
FRAGMENTED SPACE AND VIOLENCE IN PALESTINE

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The importance of space in diverse forms of mobilization is increasingly recognized. In the Palestinian West Bank, the rising number of borders has decreased mobility and limited individuals to small local spaces, generating new patterns of collective action and identity where national-oriented organizing had been strong. The limitations on mobility imposed by the Oslo accords have contributed to the increasing difficulty of collective protest, which, contrary to divide and conquer axioms, worked to increase, not decrease, violence. This occurred due to the removal of mass constituencies involved in protest while also generating competition over leadership. The case of Fatah, the Palestinian Authority's (PA) dominant faction, starkly demonstrates the dynamic of fragmentation combined with increased violence.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of place in mobilization is increasingly recognized, whether constrictions on it or the collapsing of space through technological innovations. Movements alter with the change in borders and practical capabilities of connecting. The hindrance represented by geographical space is collapsing through information technology, facilitating long-distance connections in real time. Social movement and terrorist studies note the broadening of potential organizing, the ability to communicate and link to individuals across terrain. While most analyses of space focus on the possibilities of globalization and the removal of place-bound limitations, spatial limitations and the determining power of locality have not

disappeared. Particularly in developing countries and areas escaping the regulatory arm of the law, local groups are engaged in attempts to defend and regulate local space. Territory is fought over in weak and failed states, safe havens provide opportunities for violent organizing or corridors of passage for terrorists, and ungoverned zones provide new opportunities for local authorities.¹ Space is a crucial component in the formation of daily struggles, political battles, and violent movements. Potential actors, their mobilizing identities, the issues of contention, and the locations of mobilization are all contingent on the precise composition of the space individuals inhabit.

What effect does the division of territory have upon a movement that had been organized on a larger level of aggregation? In the Palestinian West

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Bank, increasing borders have decreased mobility and limited individuals to small local spaces, generating altered patterns of collective action and identity in an area where national-oriented organizing was strong. The limitations on mobility imposed by the Oslo accords have contributed to the increasing difficulty of collective protest, which, contrary to divide and conquer axioms, worked to

increase, not decrease, violence. This occurred due to the removal of mass constituencies involved in protest and competition over leadership, as non-state actors became divorced from existing leadership. The case of Fatah, the Palestinian Authority's (PA) dominant faction and the main constituent of the Palestinian Security Services, starkly demonstrates the dynamic of fragmentation combined with militarization and increased violence.

Insights from social movement theory and organizational studies, grounded in space with an appreciation of scale, demonstrate that the character of protest varies with the physical, practical ability to mobilize and communicate. Contrary to divide and conquer axioms, this can generate incentives for increased violence both through local competition and the removal of the moderate masses from the protest field. These dynamics occur through changes in the people available for protest, the sites of contention, the issues of concern, and the collective identity linked to these

people, places, and issues. These geographies of conflict can create new incentives for violence. By decreasing the physical possibility to protest by removing public spaces, large-scale, collective and largely non-violent action was marginalized, and the issues of concern altered from national to specifically local. Collective identities moved in tandem. Non-violent collective action continues to be discussed, debated, and enacted, but the difficulty of organizing and the transformation of the dominant issues have pushed smaller groups to the forefront. This dynamic holds powerful incentives for the use of violence.

To illustrate these dynamics and the potential for violent protest with decreasing levels of aggregation, I focus on Fatah's fragmentation into numerous competing groups acting against each other and against their own superiors, manifest strongly from 2000-2007. Concomitantly, the masses so active in the first, relatively non-violent, intifada, all but disappeared from the protest scene. Clearly, multiple variables were at work in changing the level and nature of collective action in this case, however spatial limitations played a key but neglected role in divorcing would-be activists from each other and from a national leadership.

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Concentrating on the West Bank, I show that Oslo fragmented land and increased difficulties of organizing and simple movement. While much has been written on this territorial phenomenon, it has not been theoretically linked to changes in collective organizing. Land contributed crucially to other internal factors affecting the hierarchy of Fatah, including Arafat's governing style using expatriate leaders disconnected from the grassroots and Israel's targeting of middle-level Fatah leaders. Both these factors hindered the ability of Fatah to be a hierarchical controlled organization, but the limitations of space placed constraints the level of collective action and created incentives for localization in the context of Oslo's numerous territorial borders. Localization under certain circumstances can generate more violence, as local-bound leaders rely upon street credibility for their leadership instead of the authority granted by a hierarchy. It is no coincidence that where the territory of the Palestinian territories is most

contiguous, allowing movement and face-to-face connections, non-state actors are most centralized and hierarchical. Hamas in Gaza demonstrates this dynamic; the contiguity of land there corresponds to Hamas' ability to construct a strong hierarchical leadership.

The internal organization of non-state actors has been increasingly scrutinized and linked to success or failure against various enemies and types of confrontation.² Alongside globalization's promise of potential unified organizing across countries, there has been a concomitant trend of localization for much of the world. These conclusions extend beyond understanding the leadership battle in Fatah and the development of spoilers, providing insight into when movements fragment or centralize, and the political implications of the different levels of aggregation for movements and groups.

