted himself, the Mufti found it difficult throughout the different phases of the 1936-1939 uprising to control the rebel bands which were the backbone of the revolt. The Mufti and the Arab Higher Committee wanted "the bands to continue their activities against the British and Zionists, but they did not wish to see them grow sufficiently strong and cohesive to challenge their [Arab Higher Committee's] authority and possibly disregard future instructions to halt their actions." [17](#) By comparison, it seems that while the PLO came into a fully influential position in co-piloting the *intifadah* with the various local elites in the West Bank and Gaza only by the second or third month of the uprising, the

PLO was able to maintain more than a considerable effect on political and street action within the West Bank and Gaza was the *intifadah* unfolded. Even after the Mufti's departure from Palestine in October 1937, the British turned to his designates when they sought to create a dialogue with the Palestinian Arab community during and after the conclusion of the 1936-1939 uprising. With striking similarity to this British action in the earlier uprising, the United States turned to the PLO, albeit with conditions, as a legitimate interlocutor representing the interests of the Palestinian Arab community. But unlike the 1936-1939 uprising, during the *intifadah*, political leadership outside of Palestine worked more harmoniously with the leadership and rank and file protesters in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Character and Participation

Close comparison of the two uprisings reveals that, at the time of eruption, there were critical differences in the character and composition of Palestinian society. These differences obviously affected recruitment into the uprising. By the time the *intifadah* had broken out, the traditional strength of the Palestinian landowner, urban merchant, and village leader in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had been replaced or was being supplanted by leadership elites based not only on wealth but also on educational achievement, professional attainment, and an accumulated personal resume of confronting Israeli presence. In the period before each uprising, a better educated and more radical younger generation emerged to confront traditional leaders. But in the earlier uprising, the number of these younger leaders was relatively small in comparison to the majority *fellaheen* class and was certainly less influential than the landowning elite. In December 1987, Palestinians of all classes were more politicized and more clarified in their general goals than were the Palestinians in April 1936. Like the 1936-1939 uprising, the *intifadah*, as far as the area of the "West Bank" was concerned, broke out in the towns and spread to the countryside. But unlike the 1936-1939 uprising, the *intifadah* did not have the townsmen dropping out and

abrogating engagement against the occupying force to the *fellaheen* as the predominant, if not the sole, social component of public protest. ¹⁸ Although the 1936-1939 uprising was fought primarily by uneducated peasants, the *intifadah* was carried out by wide segments of a highly educated population in a coordinated fashion. A great difference in participatory commitment in the *intifadah* was the new role which Palestinian women and students played in going to the streets and in engaging the Israeli authorities, particularly in the West Bank. It was estimated that children were responsible for 85 percent of all incidents during the first two years of the *intifadah*. ¹⁹

There is little doubt that the 1936-1939 uprising was largely a marked challenge against Britain's presence in governing Palestine; against the League of Nation's ratified Palestine Mandate, which gave legitimacy to the Balfour Declaration; and against the twin "evils" of Zionism, Jewish immigration and Jewish land purchase. But the 1936-1939 uprising also developed as an angry opposition to and as a rebellion against the urban social caste from which the political and social elite had sprung. Then, there were very sharp social distinctions drawn between the upper class urban elite with landowning interests and the impoverished lower class *fellaheen* population. ²⁰ During the *intifadah's* unfolding, many social and class distinctions among rural, urban, refugee, and nonrefugee Palestinian communities were further blurred in the West Bank and Gaza; whether those distinctions will be removed permanently remains to be determined during the period after the *intifadah's* conclusion. In neither uprising was there evidence to suggest that a distinct social class consciousness developed as a result of the unrest. Certainly in the 1936-1939 uprising there were a greater number of factors that motivated individual participation, including those which were racial, religious, anti-colonial, and familial. Some participants were simply brigands. What appeared as an outburst against Britain and Zionism in the 1936-1939 uprising degenerated into a pronounced internecine communal conflict, if not a civil war. ²¹

Well before the outbreak of the 1936-1939 uprising, social bonds had begun to fray within the Palestinian Arab community, partially because of the intrusive changes brought about by Zionist growth and by British administration. In the 1930s, the existence of most Palestinian Arabs was significantly bounded and geographically limited to their *hamula* or village and by its social and financial dependence upon urban notables and money lenders. The effect of the 1936-1939 uprising stimulated a further weakening in the social moorings which had traditionally sustained and connected rural dependence upon the urban elite. In the aftermath of the 1936-1939 uprising, Palestinian Arab social bonds were weakened by the emergence of a younger bourgeoisie and merchant class located primarily on Palestinian's coast who challenged traditional leaders. The decimated traditional urban elite who had guided the Palestinian political community in the late Ottoman and Mandatory periods retained minimal influence over a disjointed Palestinian Arab community. ²² Palestinian social upheaval and political fragmentation easily enabled surrounding Arab capitals to intervene in Palestinian affairs during the 1936-1939 uprising. Absent an emerging and coherent Palestinian leadership, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Transjordan had an unchallenged opportunity to speak on behalf of the Palestinian cause in the late 1930s, and during and after World War II. By comparison, a distinct motivation for the development of a collective Palestinian anger that emerged prior to the outbreak of the *intifadah* was the Palestinians' definite sense of abandonment by the Arab world. Unlike the period prior to the 1936-1939 uprising, West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestinians had already disengaged from a Jordanian option prior to the *intifadah*. Palestinian Arab alienation was amply evidenced at the Amman Summit in November 1987 when attention was concentrated on the Gulf war and not on the Palestinian issue. A major difference between the *intifadah* and the 1936-1939 uprising was the level of individual commitment to a collectively defined Palestinian nationalist feeling which had begun to develop during the twenty years of Israeli administration of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Rather than