In this article I first present the argument and outcome linking spatial changes to Fatah's fragmentation. To explain this, I combine analyses from social movement theory, organizational studies, and terrorism studies, focusing on the effects of diminished space for mobilization. The Oslo agreements altered the geographic space of the Palestinian territories, setting parameters on the sheer ability to mobilize. Instead of eliminating it, decentralized protest entailed a shift in emphasis away from the reliance on numbers toward the use of violence. I examine how Oslo changed the nature of space for organizing and connecting within and across groups, and then demonstrate the progression of independent local leaders and the concomitant increase in violent acts starting with the second intifada. I conclude with observations on the uses of violence in the Palestinian territory that have little to do with the Israelis, and everything to do with the internal organization and daily life of protest groups. Absent political incorporation and attention to underlying grievances, fragmentation can increase incentives for violence through intra-movement competition.

OSLO, SPACE, AND VIOLENCE

Between the first and second Palestinian intifadas, the character of opposition protest changed radically. Where the first intifada was relatively non-violent and involved a large swath of society, the second was elitist and militarized. The first intifada, starting in December 1987, was a time

of massive popular organizing involving all sectors of society. Particularly evident was the participation of women and children, and Christians as well as Muslims. A new mobilizing infrastructure emerged, revolving around democratic local committees and a rotating leadership comprised of all the political factions. Middle classes and professionals formed tens of thousands of committees to provide everything from education to health care. While not strictly non-violent, this intifada was relatively so. Its violence was limited to the throwing of stones against the Israeli military within the occupied territories. Unarmed civilians were not targets. The main weapons were economic: the boycotting of Israeli commodities and taxes, and commercial strikes. Stores closed as merchants joined the intifada, refusing to open and sell Israeli goods.³

Typical explanations attribute the militarization of the second intifada to spoilers attempting to defeat the Oslo peace process, frustration at the failure of that process, the dictates of leaders (Yasser Arafat), and the increased presence of weapons due to arming the Palestinian police. These analyses do not question the origin of spoiler groups nor do they account for the actual composition of violence—uncontrolled competition by groups technically part of the Palestinian ruling government but acting against it and each other. The effect of Oslo's alteration of Palestinian geography is omitted.

Spatial restrictions and dissection in this case were matched by a corresponding fragmentation in organizing by PA's loyalists and employees, and the population at large. Space contributed to the internal variables responsible for fragmenting and localizing collective action in the Palestinian territories. The new organizing forms brought about by spatial changes hold strong incentives for the use of violent tactics. The active cross-class opposition from the first intifada withdrew from protest, due to cooptation and the removal of public spaces for contestation. The few remaining

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activists survived in small locales, leveraging their use of violence against their small numbers. The higher the fragmentation, the more independent decision-making, abrogation of agreed-upon truces, and internal battles for dominance. These battles were often characterized by the use of bold military maneuvers to establish and institutionalize a new leadership.

Oslo's territorial fragmentation created three principal dynamics that increased the use of violence. First, the decline in public spaces and ability to assemble or organize beyond the immediate town left small groups in the forefront of the opposition. The democratic masses, so clearly in control of the first intifada, largely disappeared from the scene. Some were co-opted into the new Palestinian Authority (PA) institutions; others hid out in non-governmental organizations, themselves serving to fragment the

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organizational unity of the opposition.⁴ The field was left to a committed minority. Second, for that committed minority, radical decentralization weakened the links between members and organizational hierarchies, decreasing the ability of the organization to control and discipline members. Members competed with each other for leadership and competed with

other groups for recruits and prestige, demonstrating their abilities through violent acts. Third, as a result, some members struck out on their own, vying not for leadership of the larger group but establishing themselves on the local level as separate independent groups. Again, these new leaders established their credibility over potential competitors often through the use of exemplary violence. I concentrate on the last two often-neglected processes in this article.

Arafat's governing style, promoting friends and non-local individuals into positions of power, contributed to the translation of spatial limitation into violent fragmentation through its failure to generate incentives for members to feel their futures lay, and their actions judged by reference to the national.⁵ While this contributed to the fragmentation of Fatah, the speed and extremity of Fatah's devolution from a national orientation into scores of competing local groups, within a few years, each with its own new name, demonstrates that more than Arafat's corrupt governance

was at work. Rather, land limits contributed to creating new local identities independent and hostile to their old bosses. After the fragmentation of Fatah was already apparent with the start of the second intifada in late 2000, Israel contributed further in the following years to the process of localization by its concerted elimination or detention of middle-level Fatah cadres, particularly during the reoccupation of West Bank towns in 2002, removing precisely those able to bridge the local and the national leaderships.⁶ Indeed, while normally the size of the enemy corresponds to the size of the alliance to face it, generating larger groups to match the size of the threat, here despite a large Israel and threats common to the entire Palestinian territories, groups became local, demonstrating the extent of the extra-ordinary variables encouraging localization.⁷

LOCAL SPACE AND FRAGMENTED GROUPS

Geographical space is one element determining group networks and the array of constraints and opportunities within which groups form and make tactical choices.⁸ Spatial restrictions decreased radically in many areas with the arrival of the national state, allowing a new form of social protest to develop the social movement.⁹ The removal of internal borders and the creation of the national state allowed local revolts to become national level protest movements based on the abstract identity of citizenship.¹⁰ Global interconnectedness spurred analysis of movements broadening beyond their origins, particularly studies of global social movements and globalization resistance.¹¹ Constraints on mobilizing are a less-studied phenomenon. Spatial limitations can be a continuing matter of resources and practicality, a lack of technology or infrastructure. What of localities that were previously connected, then became separated from each other? Militarily, such fragmentation would presumably lead to a classic “divide and conquer” scenario, reducing resistance capabilities. In the current world, with easy access to weapons, available techniques, and simple weapon-making equipment, fragmentation can increase incentives for violence through processes similar to those of underground and small radical offshoot movements. In this case, decentralization resulted in new, independent and unconstrained leaders using violence as a main resource in competitive battles.

Place and locale can determine numbers of people available, potential

allies, issues of contention, locations of mobilization, the collective identity utilized by a group or movement, and methods of collective action. As Tilly states, the processes involved in collective action are always connected to space, place, and scale.¹² Meanings are derived from daily, lived space, which is then tied to collective identity, a necessary component of collective action and mobilization.¹³ Networks too depend upon personal encounters. Networks and the ability to form them can be taken for granted in this globalizing world, yet the scope and substance of lived networks form the basis for organizing. Face-to-face communication has been instrumental in fostering trust and commitment, essentials for both mobilization and discipline within an organization.¹⁴ Tight networks and friendships, upon which hierarchy and a sense of obligation to the movement are built, are created and sustained by direct interaction.¹⁵

New border divisions can reverse the processes of aggregation in social movements linked to the development of a national state by decreasing numbers of participants and localizing issues and identities. This process can occur even where a unified identity and national collective action had been present. In social movement terms, spatial factors can alter the scale of contention downward, internalizing it at a more local level, or upward, externalizing it and broadening the arena of contention, the individuals involved, and the collective identity of the group.¹⁶ Collective action that began at one level of aggregation moves to another. As the scale of contentious collective action moved to a more local, smaller level of aggregation, the pool of potential actors narrows. The ability to put on a large-scale demonstration is integral to social movements. As Sewell states, “The physical assembling of large numbers of people into limited spaces is an important feature of nearly all forms of contentious politics.”¹⁷ Additionally, through numbers, protesters compensate for their lack of resources. This amassing does several things. First, it can compensate for lack of resources. Second, it gives the group publicity, and third, it promotes solidarity among the group, convincing them that they are indeed part of a cause with large numbers of committed members.¹⁸ This affects the group’s identity and various emotional features of the group’s faith in their own ability to achieve their goals. Indeed, preventing large numbers of people from gathering together has been a main goal of authorities facing protesters.¹⁹

Different forms of space correspond not merely to a quantitative

change in the number of individuals available for collective action, but to the characteristics of the group and its focus. Social movement entrepreneurs foster collective identity to generate activism, but they work with and enhance senses of identity that are present and relevant.²⁰ The space of movement and daily interaction affect these identities. The local area is both a pull and a constraint: issues and personnel available to be mobilized become local, while at the same time boundaries set limits on connections with the larger national community, confining individuals by default onto their local space. The local not only limits networks and space, but also provides new opportunities for different people. “Spatial constraints are turned to advantage in political and social struggles and...such struggles can restructure the meaning, uses, and strategic valence of space.”²¹ Within the limitations, new actors emerge, including local leadership.

New actors can be empowered by altering boundaries to the local level. While it is common to conceive of terrorism and political violence as led by leaders, viewing the phenomenon from a top-down perspective, analysts have begun to realize that political activism including violence is not always directed from organizations structured like states or militaries, but can be leaderless and independent. A mix of movement and local goals can motivate actions. Local, isolated activists have acted against their superiors in line with community judgments of the organization as unjust and co-opted.²² Organization theorists along with empires and dictators acknowledged the dangers of decentralization for enforcing authority. Decentralization in space and authority yields the possibility of actors at lower levels of the hierarchy pursuing independent paths.²³ Organizations spend much time and effort in creating internal unity through identity, solidarity, and hierarchy.²⁴ Intermittent connections may not be enough to counter the pull of local authorities in this new space of daily living.

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identity; purposive techniques can maintain networks and link the local to the national, even generating lines of authority as military and government agencies have found. Decentralization can be stopped from becoming fragmentation through techniques such as career advancement, reporting requirements, movement of personnel, and training for a corporate identity.²⁵ These techniques were missing in Fatah, and the lack of promotion or organizational mobility were chief complaints within the organization.