fraying social bonds, the intrusive legal changes and financial demands imposed upon the Palestinian Arab community by the Israeli administration generated a localized social cement. Palestinians were deeply entangled in the tentacles of Israeli economic and personal control over their lives. Prior to the *intifadah*, the struggle by Palestinians was not against their political leaders or against a social caste, but against a collective subordination to Israeli rule. ²³ Israeli military presence and administrative dominance stimulated a collective Palestinian Arab response of steadfastness or *sumud*. Prior to the outbreak of the *intifadah*, *sumud* focused on the communal struggle to stay on the land and maintain Palestinian social, economic, and educational institutions. ²⁴ The *intifadah* was unlike its predecessor in that it became a participatory undertaking for most segments of Palestinian society, with organizational mechanisms established to articulate people's demands and to answer, in some measure, their needs. During the *intifadah* an atmosphere of self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and mutual interest developed across class lines, ²⁵ a natural extension of what had occurred within Palestinian society in the years immediately prior to the *intifadah*.

The 1936-1939 uprising was an admixture: a peasant revolt, driven by distinctively personal frustrations and motivations and overlaid by a nationalist veneer. While both uprisings were a negative reaction to Zionism and foreign presence, the *intifadah* contained a positive assertion of a more mature, broadly based, and clearly articulated national consciousness. The *intifadah* emitted a sense of confidence, self-esteem, and significant international sympathy for the Palestinian quest for self-determination and for removal of Israeli rule. In the earlier uprising, the individual rather than the community expressed itself against Zionism. Both uprisings were sparked by a fear of lost destiny; in the 1936-1939 uprising the emphasis was on a sense of sporadic individual encroachment, displacement, and economic deprivation rather than on a developed collective sense of a peoplehood being systematically denied or wronged. In 1936-1939, rebel bands were organized along family, clan, and village lines. Some Palestinians who recalled the 1936-1939 uprising associated their "national"

identity with a need to restore their personal honor because their village lands were lost. ²⁶ Significantly, Palestinians during the *intifadah* possessed a broader view of their territorial affinity, geographically defined as at least the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Unlike the 1936-1939 uprising, the *intifadah* tended to galvanize an already existing Palestinian national consciousness across class, clan, and geographic lines.

Organizational aspects of the two uprisings were noticeably different. Through its various phases, the 1936-1939 uprising was more spontaneous and less organized. It was an unsystematic, undisciplined, and unstable insurgency, often prone to anarchic lapses. ²⁷ Most rebel bands and the individuals that comprised them were virtually independent actors. While there was little coordination between the bands, there were few ideological distinctions between them. In the *intifadah*, on the other hand, participants and leadership represented essentially four political ideologies within the Palestinian community. They collectively made decisions through constructive dialogue. Issues that were potentially divisive to carrying out tactical aspects of planning and coordination were intentionally postponed lest they detract from the communal coherence generated by the *intifadah*. ²⁸ In the years prior to the outbreak of the *intifadah*, a wide variety of professional groups, women's and student organizations, trade unions, and religious associations had formed, comparable on a smaller scale to the Young Men's Muslim Associations which had developed prior to the 1936-1939 uprising. But in the latter uprising, the degree and extent of organization made these communal groups an interwoven network which formed the participatory base for maintaining the uprising.

By comparison, the *intifadah* was more than civil disobedience, but less than an armed revolt that characterized portions of the 1936-1939 uprising. In the earlier uprising, the urban leadership had little success in imposing itself on individual band leaders. Those local leaders refused to assimilate into a larger structure in

order not to forfeit their independence. In the name of the uprising, band leaders and *fellaheen* participated in the 1936-1939 uprising by engaging in acts of violence, sabotage, and attacks on life and property. ²⁹ By comparison the *intifadah* was more controlled and more organized in a decentralized fashion. Palestinian *intifadah* participants aimed at the Israeli occupation as their central target, rather than attacking Israelis or physical symbols of the occupation, such as Jewish settlements and British strategic objectives as was the case in the 1936-1939 uprising. At the end of the second year of the *intifadah*, while more radical elements of the PLO leadership repeatedly threatened to "upgrade" the *intifadah* with the use of guns and weapons against the Israelis, the clearly prevailing view was not to use such weapons. ³⁰

Distinctive and characteristic of the *intifadah* were the varying layers and frequency of consultation between the uprising's leadership and its participants. There were pamphlets and brochures published during the 1936-1939 rebellion, but there was none of the detail, complexity, timeliness, regularity, and care which characterized the composition of calls or communiques regularly issued during the *intifadah* by the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising. ³¹ By comparison, the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising was more responsive to the population's needs and requests than was the Arab Higher Committee, in part because the *intifadah's* protests against the Israelis were finely tuned to each locality and to an understanding of what might be the population's limits of personal and economic sacrifice. Unlike the 1936-1939 uprising, organization of the *intifadah* was enhanced by the benefits of mass communication - copy and facsimile (fax) machines, telephones, radio broadcasts, easy vehicle access to all parts of the West Bank and Gaza, and an attendant international media. All were gainfully used to advance communal interaction and cooperation.

The Islamic Dimension

In addition to the personal grievances which pained Palestinians before the outbreak of both uprisings, the looming resurgence of Islamic values and sensibilities helped to catalyze and radicalize the individual Palestinian's motivation to action against both Britain/Zionism and against Israel. In the several years prior to both uprisings, a definite Islamic dimension played a role in mobilizing antipathy against the "foreign invaders" of Palestine. On both occasions, a distinctly Islamic component was interlaced with the more secular and politically moderate mainstream of Palestinian national thinking. Although organized into relatively small cells which preserved their autonomy, Islamic groups maintained contacts with the more dominant Palestinian elite who were leading the national movement. In each uprising, Islamic groups contributed in some measure to the general radicalization of the Palestinian political community. In the case of the 1936-1939 uprising, the Islamic component dissipated; but during the *intifadah*, the Islamic elements, at least after the second year, continued to play a formidable role in fashioning and participating in the political aftermath.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Syrian born Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam took up residence in Haifa, organized an armed resistance based upon small cells, preached holy war against the Jews, and sought a purified Islam similar to that championed by Rashid Rida in Cairo. He was not controlled by either the most radical *Istiqlal* interests or the Mufti, but he most certainly worked against the interests of the secular landowning elite that dominated the national movement at the time. ³² Perhaps to preempt the quickly rising popular peasant support for Shakyh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, the Mufti issued *fatwas*, religious legal injunctions against Zionism, summoned a conference of Muslim villagers in December 1934, convened two *`ulama'* conferences, and preached the protection of Palestine against the Jews. At an *`ulama'* conference held in January 1935, a *fatwa* was issued which was signed by 248 religious figures. The significance of the *fatwa*

was not in the numbers who signed it collectively, but rather in its content, which was clearly more anti-Jewish than anti-Zionist. ³³

In contrast to al-Qassam, the Mufti did not invoke the cry for a *jihad* against Jews, as he could have done after the outbreak of the 1936 uprising, and especially after al-Qassam's death at the hands of the British in October 1935. Al-Qassam's death then, unlike any one incident prior to the outbreak of the *intifadah*, personalized the feelings of frustration and deep despair felt by the peasant and working classes. One author suggests that Qassam's death showed that militant activity was an appropriate mechanism of rebellion by the lower classes against the land-owning establishment and against the Zionists and British. ³⁴ Qassam's death was an exhortation to action for many peasants, particularly in northern Palestine where he died. In the decades prior to the outbreak of the *intifadah*, Islamic religious leaders in Gaza organized several different Islamic groups, mostly in the very poor areas of the Gaza refugee camps. ³⁵ Some groups like HAMAS were organized after the *intifadah* began. Palestinian Islamic groups derived their historical origins from local precursors such as the presence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and in Palestine in the post-World War II period. The effects of Israeli occupation reaffirmed the historically based uncompromising attitudes toward Zionism and toward Jews which had been traditionally held by the Muslim Brotherhood.

Major differences are evident in the degree of Islamic texture in the fiber of the two uprisings. In the 1936-1939 period, an Islamic orientation was successfully absorbed by the Mufti before the outbreak of the uprising; alternative Islamic leaders were only minor figures compared to Hajj Amin during and after the beginning of the uprising. Although used in the earlier period, the mosque network was not organizationally or effectively developed to provide educational, charitable, and religious services to the underclass populations, particularly as compared to the Gaza Strip during the *intifadah*. Moreover, prior to the *intifadah*,

the PLO and some Islamic groups like Islamic Jihad operationally converged their activities in the West Bank and Gaza. Islamic Jihad had an emotive influence which impelled people into the streets prior to the *intifadah*. ³⁶ Additional general support for an Islamic underpinning during the *intifadah* came from the contemporaneous Middle Eastern environment, which prior to and during the *intifadah* sustained many significant and highly committed Islamic groups that were organizing to provide Islam as the primary and guiding alternative to secular nationalist regimes. For the purpose of maintaining a solid political position and organizational unity, the "external" PLO political leadership sought to engage and coopt coordination from the increasingly popular Palestinian Islamic groups, but sometimes with less than uniform success. Elements within HAMAS, for example, wanted to liberate all of Palestine and were opposed to the PLO's compromise of a two state political solution. ³⁷

Duration and Effects

Unlike its precursor, the *intifadah* was not interrupted by a major halt in disturbance. The 1936-1939 uprising was a captive of Palestine's agricultural calendar and of intervention by Palestinian and Arab political leaders. The first phase of the general strike started at the end of the citrus picking season of 1935-1936 and ended prior to the citrus harvest of 1936-1937. The second phase did not begin until the summer of 1938 when the regular harvest season was over. Unlike the 1936-1939 uprising, the *intifadah's* duration demonstrated stamina and a low but continuous level of intensity.