SIZE AND INCENTIVES FOR VIOLENCE

Scale is related to incentives for violence. Smaller numbers have been associated with an increase in the use of violence in social protest.²⁶ Fragmented and leaderless groups correspond to increasingly anarchical violence in other cases.²⁷ The need to make a big statement remains, and without the necessary numbers to communicate such a message, more violent methods are used to achieve the desired result. Violence indirectly aids the cause through publicity, demonstrating the credibility and commitment of the protesters, which adds legitimacy to their cause, recruiting members by being the most active organization in the field, keeping members in line and committed, and provoking a response which polarizes the sides, forcing previously neutral individuals to take a stand.²⁸ With dwindling numbers, these goals are achieved through public violence. During Italy's period of social activism and terrorism, it was groups lacking resources or an ability to engage in organized movement politics that specialized in violence, a cheap and available resource not requiring much coordination.²⁹ Likewise, limited space itself can decrease orderly protest.³⁰

Similarly, underground exclusive groups have a high propensity to use anti-civilian violence due to their isolation.³¹ Cut off from outside contacts, they become trapped within underground "spirals of encapsulation" which diminish the potential of outside ideologies, ideas, and individuals to alter activists' views.³² Such isolation or segregation is key to the creation of oppositional consciousness. For this, autonomous spaces where the movement can develop without ties of affection, friendship, or business are necessary to promote more radical views that target people the individual would otherwise meet in daily interaction.³³ Integration spoils this oppositional consciousness. Insulation from alternative opinions or practices has been

instrumental in creating loyal members for cults.³⁴ In the extreme, as is the case in exclusive and underground organizing, separation promotes “anti-system” ideologies, a process that led to violence against civilians in Algeria, Hafez argues.³⁵ The close quarters and difficulty of exit is one case where individuals engage in violence they otherwise would not.³⁶

The removal of connections to the hierarchy opens the field for potential leadership battles, in the extreme characterized by a competition of one-upmanship. Competition raises the bar for demonstrating an ability to implement ever more daring acts. Leaders must “prove” themselves, often through a competitive display of violence to solidify leadership. Without a hierarchical structure of orderly leadership change, reputation is established by dynamics similar to those of gangs and mafias, with a political twist.³⁷ The ability to command in this case comes not from a structure of leadership but instead from street-won legitimacy. In addition to demonstrating physical prowess, the would-be leader must be admired as a fighter for the cause: he (all men in these cases) must be perceived as self-sacrificing, risking death or imprisonment, and taking action to stand up against the enemy. To stay on top, they need to continually prove themselves militarily vis-à-vis other local groups operating in the same field. These battles are often characterized by the use of bold military maneuvers to establish and institutionalize a new leadership. By contrast, the more established the actor, in general, the lower the propensity to use unaccepted tactics.³⁸

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Potential leaders use violence and innovative tactics to win out over rivals, as do groups seeking to establish themselves in competition with other groups. Bloom details a theory of outbidding to explain suicide terrorism. “Where there are multiple groups, violence is a technique to gain credibility and win the public relations competition.”³⁹ Competitive outbidding and new forms of violence are more likely where no actor is dominant. The increasing number of groups in the Palestinian territories corresponded to increases in attacks and in the violence of them. This is demonstrated in multiple organizations attempting to claim responsibility for the same

bombings.⁴⁰ Similarly, during Italy's experience of terrorism and violence, Della Porta and Tarrow found that competition within a social movement, among various groups with similar goals for example, led to high amounts of violence. Violent actions are advertisements that distinguish one group from the rest. Most violence would be expected when numerous groups with like goals exist, all vying for prominence.⁴¹ Competition between groups within the movement for a social support base resulted in increases in violence, pushing the boundaries of the acceptable.⁴² Uncertainty and lack of leadership also cause a rise in violence, as sides become polarized and moderates leave the field of activism or take a side.⁴³

The higher the level of fragmentation, the more independent decision-making, abrogation of agreed-upon truces, and internal battles for dominance. Thus, divide and conquer does not necessarily decrease violence, as the axiom seems to imply. Increased violence with fragmentation can be due to competition that turns on the popularity of the violence with the public, or the public's limited levers of control over it. With the relevant public constricted to small locales, the community may have neither the will nor the ability to limit

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violence. The opposition in the West Bank and Gaza has more volunteers for suicide operations than it can handle, due to ongoing dissatisfaction with the situation.⁴⁴ According to Maoz, Israeli policies of collective punishment rely on the community to rein in the activists. To do this, the populace must have the will and capacity to deter the insurgents.⁴⁵ Policies geared to make mobilizing more difficult are based on the premise that the movement is hierarchical, controlled by a leader who "commands" his followers. Without the leader, the reasoning goes, the masses would be either unable or unwilling to act. Robinson calls this the "microwave" theory of political violence. The leader (Arafat in his case) pushes a button, and militancy is turned on or off.⁴⁶ In this case, the difficulty of formal organizing led to decentralized and underground activities, not the disappearance of the organization as top-down theories would suggest.

TRANSFORMING SPACE

The physical mobility obstacles created through the Oslo accords affected the internal structure of protest movements and of Fatah in the Palestinian West Bank, causing non-mobilization by previously active groups and fragmentation into numerous competing groups by others. Oslo created sweeping changes in the geography of the West Bank and Gaza, parceling the territories with crisscrossed checkpoints of control that severely hindered and in many cases prohibited movement of persons altogether, limiting most to their small towns. Oslo, the name given to the cumulative process beginning with the Declaration of Principles signed in 1993 between the Palestinians and Israel, contained a timetable for withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories that was not met.⁴⁷ Despite the missed timetables for withdrawal, much of Oslo has in fact been implemented. A large portion of Oslo focused on geographic changes, and it is these provisions that were enacted. Geographic and border control measures were deemed especially important for Israeli security by the Israeli military, who had a strong hand in crafting the provisions in Oslo II particularly.⁴⁸

The Oslo accords reorganized the boundaries of life and mobility for Palestinians. Oslo entailed a piecemeal process by which a Palestinian authority would gain partial control over increasingly more land. Fundamental to this process is the fragmentation of the territories, the prevention of all forms of opposition, and the continued control of exit points by Israel. Oslo expanded and institutionalized Israel's supervision of population movements, resulting in what some have termed a "matrix of control" resembling an archipelago or Swiss cheese, as a result of economic, bureaucratic, and demographic provisions.⁴⁹ The tiny West Bank, smaller than Delaware, was divided into 300 separate areas.⁵⁰ The accords increased the number of borders, checkpoints, and the use of closure or refusing entry for Palestinian workers to Israel. As per Oslo II, all Palestinian borders would be with Israel. Borders became internal borders, including exit or entry from any areas transferred to the PA. In effect, the occupied territories became a patchwork of small isolated areas.

The relevant aspect of Oslo here was the creation of physical obstacles to mobility. The first consequence of Oslo was the inability of previously active groups to mobilize and protest. While prohibitions and harsh pen-

alties for organizing were present in the first intifada, Oslo added a new element. It increased the geographic difficulties of convening meetings, network, and stage protests. The geographic changes of Oslo have been variously termed cantons, enclaves or ghettos.⁵¹ Whatever the term, it is clear that travel in the West Bank has been made much more difficult and often impossible.

As per Oslo II (1995), three zones of jurisdiction were established within the West Bank. The PA came to rule over Area A, both the PA and Israel controlled Area B, and Area C was Israel's sole responsibility. The

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Israeli military would be redeployed from Areas A and be stationed outside them. Areas B and C would remain in Israeli hands during the initial phases of Oslo. Area A autonomous zones were limited by the fact of checkpoints upon entrance and exit, since all Palestinians are located within less than three miles of Area C.⁵² By the end of 1999, the PA was in control of over 200 small areas, most smaller than one square mile. Passage to or from them is controlled by Israeli military checkpoints. Border controls and physical barriers, such as trenches, electric fences, and barricades of sand, rock, or concrete, lie outside each of these areas. Added to

this, roads in the territories are policed by hundreds of standing and mobile checkpoints, the latter termed "flying checkpoints" due to their lack of a permanent location.⁵³ Between 2000 and 2004, over 500 new military checkpoints have been established;⁵⁴ an additional over 200 were temporary. Almost 60 were established immediately following Oslo.

One observer notes that a Palestinian going from one area of the PA in the north, Jenin, to another in the south, Hebron, would have to change zones of authority—and thus pass through border crossings—50 times.⁵⁵ According to another observer, a major consequence of this territorial change has been the "theft of time" and the inability to make plans, even for work. Costs of travel have skyrocketed, and individuals wait hours and

days at roadblocks or waiting to cross borders. Palestinian travelers must change transportation an average of every 12 miles.⁵⁶ The uncertainty of being able to pass through borders and checkpoints prohibited effective planning. Permits were not assured and the decisions were unilateral. People were not informed in advance whether their application to travel would be accepted.⁵⁷

In addition to the generation of new internal borders and checkpoints, limits on popular mobility included the separation wall, closure and curfews. The wall cut off villages not only from Israel but from neighboring Palestinian villages and their own agricultural lands as well. Eighteen communities were completely surrounded by the wall.⁵⁸ Closure is the limitations imposed by Israel on the movement of the Palestinian population and its goods. Closure can be internal, within the West Bank and Gaza strip, or external, or between those territories and Israel. It can be partial or total. While closure pre-dates Oslo and the advent of suicide bombings inside Israel, it was institutionalized by the accords and presented as an anti-terrorism measure.⁵⁹ Internal closure is effectively a curfew, preventing movement between villages. Closure combines with the pass or permit system, whereby even when restrictions are lifted the population needs permission to move from place to place.⁶⁰ Beginning in May 2002, passes lasting one month were required for traveling out of or into any of the eight regions of the West Bank. Closely linked to closure are curfews. In Areas B and C, remaining under Israeli control, curfews were enacted throughout the Oslo process. Further, if the PA was deemed lacking in meeting Israel's security concerns, Area A could, and has, come under curfew also; towns in Area A were re-occupied in 2002. Closure policies furthered the decline of mass activism through increasing poverty, by withdrawing income from work in Israel. Poverty rates are now estimated at 60 percent and 80 percent for West Bankers and Gazans respectively.⁶¹ Contrary to the crowd theories of old, the poor have less time and resources to mobilize.⁶²