Both uprisings show ample evidence that some local leaders were assassinated for collaborating with the Zionists/Israelis. In both instances, intimidation and assassination of those not fully sympathetic with the cause occurred later on in the uprisings. There is evidence that suggests that the Mufti carried out such personal vendettas indirectly through intermediaries in hopes of settling scores against those who opposed his leadership and against those who supported the

suggested partition of Palestine in 1937. ³⁸ In 1938, for example, there were campaigns of physical violence waged directly against village *mukhtars*, and against landowners who had previously sold land to the Zionists; there was also regular intimidation by rebel bands against villagers who were forced to provide supplies, weapons, and food necessary to keep the bands active. It is not known in each case why an accused collaborationist was killed, nor is it known if the external or internal Palestinian leadership had any influence on the collaborator's "commitment" to the *intifadah*. But there is ample evidence to indicate that the PLO and the unified leadership of the *intifadah* publicly condemned the uncontrolled violence against people accused of collaboration. In the 1936-1939 period, 494 Arabs were killed by other Arabs, which comprised approximately 16 percent of the total number of Arabs killed during the uprising. By the end of the second year of the *intifadah*, about one-fifth of the Palestinians killed were victims of other Palestinians, ³⁹ and the level of intra-Palestinian skirmishing was clearly escalating during the latter half of that year. In both cases, it seems that collaborationist killings were carried out for a variety of reasons: personal and political animosities, local land disputes, perceived laxity in commitment to the national cause, and even banditry. However, motivations for the *intifadah* collaborationist assassinations were generally not based upon family identity or social class, which were very evident causes for Palestinian against Palestinian killings in the 1936-1939 uprising.

A comparison of the political action taken by the respective Palestinian political leaders during the uprisings provides a marked contrast. When both uprisings began, the Mufti and Arafat were in the amorphous center of the Palestinian Arab political spectrum. In the 1936-1939 period, the Mufti, in failing to control the pace or direction of the undisciplined violence, became more resistant about political compromise. When he could not control the bands in the summer of 1936, he invited the intervention of Ibn Saud, Emir Abdallah, and Nuri al-Said. The Mufti assumed an increasingly radicalized view of Britain and Zionism,

reaching a point that made any accommodation with either party virtually impossible. This radicalization occurred in part because the Mufti needed to reassert his political authority over a highly fragmented Palestinian community, especially after he was exiled from Palestine in October 1937. Any signs of accommodation would have put him closer politically to both the Palestinian Arab moderates and the Hashemites, which would in turn have forced him to share decision-making prerogatives. Also, in the Mufti's case, any complete embrace of Emir Abdullah, besides merely seeking his intervention to stop the uprising, would by necessity have given additional credibility to his Palestinian rivals who were openly supported by the Transjordanian leader.

By comparison, when the *intifadah* broke out, Arafat and his dominant wing of the PLO were already considered centrist within the Palestinian Arab political community. Since 1974, the PLO had accepted the notion of a state in any area liberated from Israel. ⁴⁰ Only after July 1988, when the Hashemites withdrew their interest in controlling Palestinian territory west of the Jordan River, did Arafat begin to intimate a willingness to accept a two state solution. Thereafter, the *intifadah* became the PLO's prime engine for clearly articulating the possibility of a two state solution. Unlike the Mufti, Arafat could assert a political accommodation without being forced to adopt some form of Hashemite hegemony over Palestinian decision-making. At that point, as one PLO Executive Committee member commented, the *intifadah* became "an incentive to take action in the region,...[as] an activator, a catalyst, to attain peace." ⁴¹ Consequently, the Palestinians made their most conciliatory public gestures toward Zionism ever, including: the PNC's November 1988 resolution to accept a two state solution based upon the November 1947 partition resolution, Yasir Arafat's public recognition of Israel in December 1988, and the subsequent opening of a diplomatic dialogue between the PLO and the United States. The PLO labeled the combination of these events as its "peace initiative," a term

which certainly had been unthinkable among the Palestinian leadership half a century before.

In February 1939, the St. James Palace conference followed the earlier uprising and diplomatic efforts were undertaken by Britain to bring Zionists and Palestinian Arabs together. However, the publication and implementation of the 1939 White Paper, which severely limited Jewish immigration and land acquisition in the early 1940s, though viewed by Palestinian Arabs as a political victory against Zionism, was still considered insufficient. While certainly not satisfying Palestinian aspirations for Arab majority self-rule, the application of the White Paper, and the intervention of World War II helped neutralize additional Palestinian Arab political demands to the British and against the Zionists.

By comparison, the limited continuation of the *intifadah* after two years remains a carefully husbanded political currency, savored and nurtured by the Palestinian political leadership. With the focus of the international media diverted elsewhere at the end of the *intifadah's* second year, and with some frustration among Palestinians that the *intifadah* has not yet advanced Palestinian statehood and not persuaded the United States to pressure Israel into political and territorial concessions, there is evidence to suggest that the maintenance of the *intifadah* has become more precious to the political leadership in 1989 than perhaps it was in December 1987. The former Palestine National Council speaker and current chairman of the Palestine National Salvation Front, which opposes Arafat's leadership, remarked in August 1989, that "if the *intifadah* were terminated, we [the Palestinians] would not have bargaining power." ⁴² Several months later, Salah Khalaf, a leading member of *al-Fatah* who is considered the number two man in the PLO noted that, "We Arabs have nothing other than this *intifadah* in our hands. Through it we reactivate political action. So if God forbid, the *intifadah* suffers a setback, I do not know what our position as Arabs will be." ⁴³ In 1939, the Palestinian leadership had little choice but to settle for the White Paper and

the promise of a unitary state within ten years. Whether the present Palestinian leadership will accept a similar promise remains, of course, to be seen; but there persists the concern that a political process such as elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip could be used both to end slowly the *intifadah* and to uncouple it from the achievement of the articulated goal of an independent Palestinian state. ⁴⁴ As there was in 1939, there is a fear among Palestinian leaders half a century later that if a transitional period is begun, it will not ultimately result in an independent Palestinian state.

A major reason why the PLO leadership had the option to use the *intifadah* as a force for diplomatic action was the relative freedom of political autonomy within the Arab world which the Palestinian leadership enjoyed prior to and during the *intifadah*. The independence of political decision-making is a lesson that the present Palestinian leadership has learned from the earlier uprising. While the present leadership is eager to have Egyptian President Mubarak act as a diplomatic lubricant in the negotiating process with the United States, it is concerned that Egypt might begin to usurp the Palestinian prerogative of independent decision-making. PLO leaders want "to differentiate between the Egyptian [diplomatic] role which [was] welcomed and an attempt to represent the Palestinians and speaking on their behalf." ⁴⁵ In the 1936-1939 period, the Arab Higher Committee sought the intervention of Arab states to end the uprising in order to protect its own image and to preserve its own status as leader of the Palestinian Arab community. In the midst of the uprisings, Arab leaders met in Bludan in September 1937, in Algiers in June 1988, and in Casablanca in May 1989. During these conferences, greater venom was directed at Zionism and Israel than at the important powers, Britain and the United States. Most historians recognize the Bludan Congress as a benchmark for the Arab world's initial intervention in the Palestine problem. ⁴⁶ The Algiers and Casablanca Arab summits, on the other hand, affirmed or ratified Arab League political support for an independent political course set by the PLO. By adopting a conciliatory

political option in the midst of the *intifadah*, the PLO leadership demonstrated its desire to retain firm control of the diplomatic and political direction of the national movement; to maintain the unity of the PLO and therefore avoid the emergence of a leadership alternative in the West Bank and Gaza; and certainly to sustain the prerogative of independent Palestinian decision-making free from the control of Arab capitals such as Damascus, which wished to contain the Palestinian diplomatic initiative with Israel. But it must be stressed that the Arab world during the period prior to and after the *intifadah* was, in comparison to fifty years before, much less inclined to be concerned with the control of the Palestinian issue. In the earlier uprising, Arab leaders in states surrounding Palestine primarily intervened to help end the various phases of 1936-1939 uprising in order to promote their own political purposes. [47](#)

While the 1936-1939 uprising set the precedent for Arab state meddling in Palestinian affairs, the willingness during the *intifadah* of some Arab capitals, most particularly Amman, to disassociate themselves from a territorial competition for the West Bank provided the Palestinian leadership with a political option it had not enjoyed previously. But Arab world distance from the Palestinian question, particularly in the restrained form of merely verbal political and meager financial support given during the *intifadah* has been, to date, bittersweet. The November 1987 Arab summit conference in Amman, meeting just a month before the outbreak of the *intifadah*, displayed, if not abandonment or indifference to the Palestinian question, then certainly a lack of substantive commitment. While the PLO leadership enjoyed broader political options during the *intifadah*, it also lamented the disinterest which the Arab world demonstrated toward tangible support of the *intifadah*. Particularly during the *intifadah's* second year, most of the Arab world, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, failed to meet the financial obligations toward the *intifadah* as promised at the Casablanca summit in May 1989. [48](#) Khalid al-Hasan, a Fatah Central Committee member, remarked after that summit that "the Arab stand no longer exists. It is no use saying that the

Arab stand is disunited, fragmented, or tentative - it is now less than zero. As far as the Palestine question and the *intifadah* are concerned, there is no Arab stand." ⁴⁹ As compared to fifty years before, the Arab world no longer coveted protection and control over the Palestinian issue; not only was the Palestinian political future being left to PLO policies almost exclusively, there was also a profound absence of intense political commitment to the Palestinian issue, which was very distressing to the Palestinian leadership.

Finally, it should be noted that on the occasion of each uprising, substantial international exposure was given to the Palestinian issue. But in 1938-1939 and again in 1988-1989, other more pressing international issues considerably reduced the initial publicity which the Palestinian uprisings received. In 1938 and 1939 Britain turned its attention almost exclusively to Europe and the changes being wrought by the emergence of fascism. In 1988-1989, within the Middle East, the *intifadah* became a secondary issue to events in Lebanon, especially to Syria; the Palestinian issue became an international issue of marginal interest as historic challenges to socialism and communism occurred in the U.S.S.R., China, and eastern Europe. In the 1936-1939 period, Britain postponed any decision to leave Palestine that might have ensued had the partition notion been adopted. It changed its plans not because of the uprising, but because of global considerations. During the *intifadah*, while the United States put forth the 1988 Shultz Initiative as an ambiguous way to start negotiations, Washington withdrew active support of the initiative and therefore some of its attention to the Palestinian issue, not for considerations of global politics, but because the United States was not yet convinced that either side was willing to overcome their respective ideological constraints and political paralysis and to engage in direct and substantive negotiations. But like Great Britain, the United States realized the importance of engaging in a dialogue with all sides. As a cumulative result of the *intifadah*, the Hashemite disengagement from the West Bank, and Arafat's willingness to denounce terrorism and recognize Israel, Washington opened that

dialogue. Like Great Britain in 1939, Washington was, at least by the *intifadah's* second anniversary, not able to start direct Palestinian-Zionist/Israel talks. Fifty years ago it was the Palestinian leadership that refused to sit with the Zionists; now it is the Israelis who refuse to sit with the PLO leadership.