Settlements increased during Oslo, which also created internal borders and necessitated bypass roads to connect to Israel.⁶³ Land devoted to settlements increased substantially. Israeli settlements increased by over 50 percent during the seven years between Oslo and the second intifada, and the settler population almost doubled.⁶⁴ Further bisecting the territories is a grid of bypass roads, linking the settlements to Israel but insulating

them from the surrounding Palestinian population. Unlike the Palestinian traveler mentioned above, Israelis travel freely throughout the territories via bypass roads such as the Trans-Israel Highway, without ever changing zones or being held up at a checkpoint. These highways take up a width of three to four football fields, including the highway and the isolated fenced zones surrounding them.⁶⁵ As of 2004, 250 miles of settlement road had been built and three major highways, all prohibited from Palestinian use and bisecting the territories.⁶⁶

The substance of spaces available for protest altered as well. Israeli soldiers moved from inside towns to controlling the town's entrance and exit. Further, roads that were a forum for disruptive protest in the first intifada,

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are now officially controlled by the Israeli military per Oslo. Due to the parallel set of roads for Israeli settlers, Palestinian roadblocks achieve nothing. Disappearing public space has been replaced by isolated and contained places of confrontation, usually internal borders. Checkpoints and border crossings became the main site of confrontation with Israeli soldiers.⁶⁷

Though logistically difficult, mass-based demonstrations did occur, but their effect and publicity were limited. Thousands of Palestinian political prisoners on a hunger strike similarly found their effort did not seem to warrant media coverage or attention to the conditions they were protesting. An Israeli official likened the hunger strike to terror, saying he would not give in to their demands. Explicitly in reference to the lack of attention to this non-violent action, armed groups declared their desire to kidnap soldiers and settlers to promote the prisoners' demands. A Palestinian demonstration against the wall, uniting Palestinians with Americans and Israeli Jews, was greeted by live fire in which both an American and an Israeli were wounded. Another non-violent demonstration, declared free of weapons by Amnesty International, was held to draw attention to the plight of a refugee camp under curfew. Tanks shelled the demonstration, killing eight.⁶⁸

Generally, the media neither report disruptive, non-violent protests nor do their participants escape (Israeli) military or (Palestinian) police action. The widespread opinion is that non-violent protest, while desirable in theory, will be met by violence.⁶⁹ This opinion is backed by experience, as the PA and Israel have both confronted non-violent demonstrations with lethal force. Advocates and organizers of non-violent activities end up in jail alongside those engaging in violence, even members of organizations uniting Israeli Jews and Palestinians. A leader of one such joint demonstration was placed under administrative detention since he was embarking on an “unhappy” path according to authorities.⁷⁰ Such repression adds to the practical difficulties of organizing to the detriment of activism attracting large groups.

FROM RULING ORGANIZATION TO MULTIPLE COMPETING MOVEMENTS

Arafat’s movement Fatah, the main constituent of the governing PA, dominated the government at the start of the Oslo Accords. This first intifada created a new leadership infrastructure in the territories. To govern, Arafat relied heavily on his own PLO faction, Fatah, leaders from abroad, notable families, cooptation through corruption, and personal micro-management. He tapped a new source of support, the old landed elite families or notables, reviving reliance on family and tribes where it had been marginalized.⁷¹ Fatah dominated the new PA security forces, which by 1997 totaled over 40,000.⁷²

From Oslo in 1993 to the start of the second intifada in 2000, violence was mainly a tactic used by the Islamist groups, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. By 2000, the situation changed: it was the secular groups—Fatah and its offshoots—that were deemed the larger security threat by Israel.⁷³ Among these groups was the Tanzim (the Organization), the group from which much of the new violent groups sprang. The Tanzim was made up largely graduates of the first intifada who represented the internal leadership aligned with Arafat, and was possibly formed by Arafat to counter the attractiveness of the Islamist militias.⁷⁴

While during the initial Oslo years these groups followed the PA’s orders and battled the Islamists, by the start of the intifada many joined

with the Islamic opposition in their operations and refused orders from their superiors. Many then formed the unofficial al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade (AMB), fought Israeli military forces often against direct orders from the PA, split into numerous additional groups, and began using the tactic of suicide bombing against civilians. Given the resulting fragmentation, some analysts questioned the loyalty of these forces to PA commands from the start.⁷⁵ Yet something had clearly changed. At the beginning of Oslo, Fatah and the Palestinian Police were able to effectively rein in dissenters. By the start of the second intifada, discipline no longer worked.⁷⁶ Other observers initially posited that the groups were acting on orders from Arafat, until attacks on Arafat's close allies and the PA proliferated. The groups refused Arafat's orders for them to dissolve.⁷⁷

While previously violence followed a clear pattern of tit-for-tat retaliation, apparent to close observers, the use of violence now seemed random. Analysts began calling the violence "laissez-faire," a free-for-all, anarchy, and chaos.