Part III Conclusions

Because this essay is inherently limited by the ongoing nature of the *intifadah*, any substantive conclusions are speculative. The most prominent prognosis, of course, is that the chances for ensuing negotiations between the parties after this current uprising are greater than they were in 1939. Both Palestinians and Israelis are more mature about accepting, albeit with reservations, the other's legitimacy. Both communities are more intertwined with one another physically and economically than fifty years ago; the *intifadah* has catalyzed the interaction through confrontation. Both communities look to an outside arbiter to broker mutually acceptable procedures. Both sides remain partially bound by fossilized ideologies, but have developed some pragmatic resiliency as a result of the *intifadah* and events which preceded and accompanied it. For the Palestinian community, the main danger is that further disharmony may evolve if no satisfactory political process unfolds. Such disunity could be augmented by several factors: the loss of the *intifadah's* discipline; the continuation of Israeli deportations of political leaders; an unexpected change in political leadership; the reinvigoration of Palestinian-Islamic movement by the November 1989 parliamentary election results in Jordan; and the results of local Palestinian elections which, if held and not properly managed, could be more divisive than harmonizing in their end result. In addition, the PLO's organizational structure could be threatened by a political process which, though headed toward a negotiated settlement, might simultaneously contribute to an erosion of PLO "external" leadership dominance over the Palestinian political community. The aftermath of the 1936-1939 uprising saw an almost total disintegration of the local Palestinian political leadership in the decade which followed. For the current

external leadership and the Unified National Leadership of the uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, how and when the *intifadah* ends are of utmost importance to the future nature and composition of the Palestinian leadership. It is ironic that although Palestinian leadership enjoys almost total autonomy in the inter-Arab political system today, something it did not enjoy fifty years ago, its West Bank and Gaza constituents have greater dependency upon the Jewish economy than there was during the 1936-1939 uprising. For the PLO to survive as a dominant political force, it will not only have to make some accommodation with Israel, but it will also have to find ways to extend formal coordination with the amorphously defined Palestinian leadership in the occupied territories, who have become the center of gravity for Palestinian nationalism. Unlike its equivalent in the 1936-1939 uprising, participants in this Palestinian national assertion are broadly based, pluralistic, interested in political compromise, acceptable to Israeli political leaders, and apparently a durable component of the Palestinian community. The emergence of the West Bank and Gaza Strip leadership has been one of the most significant political results of this uprising. [50](#)

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Footnotes

Note 1: In preparing the final draft of this article I would like to acknowledge the useful and thoughtful suggestions made by my colleagues Rex Brynen, Neil Caplan, Emile Nakhleh, and Bruce Maddy-Weitzman. I am grateful to all of them for making the manuscript more comprehensive and concise. While I thank them for their timely efforts, I am alone responsible for the article's contents. [Back](#).

Note 2: For a recent comparative examination of the *intifadah* with the 1936-1939 uprising, see M. Khalid al-Azhari, "Thawrah 1936 wa *Intifadah* 1987" (The 1936 Revolt and the 1987 *Intifadah*), *Shu'un Filastiniyah*, October 1989, pp. 3-26.

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Note 3: For convenience sake, the term uprising is used to describe the events during both chronological periods. The 1936-1939 uprising has been variously described by historians as a "revolt" and "rebellion." The term *intifadah*, meaning shudder or tremor, comes from the Arabic verb meaning, "to be shaken off."

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Note 4: Adapted, revised, and expanded from Kenneth W. Stein, "1938, 50 Years On," *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 January 1988, p. 5. [Back.](#)

Note 5: Remarks by Jemal Hussein, member of the Palestinian Arab delegation, Third meeting of the St. James Palace (London) Conference, 6 March 1939, Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA), Jerusalem, Record Group S25/File 7638 and remarks by Feisal Hussein, *al-Fajr* (Jerusalem), 20 April 1989. [Back.](#)

Note 6: Remarks by Chaim Weizmann, later Israel's first President, in note of an interview with British Prime Minister Chamberlain, 16 February 1939, CZA, S25/7642. [Back.](#)

Note 7: For excellent general descriptions of the 1936-1939 uprising, see W.F. Abboushi, "The Road to Rebellion: Arab Palestine in the 1930s," *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Spring 1977), pp. 23-46; Yehuda Bauer, "The Arab Revolt of 1936," Part I, *New Outlook* (July/August 1966), pp. 49-57 and Part II, *New Outlook* (September 1966), pp. 21-28; Tom Bowden, "The Politics of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine 1936-1939," *Middle Eastern Studies* (May 1975), pp. 147-174; Ghasan Kanafani, "Thawrah 1936-1939 fi Filastin" (The 1936-1939 Revolt in Palestine), *Shu'un Filastiniyah* (1972), pp. 45-77; Zvi el-Peleg, "The 1936-1939 Disturbances: Riot or Rebellion," *Wiener Library Bulletin* (1978), pp. 40-51; Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestine Arab National Movement, 1929-1939*, pp. 109-273; Subhi Yasin, *Al-Thawrah al-'Arabiyyah al-Kubra fi Filastin* (The Great Arab Revolt in Palestine), Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1967. [Back.](#)

Note 8: For an assessment of the personal rather than "nationalistic" opposition to Israel, present in the minds of many Palestinians prior to the outbreak of the *intifadah*, see Emile A. Nakhelh, "The West Bank and Gaza: Twenty Years Later," *The Middle East Journal* (Spring 1988), pp. 209-226. For an assessment of Palestinian *fellaheen's* declining economic condition and its relationship to the 1936-1939 Palestinian uprising, see Kenneth W. Stein, "Peasant Destitution and Rural Change: Contributing Causes to the 1936-1939 Arab Disturbances in Palestine," in a contribution to Farhad Kazemi and John Waterbury's forthcoming edited volume, *Peasants and Revolutions in the Middle East* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida), 1990. [Back.](#)

Note 9: Nels Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism*, London: Keagan Paul International, 1982, pp. 35-6. [Back.](#)

Note 10: Philip Mattar, "The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Politics of Palestine," *Middle East Journal* (Summer 1988), p. 234. [Back.](#)

Note 11: Remarks by Khalid al-Hasan, Fatah Central Committee Member, *al-Watan* (Kuwait), 13 October 1989, p. 20. [Back.](#)

Note 12: See the citations in footnote 7. Issa Khalaf, *Palestine Arab Factionalist Politics and Social Disintegration, 1939-1948*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, 1985. See also Salim Tamari, "What the Uprising Means," in Zachary Lockman and Joel Beinin (ed.) *Intifadah: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation*, MERIP, 1989, pp. 132 and 135. [Back.](#)

Note 13: Pamela Ann Smith, *Palestine and the Palestinians 1876-1983*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984, pp. 62-3. [Back.](#)

Note 14: For examples of the frequency and growing intensity of Israeli and Palestinian Arab inter-communal unrest in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem area, see the Chronology section, "Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Middle East Journal*, Vols. 41-42, (1987-1988). [Back.](#)

Note 15: Marlowe, *Rebellion in Palestine*, p. 169; Tom Bowden, "The Politics of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine, 1936-1939," pp. 173-174; Zvi el-Peleg, *Hamufti Hagadol* (The Grand Mufti), Israel, 1989, pp. 46-58; Zvi el-Peleg, "The 1936-1939

Disturbances: Riot or Rebellion," p. 43; Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem Al-Hajj Amin Al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement*, Columbia, 1988, pp. 65-85. [Back.](#)

Note 16: Porath, *The Palestine Arab National Movement From Riots to Rebellion*, pp. 48-9. [Back.](#)

Note 17: Yuval Arnon-Ohanna, "The Bands in the Palestinian Arab Revolt, 1936-1939: Structure and Organization," *Asian and African Studies* (1981), p. 234. [Back.](#)

Note 18: Arnon-Ohanna, pp. 229-30. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Interview with Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhaq Rabin, *Wochenpresse* (Vienna), 15 December 1989. [Back.](#)

Note 20: See George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, New York, 1963, p. 405. [Back.](#)

Note 21: Bowden, "The Politics of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine 1936-1939," p. 147. [Back.](#)

Note 22: See Khalaf, Chapters IV, V, and VI. [Back.](#)

Note 23: See for example, George Abed (ed.) *The Palestinian Economy: Studies in Development Under Prolonged Occupation*, London, 1988. [Back.](#)

Note 24: See Nakhleh, "The West Bank and Gaza: Twenty Years Later," pp. 213. [Back.](#)

Note 25: Yezid Sayigh, "The *Intifadah* Continues: Legacy, Dynamics, and Challenges," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 3 (July 1989), pp. 20-49; and interview with Mona Rishmawi and Fateh Azzam, Executive and Administrative Directors respectively of *al-Haq*, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 December 1989. [Back.](#)

Note 26: See Theodore Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Struggle for a Palestinian National Past*, unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, August 1988. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Bowden, p. 169. See also High Commissioner Sir Harold MacMichael to Malcolm MacDonald, Colonial Secretary, 2 January 1939, CO 733/398/75156. [Back.](#)

Note 28: Interview with Mona Rishmawi and Fateh Azzam, Executive and Administrative Directors respectively of *al-Haq*, Atlanta, Georgia, 7 December 1989. [Back.](#)

Note 29: Excellent descriptions of the peasant bands in the 1936-1939 uprising are provided in Yuval Arnon-Ohanna, "The Bands in the Palestinian Arab Revolt, 1936-1939: Structure and Organization," *Asian and African Studies*, pp. 229-47; and Bowden, "The Politics of the Arab Rebellion in Palestine," pp. 147-74. [Back.](#)

Note 30: See remarks by Salah Khalaf, *Fatah* Central Committee member, 8 December 1989, Radio Monte Carlo, as quoted in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report Near East and South Asia* (hereafter FBIS-NES), 11 December 1989, p. 5; and in *al-Tadamun* (London), 5 February 1990. [Back.](#)