As the fragmentation increased, analysts recognized the depth of the qualitative change in Fatah linked to spatial borders and competition.⁷⁸ "The West Bank and the Gaza Strip have been divided into approximately 10 separate territorial units that maintain semi-independent micro-political/economic environments bearing little accountability to central Palestinian governance in Ramallah," according to one conflict observer group.⁷⁹ The PA had no real authority,

leaders were local, and there was no uniformity across cities in the territories, according to the International Crisis Group.⁸⁰ Competition within Fatah has been responsible for the generation of splinter groups, another stated.⁸¹ Such fragmentation was attributed to policies of isolation.⁸² While previously violence followed a clear pattern of tit-for-tat retaliation, apparent to close observers, the use of violence now seemed random. Analysts began calling the violence "laissez-faire," a free-for-all, anarchy, and chaos.⁸³ The PA leadership complained about the splinter groups, calling them wanted men and rebellious armed gangs.⁸⁴ Fatah had become local militias, and internal power struggles led some to seek sponsorship abroad, a dynamic that would theoretically increase public violence, according to Bloom.⁸⁵

Numerous competing armed groups, acting not against their erstwhile

enemy, Hamas, but against each other, dominated many West Bank cities. The extent of the fragmentation and competing groups was demonstrated in the development of distinct identities linked to local place, apparent in the generation of new names for the small groups, the use of their own flags in place of the Palestinian one, and their own self-promoting parades.⁸⁶ While collectively they are known as al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (AMB), in fact within this general classification are numerous groups each with their own name: the Battalions of the Return, Jenin Martyr's Brigade, Forces of Umar al-Mukhtar, Jerusalem Brigades, Forces of Badr, Brigades of Black Oslo, Salah ad-Din Brigades, and the Harbinger (al-Nathir), among others. The cities of Nablus and Jenin were early independent actors, despite Nablus having been a Fatah stronghold.⁸⁷

These independent groups used increasing violence, extending into what had been the purview of the Islamist groups, suicide bombing.⁸⁸ Israeli sources attributed Fatah-affiliated groups with half of all attacks against Israel in 2002.⁸⁹ These "splinter groups" had become more of a source of terrorism than Hamas, when foiled attempts are included.⁹⁰ The various groups also engaged in joint operations with Islamist groups.⁹¹ The populace viewed these groups as thugs or gangs; one prominent leader was known as the knee-capper.⁹²

Brigade members have established themselves first as local leaders, then as independent of Fatah command, particularly in northern West Bank towns that are isolated from each other including Nablus, Jenin, Qalquiliyya and Tulkaram. The localization of leadership is illustrated in the Brigade leader of Jenin, Zakariya Zubeidi. Beginning as a peace activist, he became the unofficial mayor of Jenin, independent of PA authority. His group has attacked and kidnapped PA officials and their offices on numerous occasions. One governor was given a public beating for his alleged corruption. The role of violence in consolidating the chain of leadership is clear. Two days after assuming the reigns of authority, he authorized a suicide bombing in Israel.⁹³ Arafat repeatedly tried to convince Zubeidi to become a loyal Fatah member, to no avail. In 2004, amidst growing popular approval for suicide attacks and multiple competing power claims by opposition groups in the northern area around Jenin, Zubeidi decided to re-commence suicide acts within Israel against the PA's wishes.⁹⁴ Even sending money would not buy Zubeidi's loyalty to the PA; he took the money but refused to comply.⁹⁵

In other locations, fights for dominance continued without the effective establishment of local authority. Nablus has been called as “a factory for suicide bombers,” despite its isolation by at least eight checkpoints.⁹⁶ Several factions within AMB vie for dominance here, the source of most violence. Wars for “turf” are within the secular, Fatah-aligned groups, not between them and the Islamists.⁹⁷ In one scandal, children were unofficially being recruited for suicide operations, against the local Brigades leader’s orders. After he was killed, the recruiting continued, and parents complained that he had been the only one able to control the numerous fighters.⁹⁸ Fragmentation led to acts against the leadership’s decisions and to competitive violence or outbidding. In another area, when one leader in AMB stopped shooting into a border settlement, his competitor rejected

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the order and continued the violence with his own faction. In other cases, orders against terrorist attacks inside Israel were simply ignored.⁹⁹