Note 31: For examples of the notices posted during the 1936-1939 uprising, see Yuval Arnon, *Fellaheem Bamered Ha`aravi Beeretz Yisrael 1936-1939* (Peasants in the Arab Revolt in *Eretz Yisrael* 1936-1939), Tel Aviv University, 1978, pp. 176-9. For rebel band commanders documents and their detailed analyses, see Ezra Danin and Ya'acov Shimoni, *Te`udot Vedemuyot Meginzay Haknufiyot Ha`araviyot BeMeora`ot 1936-1939* (Documents and Portraits from the Records of the Arab Bands in the Revolt of 1936-1939), Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1981. For an analytical summary of the calls issued during the first year of the *intifadah* by the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising, see Karen Schneiderman, "The Calls of the Palestinian Uprising," *Emory Journal of International Affairs* (Spring 1989), pp. 31-8; and Shaul Mishal, "Paper War-Words Behind Stones: The *Intifada* Leaflets," *Jerusalem Quarterly* (Summer 1989), pp. 71-94. The first twenty-nine calls were republished in Lockman and Beinin, *Intifada*, pp. 327-99. [Back.](#)

Note 32: Johnson, pp. 42-4; See also Shai Lachman, "Arab Rebellion and Terrorism in Palestine, 1929-1939, The Case of Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his Movement," in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia Haim (ed.) *Zionism and Arabism in Palestine and Israel*, London: Cass, 1982, pp. 52-99. [Back.](#)

Note 33: Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council: Islam Under the British Mandate for Palestine*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987, pp. 240-54. [Back.](#)

Note 34: Johnson, p. 45. [Back.](#)

Note 35: For a sampling of the numerous articles focusing on the Islamic components present and developing during the *intifadah*, see the forthcoming article by Elie Rekhess focusing on Islam in the *intifadah* in Robert O. Freedman (ed.) *The Intifadah After Two Years* (University Presses of Florida), 1990. See also Rekhess's article, "The Rise of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad," *Jerusalem Post*, 21 October 1987; Robert Satloff, "Islam in the Palestinian Uprising," *Orbis* (Summer 1989), pp. 389-401; and Matti Steinberg, "The PLO and Palestinian Islamic Fundamentalism," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* (Fall 1989), pp. 37-54.

Interview with Shaykh Khalil Quqa, Gazan leader of Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS), in *al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 8 October 1988; and Oren Cohen, "This is Hamas," *Hadashot*, 7 October 1988, pp. 24-5. [Back.](#)

Note 36: Satloff, "Islam in the Palestinian Uprising," pp. 394-6. [Back.](#)

Note 37: See remarks by Salah Khalaf, *al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 4 December 1989. [Back.](#)

Note 38: See Swedenburg, pp. 160-72. [Back.](#)

Note 39: Ha`olam Hazeh, 25 October 1989. [Back.](#)

Note 40: See Salim Tamari, "The Palestinian Movement in Transition," in Rex Brynen (ed.) *Intifada: Regional Implications and Repercussions of the Palestinian Uprising*, IPS, 1990. [Back.](#)

Note 41: Remarks by PLO Executive Committee member Mahmud `Abbas, *Al-Quds al-'Arabi* (London), 14-15 October 1989. For an excellent analysis of what changes the *intifadah* and associated events brought to the PLO, see Adam Garfinkle, "Plus Ça Change...in the Middle East," *World Affairs* (Summer 1988), pp. 3-15. [Back.](#)

Note 42: Remarks by Khalid al-Fahum, *al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 10 August 1989. [Back.](#)

Note 43: Remarks by Salah Khalaf, *Ukaz* (Jeddah), 16 November 1989, as quoted in FBIS-NES, 27 November 1989, p. 5. [Back.](#)

Note 44: See Palestinian document on elections, *al-Fajr* (Jerusalem), 1 May 1989. [Back.](#)

Note 45: See remarks by Salah Khalaf, *al-Watan* (Kuwait), 15 December 1989; see also *Voice of the Mountain* (Lebanon) 9 June 1989 as quoted in FBIS-NES, 13 June 1989, p. 4. It reported that "several factors can be adduced why the revolution of 1936 was aborted, but the most important of these was the fact that the Palestinian leaders of the time accepted the advice of the Arab regimes."

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Note 46: Elie Kedourie, "The Bludan Congress on Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies* (January 1981), pp. 107-25; Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate The Politics of Arab Nationalism*, Princeton, 1987, p. 555; Yehoshua Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity 1930-1945*, London: Cass, 1986, pp. 168-70.

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Note 47: See Khoury, pp. 535-62; Gabriel Sheffer, "The Involvement of Arab States in the Palestine Conflict and British-Arab Relationship Before World War II," *Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 10 (1974), pp. 59-78; Gabriel Sheffer, "'Arav Hasa `udit Vebe `ayot Eretz Yisrael Bitekufat Hamered Ha `aravi, 1936-1939' (Saudi Arabia and the Palestine Problem in the Period of the Arab Revolt, 1936-1939), *Hamizrah Hehadash*, Vol. 22 (1972), pp. 137-51. [Back.](#)

Note 48: See remarks by Yasir Arafat, *Al-Hawadith* (London), 24 November 1989, pp. 20-2. [Back.](#)

Note 49: Remarks by Khalid al-Hasan, Fatah Central Committee Member, *al-Watan* (Kuwait), 13 October 1989, p. 20. [Back.](#)

Note 50: On the difference between the PLO leadership and the leadership/participants of the *intifadah*, Salah Khalaf said, "I admit that the generation of *intifadah*, is entirely different from the generation of the PLO leadership. In other words, it is different from my generation. It is even better and more efficient than we are. Yet, this *intifadah* is our child. I am very proud of this child because it is better than its parents." See remarks by Salah Khalaf, *Der Spiegel*, 29 August 1988, pp. 131-6. [Back.](#)