PA officials were targets of these groups. Even individuals close to Arafat have been attacked, killed, or kidnapped. The PA’s interior minister was threatened in Nablus, the cars of the town’s governor set on fire and his brother kidnapped.¹⁰⁰ The Gaza police chief was kidnapped.¹⁰¹ The home of a PA police officer was set on fire, while a hundred other policemen stood across the street.¹⁰² Foreigners were seized, diplomats attacked, and Arafat aides and officials were abducted, fired upon, or killed.¹⁰³ These attacks included the PA Minister of the Interior, who was threatened and banned from Nablus for his disavowal of AMB bombing attacks.¹⁰⁴ Individuals calling themselves the Abu Ammar (Arafat’s nom de guerre) brigades fired on Mahmud Abbas, the president after Arafat, in Arafat’s mourning tent.¹⁰⁵ PA offices, institutions, and journalists have been attacked. The governor of Jenin’s office was sacked, and his predecessor kidnapped and publicly tried in the streets.¹⁰⁶

The loss of centralized control has made truces or peace treaties increasingly difficult. Local leaders stated that they were not consulted, despite their alleged superiors having agreed to the truce.¹⁰⁷ Truces accepted by the other oppositions, including the Islamists, have been ignored and violated

by the Brigade. Decisions by the Fatah Revolutionary Council could not be enforced.¹⁰⁸ In many cases, it was unclear who was responsible for the actions.¹⁰⁹ Against strict PA orders for calm before the hearing at the International Court of Justice in the Hague on the legitimacy of the separation wall, one of these AMB groups carried out a bombing, a complete public relations embarrassment.¹¹⁰

The process of organizational splintering accelerated following Israel's re-occupation of West Bank towns in spring 2002. Still, the first suicide bombing inside Israel mounted solely by a group from the secular AMB, without Islamist collaboration, occurred before that, in January. Israel assassinated over one hundred political activists, both religious and secular during the first two years of this intifada.¹¹¹ The 2002 Israeli reoccupation of West Bank towns wiped out or imprisoned much of Fatah's middle rank leadership, who were replaced by young leaders increasingly autonomous of any hierarchy or control. In fact, following leadership assassinations and major Israeli military operations, the level of violence and disparate nature of the groups increased where those groups were territorially isolated.¹¹²

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The case of Hamas, the most repressed of the opposition, illustrates the crucial role of space even as leadership was eliminated. Despite repeated round-ups of suspected members, raids and closures of its mosques, social and educational service institutions in the mid-1990s, Hamas recovered from temporary fragmentation largely due to its unified territorial space in Gaza—known as “*Hamasland*.”¹¹³ Observers credited Hamas with maintaining discipline, even being capable of restraining its followers from revenge or independent operations.¹¹⁴

Fatah's fragmentation reached its height in 2005. While at the start of the uprising Arafat indeed approved or ignored much of the violence, by 2001-02 he and the PA made concerted attempts to stop it and reign in the splinter groups.¹¹⁵ Security crackdowns were unsuccessful.¹¹⁶ Hamas' electoral win in 2006 changed that. In 2007, much effort, troops, and funds were devoted to regaining control, and now with the emergence of this

larger, unifying threat— Hamas in charge of the PA—the efforts seemed to bear fruit at least temporarily.¹¹⁷ Indeed, external enemies should promote centralization and alliances, however this dynamic curiously did not result from the threat posed by Israel. Despite the renewed efforts at discipline in Fatah, the fundamental problem of localization remains a distinct possibility, generating independent authorities and identities at smaller levels of aggregation than the national, virtually unconstrained.

CONCLUSION

Space can be one determinant of organizational form, which in turn is related to the choice of group tactics. Space is tied to the place and possibilities of mobilization, issues and grievances, and the potential constituency of collective action. The episode of Fatah's fragmentation demonstrated the quickness with which local leaders can be divorced from national leadership, and the effect in this process of spatial borders in altering leaderships, identities, and issues. The new geographic reality of Oslo made movement difficult, effectively confining many to their hometown, mainly through checkpoints marking passages from one authority to another every few miles. Observers continually referenced the role of isolation and closed spaces in refusing orders and generating new leaderships. Other factors played a role, namely, Fatah's unchanging and corrupt leadership and Israel's elimination of mid-level Fatah personnel. However, land borders set the stage for Fatah's dismantling of existing hierarchies, its rapid and extreme fragmentation, and its easy generation of diverse groups and identity. The situation was only countered by the advent of a viable threat to all Fatah in the form of Hamas' electoral win.

Divide and conquer is an age-old strategy for defeating an enemy. For insurgencies or movements with grass-roots support, fragmentation, in today's world with easy weaponry and technology, holds the potential to further militarize and prolong the conflict. Fragmented territory can generate a crisis and competition over leadership. Instead of decreasing the violence, territorial fragmentation and the difficulty of formal organizing led to decentralized and underground activities, not to the disappearance of the organization as top-down theories of opposition would suggest.

Notes

*Author's Note: The views expressed here are the author's alone, and do not represent the Naval Postgraduate School or any institutional affiliation.

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